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Identity and Difference:
Negotiating Gender and Sexuality in High School Contexts

by
Susan Walker Woolley

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
Education
and the Designated Emphasis
in
Women, Gender, and Sexuality
in the
Graduate Division
of the
University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:
Professor Patricia Baquedano-López, Chair
Professor Lawrence Cohen
Professor Zeus Leonardo
Professor Ingrid Seyer-Ochi

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Abstract

Identity and Difference: Negotiating Gender and Sexuality in High School Contexts

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in

Women, Gender, and Sexuality

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In school, social interactions amongst students and between students and teachers construct possibilities, highlight boundaries, index difference, and mark transgressions around gender and sexuality norms. This ethnographic study explores the ways reading identity and difference while positioning others through teasing and jokes regulate gender and sexuality across school contexts. Examining everyday linguistic and social practices, this research questions what happens to constructions of “safe space” in high schools when students are spatially excluded and marginalized by their social locations and identities.

Drawing on three years of ethnographic research in a large urban public high school in Northern California, this dissertation incorporates the research methods of participant-observation, audio and video recording, interviews, questionnaires, and artifact collection. Focusing on two kinds of sites within one Northern California high school, the research looks at how the form and content of peer education, classroom social interactions, curricular materials, and teacher instructions and interventions both construct and contest binary gender and heteronormativity. One site for inquiry is a student-led club, the gay-straight alliance (GSA), which engages in activism, peer education, and awareness-raising efforts to target homophobia and transphobia in their school. The other kind of site explored in this study is the classroom—in particular, three freshman social studies courses that represent the school’s curricular and pedagogical approach to the study of gender, sexuality, and LGBTQ issues.

This dissertation explores the complex and contradictory relationship between the disciplining forces of everyday practices and structures of schooling that position people as gendered and the regulation of gender and sexuality done through joking and teasing. Participants wield power by joking and teasing about gender transgression, by claiming others’ identity for them, and by

positioning people as “other.” Such maneuvering can position people differently across school contexts—allowing some to move through school spaces more freely while others become the site for examination and regulation of binary gender and heteronormativity. Joking illuminates the ambiguity of gender and sexuality and gets past a deeply engrained knowledge regime—that of the ideology of binary gender held together by the linchpin of heteronormativity. The structure of language, ideology, and schooling can close down rather than open up options in terms of gender and sexual identity and expression for participants. For some, ambiguity opens up creative possibilities for expression and identification, whereas for others, ambiguity constructs bodies and identities as the sites for such examination and regulation. This study focuses on the micro-level of violence done through performative speech acts that enact upon students’ bodies and identities in an educational environment that strives toward constructing “safe space.” Complicating the very possibility of such educational goals, this work highlights the intricacy of who gets to speak and how in school contexts.

This dissertation is
dedicated
to
the youth
and
the educators
who struggle
everyday
to make their school communities
more understanding
of
all forms of difference
and
safer
for everybody.

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CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

**

Ms. Oh read the text out loud, emphasizing the words the students were instructed to fill in the blanks on their handout, “At this age, it is common for adolescents to develop feelings or a ‘crush’ on someone who is *older*, or of the *same* gender, or someone that they *admire* or wish to be like.”

Leroy exclaimed, “Not the same gender! Faggot! That’s so gay!”

(Excerpted from Fieldnote Small School B 5B, 4th period, 2/17/10).

**

Walking across MacArthur High School—from the spaces of hallways and courtyards during passing times to classrooms during class time; from gay-straight alliance student club meetings to outdoor assemblies at lunch time—on any given school day I commonly heard expressions like “that’s so gay” and “no homo” and names like “faggot,” “ho,” “bitch,” and “nigger.” Name-calling amongst the students was common practice, and derogatory names were often wielded as symbolic weapons toward the people they targeted. Some names evoked gendered, sexualized, and bodily meanings, like “faggot,” “queer,” “dyke,” “fag,” “porky,” “fatso,” “bitch,” “ho,” and “trans,” as well as more graphic and demeaning epithets like “carpet muncher” and “pussy.” Similarly, some names evoked ethnic and racial categories like “Mexican” and “Asian” as well as more derogatory names like “chink” and “nigger”—deeply infused with histories of institutional, symbolic, material, and physical violence. The racial and gendered status of “White bitch” was commonly bandied about, sometimes carelessly and at other times with directed intention. Other phrases drew on ‘that’s so’ formulations and were used to express evaluation, such as “that’s so gay,” “that’s so ghetto,” and “that’s so retarded.”

This dissertation offers various contributions, including a close examination of the ways such name-calling is used to establish boundaries around socially constructed notions of normative gender and sexuality and to regulate students’ identities and bodies as they move through school spaces and socially interact. Such name-calling can work to disrupt and challenge discourses of “safe space” in schools, highlighting the marginalization experienced by some students. I examine how spaces for queer or non-normative identities and bodily comportments are negotiated in classroom interactions and peer education. I focus on how students learn about gender and sexuality in the classroom, in social interactions, and in student-led peer education. Analyzing the ways students and teachers socially construct “safe space” for difference, I explore the ways language use can shape learning contexts and both reproduce and challenge gender and sexual inequality and symbolic violence.

My research builds on scholarship that examines the ways students and teachers create and consolidate gender and sexual norms through gendered and sexualized name-calling, such as “fag” or “gay” (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Plummer, 1999; Renold, 2005; Thorne, 1993). In this work, I expand on theorizations of this as the ideology of “fag” (Smith, 1998) or “fag discourse” (Pascoe, 2007), which includes both name-calling and imitating exaggerated femininity and

same-sex sexual desire to discipline gender and sexuality. I explore how everyday linguistic and social practices, as well as schooling practices, reproduce and challenge ideologies of binary gender and heteronormativity.

Through teasing and jokes, students and teachers read identity and difference, while positioning others in a complex web of tangled structures of oppression and inequality—such as sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity, class, and ability. In this process, students and teachers linguistically and interactionally mark difference, through language that calls on deep histories of meanings, intentions, and contexts (Bakhtin, 1981). This dissertation examines how names, like “trans” and “gay,” are used to maintain boundaries around White heteronormative binary gender and to regulate students’ occupation of and movement through school spaces. Expressions like “that’s so gay” and “that’s so ghetto” evoke gendered, sexualized, raced, and classed meanings to interpellate and marginalize students they target. In schools, which strive toward constructing “safe” and “politically correct” educational environments in which participants are supposed to show and receive respect from one another, the use of expressions like “that’s so gay” and “that’s so ghetto” can generate tension, rubbing up against ideologies of “safe space” that dominate school discourses. This research questions what happens to social constructions of “safe space” in a Northern California urban public high school when students are symbolically and spatially excluded and marginalized by their social locations and identities through the use of such linguistic expressions.

In this research, I focus on the complex and contradictory relationship between the disciplining forces of everyday linguistic and social practices, the structures of schooling that position people as gendered, sexualized, and raced, and the regulation of norms done through teasing and joking. This dissertation study examines the micro-level of violence done through performative speech acts that enact upon students’ bodies and identities (Austin, 1962/1975; Butler, 1997). Naming and positioning people occurs differently across school contexts—allowing some people to move through school spaces more freely while other people become the site for examination and regulation of binary gender, heteronormativity, and race. Joking illuminates the ambiguity of gender and sexuality and gets past a deeply engrained knowledge regime—that of the ideology of binary gender held together by the linchpin of heteronormativity. For some, ambiguity opens up creative possibilities for expression and identification, whereas for others, ambiguity constructs bodies and identities as the sites for such examination and regulation.

Language like “that’s so gay” and “that’s so ghetto” as well as name-calling like “trans” and “faggot” shape learning moments about gender, sexuality, and race meanings and relations. Such names and words illuminate complex relationship—deeply historical and socially structured unequal relations of power—and meanings that infuse and shape students’ daily lives in school. This dissertation highlights and analyzes students’ negotiations of such language, including their meanings, uses, and effects.

Overview and Context

For this dissertation research, I carried out a three-year ethnographic study situated in a large urban public high school that I call by the pseudonym MacArthur High located in Northern California of the United States. I engaged qualitative research methods including participant-

observation, interviews, questionnaires, collection of artifacts, and audio and video recording for my data collection. I focused on the ways spaces for identities, based on gendered and sexualized notions of difference, are negotiated amongst students and teachers in the classroom and in peer education. This research examines the ways students and teachers construct and challenge safe spaces for difference through social interactions in school.

Over the three years of my study, I followed the peer education outreach done by youth in the MacArthur High gay-straight alliance (GSA) student club to address homophobia and transphobia in their school. In this work, the students highlighted and filled gaps not addressed by teachers through the formal classroom curriculum and gaps between policy aimed at protecting LGBTQ youth and what actually occurs in practice in students' daily school lives. Additionally, I examined sex, gender, and sexuality education in three freshman social studies classes across three small schools nestled within MacArthur High.¹ These three freshman social studies courses represented this high school's curricular and pedagogical approach to the study of gender, sexuality, and LGBTQ issues by specifically focusing on issues of identity, community, difference, power, and social justice as well as adolescence and sex education. In this research, I analyze the pedagogical work done through peer education, the classroom, and everyday social interactions in shaping learning contexts and in reproducing and challenging gender and sexual inequality and symbolic violence.

The socio-political context and location of MacArthur High School is situated in Northern California, a region known for its liberal politics, its history of activism, as well as its visible LGBTQ community. California state law and this particular district's policies aim to protect LGBTQ students. California Assembly Bill 537, the California Student Safety and Violence Prevention Act of 2000, protects students from discrimination and harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity. This school district also has an anti-slur policy that includes protections from inappropriate language, slurs, and insults against one's sex, actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender, and gender identity. For LGBTQ youth at MacArthur High, state and district policy as well as the administration and school board are largely supportive of their rights to learn in a safe environment at school. The conditions for a school where homophobia and transphobia could be addressed in a critical way appear to be present. Yet students' experiences paint a different picture.

Students at MacArthur High report significant amounts of bullying and harassment² related to gender expression and sexuality, as well as along other lines of difference. The California

¹ Since the mid-1980s efforts to restructure schools and schooling processes have taken myriad forms. One such restructuring effort is the shift from the large comprehensive schools implemented post World War II to small schools limited in size in terms of student and teacher populations. The philosophy for such a change is that the smaller size and lower student to teacher ratios are believed to generate a closer sense of community, accountability, and success for students, parents, and teachers. Some large public high schools, such as MacArthur High, have been divided into a handful of small schools and academic programs nestled within the larger school campus. For research on such restructuring and the small schools within larger schools movement, see Fine & Somerville, 1998; Raywid, 1995; Raywid, Schmerler, Phillips, & Smith, 2003; Smylie & Perry, 2005; Wasley, Fine, Gladden, Holland, King, Mosak, & Powell, 2000.

² As defined by the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) 2008, "harassment is a form of violent and abusive behavior that makes the person being harassed feel vulnerable, isolated, and afraid." The CHKS assesses the annual frequency (occurring over the past 12 months) of the following specific forms of verbal and physical harassment at school: "having had mean rumors or lies spread about the respondent; having had sexual jokes, comments, or

Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) (2008) found that at this high school 16% of male and 10% of female ninth grade students had been harassed or bullied two or more times during the past twelve months for being gay or lesbian or because someone thought they were. Moreover, 11% of ninth grade females and 13% of eleventh grade females responding to the CHKS (2008) reported they had been harassed or bullied two or more times during the past twelve months because of their gender. In comparison, 11% of female and 18% of male eleventh grade students reported being harassed or bullied because of their race, ethnicity, or national origin while 8% of female and 6% of male eleventh graders were harassed or bullied because of their religion. Amongst eleventh grade students, only 56% of females and 58% of males responding to the CHKS (2008) reported that they felt safe at MacArthur High School.

Similarly, the students I interviewed and talked with over the years shared numerous stories of abuse that spanned a range of experiences like backhanded joking comments, isolated incidents of harassment, and recurring forms of bullying and name-calling. LGBTQ students at MacArthur High suffer what one student described as “endless harassment, never-ending ridicule, and non-stop verbal abuse.” Students in the gay-straight alliance have also experienced forms of intimidation including threats of “corrective rape,” that is, threats that they will be raped in order to turn them straight. Some have heard their classmates make comments about gay bashing, while others have been specifically told they are not welcome at this school. Two boys who identify as gay had water bottles thrown at them, were shoved to the ground, and were stalked by a group of boys threatening to beat them up at a school dance. Students report being called names like “faggot” and “dyke” and hearing “that’s so gay” or “no homo” at least once every class period. As illustrated in the excerpt above, MacArthur High is not physically or emotionally safe for the development and learning of all its students.

In the case of MacArthur High School, current state laws and school policies that seek to protect LGBTQ youth are ineffective in creating a safe school environment for LGBTQ youth to learn and develop, much less acquire the skills they need to graduate. Schools are often not supportive environments for *all* students’ social and emotional development as gendered and sexual young adults. Students’ experiences of symbolic and physical violence at school—a place where they must acquire the skills necessary to graduate and possibly to continue onto higher education—show that there are endemic social and structural practices embedded in the daily lives of schooled children that reproduce forms of violence and marginalization.

Schooling offers a unique site to explore how cultural biases, constructions of difference, and inequality are produced and reproduced socially through the institution of compulsory education. While gender and sexual bullying in schools is often treated as isolated incidents caused by individual “problem” students, this form of gender and sexual inequality and violence needs to be examined through a wider socio-cultural and structural lens that considers how sexism,

gestures made to him/her; having been made fun of for the way one looks or talks; being pushed, shoved, slapped, hit, or kicked by someone who wasn’t just kidding around; being afraid of being beaten up; and having property stolen or deliberately damaged, such as a car, clothing, or books” (Austin, Bates, & Duerr, 2011, p. 98). The CHKS defines what it means by bullying as follows: “You were bullied if repeatedly shoved, hit, threatened, called mean names, teased in a way you didn’t like, or had other unpleasant things done to you. It is not bullying when two students of about the same strength quarrel or fight” (Austin, Bates, & Duerr, 2011, p. 100). Included in questions about bullying is cyber-bullying, or the use of email, text messages, and the internet to spread mean rumors or lies.

heterosexism, and racism influence such behavior. By focusing on classroom interactions, student slang, and peer education, I examine the everyday mundane ways identity and difference are read and marked by participants in the schooling process. Despite the advent of a progressive curriculum focused on gender, sexuality, and LGBTQ issues, and despite the school's location in a politically liberal area of the state and country, gender and sexual inequality and violence are reproduced through students' and teachers' everyday language and social interaction, joking and teasing, and social production of school spaces.

In this work, I seek to answer the following research questions:

- How are gender and sexuality made salient in students' negotiations of the language of class discussions and their positions within the physical and discursive space of the classroom?
- How are joking and teasing used in the construction of gender and sexuality and the negotiation of power relations in classroom interactions?
- How are peoples' identities and histories interpellated through linguistic expressions like "that's so gay" and "that's so ghetto"?
- How does using such expressions and name-calling shape notions of "safe space" in high school contexts?

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. Chapter 2 of the dissertation provides a literature review of research in the field of gender and sexuality in education as well as theoretical frameworks and concepts that guide my study. In Chapter 3, I outline the methods I used for data collection and analysis, and I highlight issues that arose around my positionality as a researcher doing this kind of work in school settings. Chapter 4—Teasing, Jokes, and Power: Examination and Gender Regulation—focuses on the regulation of gender done through joking about gender identity, gender performativity, and indices that mark stereotypes about sexuality. In this chapter, I analyze the way such gender regulation influences students' positioning and mobility through the space of the classroom. In Chapter 5—Speech that Silences, Silence that Speaks: Remaking Safe Space for Difference—I examine how the linguistic expressions "that's so gay" and "that's so ghetto" draw on distinct histories, spatial metaphors, and notions of difference to marginalize the students at which they are targeted. I conclude by examining students' experiences of physical and emotional vulnerability and violence and by challenging constructions of "safe space" for difference at MacArthur High School in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW: HETERONORMATIVITY IN SCHOOLING

This chapter reviews empirical research and theoretical contributions to the study of gender and sexuality—with a particular focus on heteronormativity and the relation of power to the construction of difference—located within schools and schooling processes. The literature review is divided into three sections—a discussion of ethnographic and qualitative research in education, theoretical framework I draw on for the study of gender and sexuality in schools, and definitions of select key terms.

Ethnographic and Qualitative Research in Education

Heteronormativity in Curriculum and Pedagogy

Research has demonstrated that school organizational structures—such as the curriculum—construct and uphold heteronormativity (Sumara & Davis, 1999). Heteronormativity is the belief that heterosexuality is the norm, binary gender roles align with heterosexual desire, and any other sexual or gender expression is deviant. The impact of heteronormativity's central position in institutions like public schooling is significant. As research has shown, institutional practices both respond to and construct identity (Talbert, 2000). Indeed, "...the curriculum structures modes of behaviour and orientations to knowledge that are repetitions of the underlying structure and dynamics of education: compliance, conformity, and the myth that knowledge cures" (Britzman, 2000, p. 35). In schools the sexuality of children and adolescents has become a site of contention around which institutional devices and discursive strategies have been deployed (Foucault, 1978). As such, schools operate as key sites for the production and inscription of heteronormativity through homophobic discourses (Youdell, 2004).

Scholars have highlighted the implications of challenging rhetoric of diversity and difference and of moving beyond antihomophobic curricula (Britzman & Gilbert, 2004; MacIntosh, 2007). Some have called for teachers to construct LGBTQ-inclusive curricula that highlight the assumed status of heterosexuality and marginalization of other sexual identities (Blackburn & Buckley, 2005). Others have questioned the way education is structured by the very discourses that underscore understandings of diversity, difference, and identity.

Deborah Britzman (1995) outlined two major pedagogical stakes in thinking about gender and sexuality in schools: one about what discourses of difference, choice, and visibility mean in classrooms, pedagogy, and how education can be imagined; the other about how structures of disavowal and refusal within education produce the subject of difference as a disruption to normalcy (p. 152). The first stake points to the ways structures and limits of thought—such as those structured by discourses of difference, choice, and visibility—shape and influence knowledge, education, and identity. This highlights how discourses that privilege choice and visibility generate limited ways of understanding difference and identity as well as possibilities for knowing and learning.³ The second stake outlined by Britzman (1995) points to the ways that

³ For example, in the case of the gay-straight alliance at MacArthur High, the students frequently relied on the category of "gay" to identify their club and alliance even though many individuals in the club did not identify themselves this way. For the sake of promoting visibility and awareness of LGBTQ issues at their school, they embraced the sexual identity category with the most circulation and most legible to their peers. Their choice to

forms of not knowing, not recognizing, and refusing to see or acknowledge processes of constructing difference can produce the individuals or subjects constructed by such difference as outside the norm.⁴ Britzman (1995) argued these stakes were tied up with the capacity of the educational apparatus and its pedagogies to exceed their own readings—to stop reading straight.

Such straight reading practices can be found in schools everyday—dividing students by binary gender or sex; assuming others’ opposite-sex attraction or desire; naming, for the purposes of disciplining those desires, identities, and practices that transgress heteronormativity; and teasing and joking that walks the fine line between hate speech and politically correct speech. Oppressive institutional practices serve to silence and deny the voices of nonheterosexually identified people in school contexts, while their voices demonstrate practices of resistance in efforts to change the institution of schooling (Blackburn & Donelson, 2004). Yet, the violence of silence found in the absence of LGBTQ issues and people in the curriculum is matched by and juxtaposed against the heightened markedness and visibility of queer bodies in schools. Lisa Loutzenheiser and Lori MacIntosh (2004) argued:

What is invisible and markedly absent from curriculums is often rendered visible and saturated with meaning outside the classroom, as queer bodies are named in high school hallways and cafeterias, or erased in popular epigrams such as, ‘Oh, that’s so gay.’ Once named, the individual is socially and politically marginalized. (p. 152)

It is such naming of the margins and of those who occupy marginalized positions and subjectivities that this dissertation examines. Building on Loutzenheiser and MacIntosh (2004), in this dissertation I highlight the silences, invisibilities, and absences as well as the everyday comments populated with meanings that are present across school contexts.

Queer Margins and Intersections

To address the omission of queers from the curriculum, it is past time to think what queer pedagogy and queer curriculum might be (Pinar, 1998). Queer pedagogy is more than just the representational inclusion of queer content in the curricula and making such queer content more palatable to students. Queer pedagogy must work to complicate—even collapse—binary oppositions, such as male/female and hetero/homo (Fuss, 1991). As Susanne Luhmann (1998) asked: “Can a queer pedagogy resist the desire for authority and stable knowledge; can it resist disseminating new knowledge and new forms of subjection?” (p. 125). Such a move shifts the focus to “how we come to know, or, how knowledge is produced in the interaction between teacher/text and student”—in other words, a shift from top-down transmission strategies to critical inquiry into the conditions for understanding or refusing knowledge (p. 126).

represent themselves to the larger public of the school as “gay” as opposed to their self-identifications as omnisexual, genderqueer, bisexual, or questioning was a political as well as strategic move, yet also reinforced and reproduced discourses and ways of knowing about LGBTQ identities and experiences.

⁴ For example, the genderqueer and transgender youth in my study faced institutional and structural ways of not being recognized by their school—at bathroom doors where they felt compelled to choose their gender in order to enter a space sanctioned either for biological males or females, on school forms that asked them to select either male or female biological sex, or in the school curriculum where their experiences and identities were not represented. Such disavowal of transgender experiences and identities reproduced gender non-conforming students as the site for disrupting normalcy and as the agents in disrupting normative structures, thus reproducing the ideology of binary gender that already constituted them as outside the norm.

Scholars have highlighted the elitism and whiteness of queer theory, calling for examination of constructions of normalcy that account for race, class, ability, and other lines of difference (Hammonds, 1994; Meiners, 1998). The power of white representation is that whiteness is constructed as both everything and nothing; “the invisibility of whiteness colonizes the definition of other norms—class, gender, heterosexuality, nationality, and so on—it also masks whiteness as itself a category” (Dyer, 1988/1993, p. 143). Instead, the norm—as it is taken to be natural, inevitable, and ordinary—and the processes by which normativity is constructed need to be critically examined (Dyer, 1988/1993). Drawing on feminist models of intersectionality (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991), some research troubles additive models of diversity in education and calls for space for the examination of difference (Kumashiro, 2000, 2001; McCready, 2001, 2004, 2010). As Kevin Kumashiro (2001) argued, antiracist, antiheterosexist education requires troubling and questioning how such difference is generated, how Others are constructed, and how pedagogy can miss or silence some experiences.

While the absence of LGBT and queer issues represented in the curriculum comes as no surprise, research has demonstrated that students see such absences not as arbitrary oversight, but as systematic and structural omission of queer lives (Khayatt, 1994; Mac an Ghaill, 1991). Further research has highlighted the heterosexist structure of school relations by acknowledging the experiences of gay and lesbian students (Epstein & Johnson, 1994; Mac an Ghaill, 1991) and by unpacking the ways heterosexuality becomes naturalized as the norm within schools (Nayak & Kehily, 1996). LGBTQ-identified youth and students questioning their gender and/or sexuality often turn to intentional spaces created for such youth both in and out of schools.⁵ Gay-straight alliances have come to play an important role in addressing anti-LGBTQ bias in schools and in providing queer youth places to gather and organize themselves both socially and politically.

Originally founded as Project 10 groups in 1984, early gay-straight alliances focused on counseling LGBTQ students, drawing on a support group model (Miceli, 2005; Uribe, 1994). Project 10 groups were formed to forge safe spaces for queer youth in their schools and communities (Miceli, 2005; Uribe, 1994). Such queer spaces differ from the safe space that whiteness insists on within race dialogue. Project 10 and GSA groups aim to create safe spaces free from homophobic and transphobic bias and violence—communities in which LGBTQ identified students and those who do not conform to dominant binary gender norms and heteronormativity can find support. In race dialogue, however, instituting safe space for anyone means that others are experiencing violence in some way (Leonardo & Porter, 2010). The safe space insisted upon by whiteness in which white people can avoid looking racist is violent to people of color (Leonardo & Porter, 2010). In this critical way, the safe space for queer youth in GSAs and the safe space for whiteness in race dialogue differ: safe space for gender and sexuality is a discourse initiated by LGBTQ communities in building a haven for queer difference while safe space in race dialogue works to protect Whites who need to engage race while maintaining their comfort zones.

⁵ Outside of the scope of this literature review includes a rich body of work on queer youth and their use of the internet and networks for political organizing (Gray, 2009), literacy performances through story time in youth-run centers (Blackburn, 2002), and out-of-school youth support groups (Gray, 1999, 2009; Herdt & Boxer, 1993). Similarly, Cindy Cruz’s (2008, 2011) research on LGBTQ youth highlights the spaces outside of schools that queer youth under some circumstances must turn to for community, such as the internet, homeless shelters, and the streets.

Gay-straight alliance clubs serve various purposes, including shaping social contexts in which gender and sexuality and issues particular to LGBTQ individuals and communities can be discussed openly (Macgillivray, 2007), providing support networks to LGBTQ students (Garcia-Alonso, 2004; Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westhimer, 2006; Griffin, Lee, Waugh, & Beyer, 2004), and pushing for legal protections for LGBTQ youth and gay-straight alliance clubs in schools (Lee, 2002; Little, 2001; Meyer & Stader, 2009). Moreover, gay-straight alliance clubs serve as representations of LGBTQ identities in their schools and communities of support for LGBTQ and questioning students (Miceli, 2005).

Early research on LGBTQ youth focused on defining the gay or lesbian adolescent to the self and others in terms of sexual orientation, behavior, and identity (Savin-Williams, 1990a, 1990b). Research largely focused on ways in which LGBTQ youth were “at-risk” and likely victims of homophobic and transphobic abuse.⁶ Indeed, silence on the part of teachers can make schools less safe for gay and lesbian teens, as teachers will often punish students who make racist remarks but allow homophobic and transphobic comments to go unchallenged (Friend, 1993; O’Conor, 1994). Such homophobia in schools has a gendered dynamic, targeting young bodies and subjectivities that do not conform to binary gender norms while deploying humor to regulate masculinities and gender-sexual hierarchies (Kehily & Nayak, 1997).

With time, research shifted from focusing on gay and lesbian students as discrete groups, or types, to processes of identity formation and positioning of subjectivities through narrative and discourse (Cruz, 2008; Epstein & Johnson, 1998). Indeed, identity, subjectivity, constructivism, and essentialism have been found to be integral to the production of discourses related to sexualities and secondary schooling (Rasmussen, 2006). In order to combat the harassment of LGBTQ students and promote inclusive practices in schools, educators have had to construct LGBTQ students as a knowable population,⁷ but if used unreflectively such normative constructions can exclude youth and their creativity (Talburt, 2004). Such tension pushes the limits of understanding identity, sexual practices, and political life as well as considerations of the freedoms and possibilities of people not always fully recognizable as inhabiting particular identity categories (Mayo, 2006). Such analysis has demonstrated the inseparability of sex, gender, and sexuality as they are constrained by constellations of identity categories and by the availability of discursive resources for rendering subjectivities legible within heteronormative institutions like schools (Youdell, 2005).

Name-calling and Constructions of Difference

Ethnographic research in primary schools has often focused on gender (Best, 1983; Clark, 1990; Clarricoates, 1981; Francis, 1997; Goodwin, 2006; Jordan, 1995; Skelton, 1996) while largely ignoring sexuality (Boas, 2012; Renold, 2000). In some cases, examples of girls being called names like “big tits” (Clark, 1990) or “fucking lesbian” (Goodwin, 2006) populate the literature,

⁶ An important body of research has developed through the 1990s and 2000s that draws on quantitative analysis of survey data. Although outside of the scope of this review, this research demonstrates that homophobic name-calling as well as gendered and sexual harassment and bullying are common in U.S. public schools (Bochenek & Brown, 2001; California Safe Schools Coalition et al., 2004; GLSEN, 2007, 2009a, 2009b; GLSEN & Harris Interactive, 2005).

⁷ Processes of constructing LGBTQ youth as a knowable population have relied on inscribing discourses of coloniality, capitalism, poverty, homelessness, and AIDS onto queer bodies (Cruz, 2001; Cruz & McLaren, 2002).

but their sexual meanings and functions within heterosexist discourse are largely ignored. Exceptions to this tendency to shy away from examining sexuality in elementary schools include studies that have taken into account the use of the specter of homosexuality as a vehicle for enforcing dominant notions of masculinity (Thorne, 1993) and heterosexual harassment as a means to construct hegemonic masculinity (Skelton, 1997). Some work has provided analysis of young boys' burgeoning sexuality and school incidents of "sex trouble," finding such incidents infused with hypersexualized and racialized connotations in the case of African American boys (Ferguson, 2000). Other research has demonstrated that primary schools operate as important sites for the development of young people's sexuality—complicating discourses on "childhood innocence" (Renold, 2000, 2005; Walkerdine, 1996, 1999)—and for the exercise of heterosexist and homophobic harassment (Renold, 2002). Heterosexuality is the key matrix through which gender is understood by children and teachers in the primary school context (Epstein, 1997a).

Scholars have demonstrated the role schooling plays in the enforcement of heterosexist and sexist hegemony. In schools, "the social relations of heterosexuality and patriarchy dominate public space" (Smith, 1998, p. 327), and homophobic and misogynistic discourse is a routine part of everyday communication. In exposing the ways education under-serves girls (AAUW, 1992, 1995; Sadker & Sadker, 1994; Sadker, Sadker, & Klein, 1991), research has shown how gender inequity is fostered by gender harassment, sexual harassment, and normalized violence. "Sexual harassment in schools is dismissed as normal and unavoidable 'boys will be boys' behavior; but by being targeted, girls are being intimidated and caused to feel like members of an inferior class" (Sadker & Sadker, 1994, p. 13). Everyday violence against girls is sanctioned within a continuum of normalized masculinity (Klein, 2006a), which further degrades all gender expression that falls outside of hegemonic masculinity. Sex bias is a double-edged sword in which males are also victims (Sadker, Sadker, & Klein, 1986). Boys commonly experience such gender harassment as being called "gay" or "trans" for one's gender performativity (AAUW, 2011). Such sexual and gender harassment operate as means to construct and reinforce heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity in schools.

Ethnographic research on boys' experiences in schools and attitudes toward education demonstrated that class and race as well as gender shape young men's opportunities in and out of school (MacLeod, 1987; Willis, 1981). Similarly, gender regimes have been found in institutional structures like schools (Connell, 1987, 1990, 1996; Kessler, Ashenden, Connell, & Dowsett, 1985). Schools operate as complex gendered and heterosexual institutions in the production of masculinities young men come to inhabit (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 1996; Mac an Ghaill, 1994, 1996). Masculinities are multiple,⁸ fluid, positioned hierarchically against one another, and held up to conflicting ideals (Connell, 1995, 1996; Kimmel, 1994, 1996; Mac an Ghaill, 1994). Performances of hegemonic masculinity have been inextricably tied to dominant notions of heterosexuality in the policing of boys' sexuality and gender (Connell, 1995, 1996; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Kimmel, 1994; Mac an Ghaill, 1994, 1996).

⁸ Extending beyond multiple masculinities models, while recognizing that schools help to promote hierarchical student relations through the structuring of education and sports (Eckert, 1989), some research examined how masculinity is discursively manipulated in the construction of "jock" and "non-jock" social identities (Pascoe, 2003). Similarly, physical education has been found to be a strategic site in the development of masculinity (Parker, 1996).

A central organizing principle of our cultural definition of manhood is homophobia, or, “the fear that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men” (Kimmel, 1994, p. 131). Homophobia expressed toward less masculine boys is usually in terms of their similarity to girls, connecting homophobia and heterosexism with sexism and the denigration of girls, women, and femininity (Epstein, 1995, 1996, 1997b). Compulsory heterosexuality is imposed, organized, and maintained by society as a violent political institution that affords males rights and access to women (Rich, 1980). Hegemonic masculinity within compulsory heterosexuality encourages men to dominate women, but also to protect women in as much as they are perceived as belonging to men (Klein, 2006a). As such, heteronormativity—wrapped up in hegemonic masculinity and homophobia—depends on the subordination of women and the feminine.

Research has connected homophobic name-calling like “faggot” and “queer” to the daily violence experienced by young people in schools.⁹ Gendered and sexualized name-calling serves as a means by which children create and consolidate gender and sexual norms (Renold, 2005; Thorne, 1993). Using words like “fag” or “poofter” as terms of insult has been found to occur among children as early as primary school (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Plummer, 1999, 2001; Renold, 2005; Thorne, 1993). Scholars have theorized this phenomenon as an ideology—the ideology of “fag,” which operates as a central component to the organization of heterosexist and homophobic dimensions of school (Smith, 1998). Others have theorized such name-calling as part of a larger discourse—“fag discourse,” which includes both name-calling and imitating exaggerated femininity and same-sex sexual desire and works to discipline boys’ gender presentation and sexuality (Pascoe, 2007). The specter of the fag—that is, the possibility that being called “fag” might stick to one’s identity, marking him as failing to meet the norms of hegemonic masculinity—serves as a powerful disciplining mechanism. C.J. Pascoe (2007) explained this process:

In imitative performances the fag discourse functioned as a constant reiteration of the fag’s existence, affirming that the fag was out there; boys reminded themselves and each other that at any moment they could become fags if they were not sufficiently masculine. (p. 60)

Indeed, there is an urgent need to make space for diverse masculinities—including queer and gender non-conforming bodies and identities—in education and to consider the intersectionality of gender, sexuality, race, and other axes of difference in students’ school experiences (McCready, 2010).

While names like “fag” are used to index people, expressions like “that’s so gay” are used to describe things such as behavior, actions, activities, and situations. This dissertation investigates how expressions like “that’s so gay” and “that’s so ghetto” and other forms of name-calling like “trans” are used to mark difference and wield power. As Kimmel and Mahler (2003) explained:

Walk down any hallway in any middle school or high school in America and the single most common put-down that is heard is “That’s so gay.” It is deployed constantly,

⁹ Scholars have also examined the violence experienced by students – both the daily abuses of homophobic name-calling and their relation with much larger incidents of school violence, such as school shootings. They found among multiple assailants of school shootings across the 1980s and 1990s a common experience of being the targets of homophobic bullying and seeking retaliation against daily threats to their masculinity (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Klein, 2006b).

casually, unconsciously. Boys hear it if they try out for the school band or orchestra, if they are shy or small, physically weak and unathletic, if they are smart, wear glasses, or work hard in school. They hear it if their body language, their clothing, or their musical preferences do not conform to the norms of their peers. (p. 1453)

“That’s so gay” is a common expression used by children as young as elementary school (Letts & Sears, 1999) and is understood to mean that something is stupid or boring (Lalor & Rendle-Short, 2007). Scholars have been careful to point out that the expression “that’s so gay” may not always carry homophobic meanings and, instead, may be understood as a process of catachresis, or forming new objects that expressions pretend only to describe (Rasmussen, 2004). The expression “that’s so gay” may not always be a homophobic slur, but may have many diverse readings (Rasmussen, 2004). In this dissertation, I explore the ways expressions like “that’s so gay” and “that’s so ghetto” evoke gendered, sexualized, raced, and classed meanings to spatially interpellate and marginalize students they target in an educational environment that strives toward constructing “safe space.” I will more thoroughly unpack the expression “that’s so ghetto” and attend to an analysis of race in Chapter 5.

Theoretical Framework for the Study of Gender and Sexuality in Schools

This dissertation draws from a range of disciplines including education, anthropology, sociology, feminist theory, LGBT studies, queer studies, and gender and sexuality studies. Because language serves as the primary lens through which I collect and analyze data, I begin here with a discussion of language and power.

Language and Power

Language serves as a lens for examining how people create and understand their daily lives, and by extension, the worlds in which they live (Boas, 1911/1995; Sapir, 1949; Whorf 1956/2001). Because language is intimately connected to thought, worldview, and ideology, it offers a glimpse into how participants define situations and situate themselves relative to others in social contexts. This research begins with the sociolinguistic insight that language both reflects and actively shapes the context in which it is used (Goffman, 1981; Goodwin & Duranti, 1992; Hanks, 1996, 2006; Schegloff, 1987). Moreover, language use is an “act of identity” or a means whereby people convey to one another what kinds of people they are, what they believe, and how they position themselves and others in the social world around them (Cameron & Kulick, 2005).

John L. Austin (1962/1975) illustrated how we *do* things with words through his theory of performativity. His performativity theory illuminated how language is deployed to carry out various actions depending on the speaker’s intentions, the listener’s interpretations, and the contexts in which such words are uttered. Austin’s (1962/1975) speech act theory outlined a framework for understanding performatives—utterances that perform actions, such as “I promise,” “I apologize,” or “I proclaim.” Performatives consist of their locutionary meaning, illocutionary force, and perlocutionary effects. For an outline of these terms and Austin’s theory, see Table 1 below.

Table 1

J. L. Austin's (1962/1975) Speech Act Theory

Term	Definition	Association
Performative	Utterances that are, in and of themselves, or are a part of the performance of an action	Words that <i>do</i> things
Locution	Uttering sentences with sense and reference	Meanings
Illocution	Actions performed <i>in</i> saying something	Conventional forces
Perlocution	Consequences we achieve <i>by</i> saying something	Unconventional effects

Building on Austin's theory of the performative, Judith Butler (1993) argued that performativity is not just the act by which a subject brings into being what is named, but it is the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names, regulates, and constrains. According to Butler (1993), gender performativity can begin with the act of proclaiming, "It's a girl" to describe a newborn, which constructs the human baby as belonging to the female sex and interpellates her gender as a girl. Gender performativity is reiterative in that it occurs repeatedly over time—every time a bit differently, but through repeated practice gender accumulatively cements meaning; gender performativity is citational in that through the process it names the effects it puts into motion; and gender performativity is compulsory in that subjects are coerced and required to be gendered within a binary framework as feminine or masculine in order to be socially legible (Butler, 1988/2003, 1993). For Butler, performativity extends to the constitution of such regulatory notions and their effects.

In this dissertation, I draw on Althusser's (1971/2011) proposition that ideology interpellates individuals as subjects, using his conceptualization of interpellation as the process of hailing, recruiting, and transforming individuals into subjects. Althusser's Marxist-oriented explanation of subject-formation focuses on the role of institutional and ideological structures that create subjects non-distinct from objects. In Althusser's formulation there is no outside of ideology or state apparatuses that make subjects out of individuals. Although I draw on Althusser's (1971/2011) notion of interpellation, my analysis is more in line with Foucault's (1977/1995, 1978, 1980, 1982) theory of power. While Althusser's assertion that ideology and state apparatuses create subjects rests on a theory of power operating from the top down, for Foucault power operates in all directions, is not reducible to ideology—rather ideology is the effects of power, and plays an integral role in the creation of subjects. Foucault (1977/1995, 1978, 1982) theorizes the subject as the effect of subjection, or particular historically located disciplinary processes and techniques. Discursive practices form subjects, and because power and knowledge intersect within discursive practices, they are fundamental to the formation of subjects.

Gender and Sexuality

I build on symbolic interactionist approaches (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934) in the study of gender and sexuality (Plummer, 1982), conceptualizing gender and sexuality as emergent social processes symbolically mediated and negotiated in social interaction. Gender and sexuality are indexed in face-to-face interaction and represented in symbolic systems, yet also shaped by the

contexts in which they are constructed and emerge. Additionally, I build on scholarship in feminist theory that considers experience as a form of evidence already seeped in discourse (Scott, 1993) and experience as developed from individual and collective standpoints that shape individual and collective forms of knowledge (Collins, 2000). Taking a queer perspective to the study of identity, my work conceptualizes gender and sexual identity as inherently unstable, as fluid and shifting, and as categories of knowledge that emerge in social relations (Gamson & Moon, 2004; Seidman, 1996). Sexuality, in particular, refers to a constellation of practices, acts, identities, and orientations in the phenomenological sense (Ahmed, 2006) and weaves together a network of relations—interpersonal as well as political—that constitute knowledge and sociality (Ferguson, 2005; Gamson & Moon, 2004; Seidman, 1996).

Gender has been theorized as socially constructed stylized ways of being recognized as masculine or feminine enacted through gender performativity—the reiterative and citational practices through which discourse produces, regulates, and constrains a cultural norm that influences how bodies are read and materialized as gendered (Butler, 1988/2003, 1990/1999, 1991/1993, 1993). At the core of binary gender performativity is heteronormative sexuality and an implied, assumed heterosexual desire. Thus, gender is such stylized ways of performing masculinity or femininity (Butler, 1988/2003) and of doing masculinity and femininity (West & Zimmerman, 1991). Distinctions between masculine and feminine ways of being are based on perceived differences between biological sexes male and female. This difference is perceived as natural, yet is also socially constructed, as it is mapped onto the body in terms of chromosomes, gonads, hormones, and secondary sex characteristics, to name a few (Fausto-Sterling, 1997). The differences between the sexes male and female and the genders man and woman are socially constructed and naturalized through discourse, rendering them binary, mutually exclusive, and in opposition to each other.

Most importantly, gender and sexuality operate as domains or intersecting axes of identification along which power relations are articulated (Collins, 2000; Rubin, 1984/1993; Scott, 1986). In other words, gender and sexuality—like race, ethnicity, class, citizenship status, age, and ability—operate as vectors along which people experience privilege and oppression and through which power relations are negotiated. Sexuality, as an axis along which power is negotiated, has been theorized as dense transfer points in relations of power (Foucault, 1978). It is the ways in which gender and sexuality, as they intersect with other axes of difference, serve as domains and transfer points for the articulation and negotiation of power that are most central to this dissertation's project.

Joking about Gender and Sexuality

Humor is based semiotically on some kind of a surprise, incongruity, or code violation, and through their punch lines, jokes offer resolution that is surprising and generates laughter (Berger, 1995). Humor is not to be equated with jokes—humor is found across genres and forms of expression, of which jokes are but one kind. Jokes deliberately evoke amusement and can be strangely ambivalent, communicating and playing on various meanings at the same time (Carr & Greeves, 2006). Humor helps people integrate themselves in groups and helps groups establish identity and solidarity. Moreover, humor can be used to ridicule others through “derision laughter,” and if people show offense at this derisive humor, one can always counter that the

remarks were made in jest, enabling people to say things that they ordinarily would not be able to say (Berger, 1995). Through jokes, people can communicate beliefs and attitudes as well as subject material, denigrate others along lines of difference, and trade insults (Blake, 2007). Joking can have a cathartic effect, especially in areas of unconscious turmoil about sexuality and aggression (Freud, 1905/1963). Jokes have been theorized as ways to exploit ambiguity in language, play on incongruity, resolve the tension of ambivalence, enforce superiority through playful aggression, and release taboo thoughts and feelings through a socially sanctioned pressure valve (Carr & Greeves, 2006; Gagnier, 1991; Thomas, 1997). Joking is a means through which impossible or unsanctioned speech may momentarily be possible, a break from socio-linguistic order in which absurdity is accepted, and a potential method for the subversion of binary structures and for the release of unconscious anxieties (Atluri, 2009).

Gender joking—jokes with gender content and made across gender lines, almost entirely initiated by men—operate to keep women in a subordinate position through stereotypes, conventional images, and definitions of women at work in sexual, domestic, or maternal terms (Cunnison, 1989). Research has found that both women and men enjoy and express a wider tolerance for female-disparaging jokes (Moore, Griffiths, & Payne, 1987; Sev'er & Ungar, 1997). Jokes about women—in particular blonde women—draw on themes of promiscuity and sexual availability, stupidity, and vanity, while jokes about strong women target the ways in which they are unfit, undesirable, and unattractive (Thomas, 1997). Jokes about strong women play on social anxieties about women, power, and conformity to rigid gender roles while also emphasizing sexuality and stereotypes regarding heterosexuality and masculinity (Thomas, 1997). Gender joking, therefore, serves to regulate women's sexuality and appearance, men's masculinity and heterosexuality, and conventional ideas about binary gender roles (Cunnison, 1989).

I take these intellectual traditions and contributions to my research on the ways students and teachers read and mark difference onto subjectivities and bodies across social contexts in their high school. By focusing on the processes through which such difference—indeed at times, such queerness—is indexed and the processes through which power is wielded and negotiated in social interaction, I analyze the symbolic violence and marginalization that occurs in school everyday, even under the radar of well-intentioned teachers, students, administrators, and policies. Highlighting the mundane ways gender and sexuality are indexed through teasing and joking, through slang expressions, and through the positioning of bodies and subjectivities in discursive and physical spaces, this dissertation illuminates how identity and difference are read, marked, and utilized in the negotiation of power across high school classrooms and peer education.

Definitions of Select Key Terms

LGBT and Queer Identities

Although the gendered categories of 'boys,' 'girls,' and 'transgender,' as well as the sexual categories of 'lesbian,' 'gay,' and 'bisexual' may help us understand a range of possible identities, students' lived realities and experiences do not fall neatly within such lines. Contrary to what such labels suggest, gender and sexuality are more fluid, emergent, and situated in

context, often serving as sites of contestation. While identity categories such as ‘gay’ or ‘straight,’ ‘transgender’ or ‘male’ or ‘female’ position individuals as members of groups of supposedly similarly self-identified folks, the boundaries around such terms are marked by fluidity, seldom fixed across contexts, and subject to interpretation. As such, gender and sexuality are constituted at the institutional level of social structures, the interactional level of everyday social interactions, and the discursive level of representations through symbol systems such as language. Even though the subject positions one occupies and the social categories one uses to classify people are contingent, binary frames of gender and sexuality—such as masculine/feminine, gay/straight, homo/hetero, in/out of the closet—structure possibilities for how identity categories are taken up, expressed, and understood. Identities are not sharply bounded binary ways of being, yet the language used to describe differences between people reifies an ideology that rests on binary notions of gender and sexuality.

Throughout this dissertation, for consistency I use the term ‘LGBTQ’ to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer-identified, and questioning people. Some scholars, educators, and youth use ‘LGBTQQIA’ or ‘LGBTQQITSP’ to include the categories intersex, ally, asexual, two-spirited, poly- and pansexual. While my choice to use ‘LGBTQ’ is not meant to exclude these other categories, it is intended to refer to all people who see themselves as aligned with this array of genders and sexualities designated as falling outside dominant notions of normative heterosexual binary gender.

I use ‘LGBTQ’ largely because the participants in this study used this term to refer to a range of identities, practices, and representations even if they themselves did not self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer. For example, some students identified as genderqueer, omnisexual, or pansexual, while others refused to claim or restrain their identification within the limits of any gender or sexual categories. The students who described themselves as ‘genderqueer’ referred to their genders as a fluid phenomenon, experienced and expressed differently day to day and across a lifespan, as having both feminine and masculine qualities, as entirely outside of the binary gender system, as neither male nor female, and—as ‘queer’ implies—intentionally blurring and thwarting boundaries concerning gender. By identifying as omnisexual and pansexual, such youth kept open the possibilities for their desire and love to be oriented toward people who identify across a range of gender identities and biological sexes not assigned to, but deliberately rejecting, the gender binary.

While participants in my study identified along a wide range of queer subjectivities and positionalities, ‘LGBTQ’ was the most common moniker used in addition to the shorthand term ‘gay’ to refer to identities outside of heteronormative binary gender in classroom conversations, in school curricula, and in the descriptions and discussions of the gay-straight alliance student club. Similarly, many students in the gay-straight alliance and in the classrooms I observed identified as questioning or uncertain about their gender and/or sexuality, yet their participation in the gay-straight alliance or in GSA-sponsored events like the Day of Silence marked them as falling outside of heteronormative binary gender regardless of their own understandings of their gender and sexuality.

In this dissertation, I use the term ‘gender non-conforming’ to refer to those participants who blur and subvert normative boundaries between genders, such as masculine-presenting girls and

feminine-presenting boys, and those who identify themselves as transgender or genderqueer. I use the term ‘transgender’ when my informants identify themselves as such. ‘Transgender’ is an umbrella term that refers to a range of identities and practices that cross over, cut across, and move between socially constructed sex/gender boundaries of male/female. This is not to be confused with the term ‘transsexual,’ which refers to a “culturally and historically specific transgender practice/identity through which a transgendered subject enters into a relationship with medical, psychotherapeutic, and juridical institutions in order to gain access to certain hormonal and surgical technologies for enacting and embodying itself” (Stryker, 1994/2006, p. 255, note 2). Central to this dissertation is the analysis of the ways trans identities and gender non-conforming bodies are iterated through schooling structures, practices, and discourses as well as the ways ‘trans’ is utilized as a gendered epithet to mark gender presentation that falls outside of the ideology of binary gender.

Harassment and Bullying

Research demonstrates that the long-term effects of school harassment and bullying extend beyond students’ schooling years, impacting their physical and mental health into adulthood (Russell, Ryan, Toomey, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2011). LGBT youth who experience high levels of school victimization, such as bullying and harassment, report impaired health and mental health in young adulthood including depression, suicide, sexually transmitted infections, and heightened risk for contracting HIV (*ibid.*). Bullying and harassment can take various forms and target various kinds of difference including gender, gender non-conformity, sexuality, race, ethnicity, citizenship status, class or socioeconomic status, ability, body size, and embodied habitus like speaking with an accent or a stutter.

Bullying is behavior that repeatedly and over time intentionally inflicts injury on another individual (Meyer, 2009). Bullying can be defined as negative actions carried out repeatedly and over time that intentionally inflict or attempt to inflict injury or discomfort such as the use of words in threatening, taunting, teasing, and name-calling, non-verbal behavior such as gestures, faces, and looks, and physical contact like hitting, pushing, kicking, pinching, and restraining another person (*ibid.*). Cyber-bullying includes the use of electronic media such as cell phone text messages, email, instant messaging, social networking websites, online videos, blogs, and other internet forums to threaten or harm others. While bullying occurs with repetition across time and is focused on one individual, harassment is more general and dispersed.

Harassment includes any biased behaviors—intentional or unintentional, targeted at an individual or without any specific targets—that can have a negative impact on the targeted individual or the social environment (Meyer, 2009). Categories of harassment can include hostile environment harassment and gendered harassment such as sexual harassment, sexual orientation harassment, and gender non-conformity harassment. For example, hostile environment harassment would include any behavior that acts to create a hostile environment such as jokes, comments, gestures, looks, unwanted touching, and graffiti on desks, lockers, bathroom walls, or other public spaces, while gendered harassment describes any behavior that shapes and polices boundaries around traditional gender norms: those of heterosexual masculinity and femininity (*ibid.*). Sexual harassment includes any unwanted behavior that has a sexual or gender component and is typically enacted within a matrix of heterosexual relations (Butler, 1990/1999).

Sexual orientation harassment refers to any unwanted behavior, hidden or obvious, that reinforces negative attitudes toward LGB people or uses anti-LGB insults to harm others and can be targeted at gay, lesbian, bisexual, or straight people alike. Gender non-conformity harassment targets gender expression or one's public performance of masculinity or femininity and can also target transgender and transsexual persons as well as those who do not define their gender based on rigid notions of masculinity and femininity or not conform to strict boundaries between masculine and feminine embodiment and expression (Meyer, 2009). Harassment, bullying, and cyber-bullying can overlap, mutually inflecting each other at different points in time and across different contexts. For example, incidents may be both racial and gendered, may target one's ethnicity and sexual orientation, may be aimed at other forms of bias like disability or body size in addition to gender non-conformity, or may encompass both sexual harassment and cyber-bullying at the same time.

For youth who identify as transgender or genderqueer, for those who do not consider themselves to be categorized as boys or girls, for those who blur boundaries such as feminine-presenting boys and masculine-presenting girls, I have observed students highlight gender transgressions through the name-calling of 'trans' as an epithet, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter 4. This dissertation deals with hostile environment harassment and gendered harassment, which shape classroom and school climates, position gender non-conforming youth as the basis for jokes and teasing, and reinforce the dominant ideologies of heteronormativity and binary gender. Such harassment can manifest in the more surreptitious name-calling and teasing that can happen in classrooms during structured class time as well as the abuse that can take place in locker rooms and bathrooms. Harassment for gender non-conformity can be particularly pernicious in sex-segregated spaces like bathrooms and locker rooms where the boundary maintenance around binary gender norms and heteronormativity is especially delicate. Most of these instances pass under the radar of teachers, as they must take care of so many things during the course of a school day that it is impossible to notice every single occurrence of bias. In fact, many teachers I observed in this study made a point to intervene in such harassment when they witnessed it. Nevertheless, as illustrated in this dissertation, instances of bullying and harassment, joking and teasing, or name-calling that go unchecked contribute to a school climate riddled by bias.

CHAPTER THREE – METHODOLOGY: ETHNOGRAPHIC INQUIRY ACROSS SCHOOL SPACES

In this dissertation, I engage the following research questions:

- (1) How are gender and sexuality made salient in students' negotiations of the language of class discussions and their positions within the physical and discursive space of the classroom?
- (2) How are joking and teasing used in the construction of gender and sexuality and the negotiation of power relations in classroom interactions?
- (3) How are peoples' identities and histories interpellated through linguistic expressions like "that's so gay" and "that's so ghetto"?
- (4) How does using such expressions and name-calling shape notions of "safe space" in high school contexts?

To address these questions, I designed and carried out a longitudinal ethnographic study that drew across a variety of qualitative methods for data collection and analysis.

This chapter is divided into three sections—Research Methodology, Data Collection Across Sites, and Introduction to Sites at MacArthur High. The first section addresses my rationale for the analytic decisions I made throughout the research process and provides a discussion of my positionality as a researcher within this high school. The second section details how I collected the qualitative data for this study, and the third section introduces the research sites in this study: the gay-straight alliance and three freshman social studies, humanities, and history courses at MacArthur High.

Research Methodology

Theoretical Foundations

This study draws on qualitative research methodology, including ethnographic participant-observation, interviews, questionnaires, collection of artifacts, and audio and video recording. Because my research questions primarily focus on social processes and participants' understandings of these processes, my research design rests on qualitative inquiry. By qualitative inquiry, I mean that the research design was a reflexive process across every phase of the project of collecting, coding, and analyzing patterns in the data, relating the data to theory, and refocusing research questions in relation to what the data being collected could illuminate (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2002). Qualitative research involves studying people in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of phenomena in terms of the meanings participants give them, and incorporating an interpretive, naturalistic approach to inquiry and analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Qualitative research, moreover, draws on multiple methods, focuses on context, is emergent and evolving, and relies on complex reasoning of deduction and induction (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

As a multi-sited ethnographic study (Marcus, 1995), this research involved sustained ethnographic participant-observation across multiple sites within MacArthur High School. These sites will be discussed in detail in the section "Data Collection Across Sites." Building on Duranti (1997), I define participant-observation as engaging in a range of activity from *passive participation* during which I, as the researcher, tried to be as un-intrusive as possible (e.g.,

quietly watched, listened, and took notes) to *complete participation* during which I intensively interacted with other participants and participated in the activity at hand (e.g., helped students with class work or translation, offered suggestions when solicited by gay-straight alliance club leaders, or fielded participants' questions regarding how to approach a class assignment, content discussed in their classes, strategies for engaging in LGBTQ awareness-raising, what my experiences were at the local university, and what I was researching at MacArthur High). Linguistic anthropologist Alessandro Duranti, quoting anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, writes, "The observation of a particular community is not attained from a distant and safe point but by being in the middle of things, that is, by participating in as many social events as possible. It is this often difficult but necessary combination of modalities of being with others and observing them that is referred to as participant-observation, a building stone of anthropology's contribution to our understanding of human cultures (Malinowski, 1935)" (Duranti, 1997). Thus, in this project, I was situated in the classrooms and student club meetings and events as an observer and a participant in the everyday mundane activities of schooling.

The multiple sources of data I gathered—including ethnographic fieldnotes, audio recorded interviews, student questionnaires, cultural artifacts generated by participants in this school, and audio and video recordings of classroom interactions—enabled me to effectively triangulate patterns and recurring themes in my data and my research findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2002). Individual and focus group interviews granted me insight into participants' processes of meaning-making and explanations of phenomena in their social worlds as well as how they narrated and represented this. Interviewing, as a qualitative mode of inquiry, calls on participants to answer and elaborate on their responses to open-ended questions, to narrate their stories and experiences, and to offer their interpretations of these experiences (Seidman, 2006). Moreover, I created and asked students to fill out questionnaires that solicited background and demographic information about study participants.

Cultural artifacts I collected constituted a range of visual and written representations created by students and teachers at MacArthur High. They included students' class work, notes, and essays; photographs and videos of students' posters and art work; photographs of classroom visibility materials posted to the walls; reading materials, handouts, and assignments created by the teachers; gay-straight alliance club visibility materials and fliers; and t-shirts and sweatshirts designed and printed by students in the GSA. As cultural and material records of information produced in these classes and this club (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), these artifacts helped to round out a picture of how knowledge was generated, contested, and negotiated across these sites. The artifacts I collected offered insight into participants' perspectives and were coded and analyzed using Discourse Analytic techniques (Jaworski & Coupland, 2006; Wooffitt, 2005).

The methods of data collection and analysis employed in this study specifically focused on face-to-face social interaction between participants and closely examined everyday linguistic and social practices that construct gender and sexuality. Thus, units of analysis included utterances and breaches as well as participants' narratives, interpretations, and representations of experiences. The utterance is a unit of speech communication linked in a complexly organized chain of other utterances whose boundaries are demarcated by a change in speakers, and unlike the grammatical unit of the sentence, the utterance can contain multiple sentences or just a fraction of a sentence (Bakhtin, 1986). The constitutive feature of an utterance is its

addressivity—the quality of turning to someone and directing or addressing language to someone—which makes the utterance so useful to examine, as the language embedded in utterances belongs to someone (the speaker) and is directed toward others (the addressees). Breaches are episodes or moments in social interaction through which tacit rules underlying social behavior are made more explicit by one's transgression of social boundaries or implicit expectations (Garfinkel, 1967). Through the analysis of breaches, one can transform into the object of study what Garfinkel (1967) described as common sense or institutionalized knowledge of facts of social life, or social expectations and norms. Narrative is a discourse genre that routinely involves description, chronology, evaluation, and explanation (Ochs & Capps, 2001) through which speakers relate to events as well as stances and dispositions toward those events (Labov & Waletzky, 1968). Through the examination of narrative, one can analyze how participants' tellings emerge from and shape experience (Ochs & Capps, 1996), how participants' explanations relate to their social worlds, and how participants' connections are forged to past, present, and possible stories (Baquedano-López, 2001).

Because this study examines how participants are positioned as gendered and sexualized, how participants negotiate their identities, and how gender and sexuality are operationalized in unequal relations of power during face-to-face social interaction, the collection of both linguistic and ethnographic data offered the most comprehensive view into how these processes happen across contexts. Thus, this project deliberately situated the use of Conversation Analysis (CA), as a form of transcription and analysis in examining audio and video recordings, in ethnographic context in order to consider a more comprehensive picture of the social phenomena under examination (cf. Moerman, 1988). Expanding on the conventions of Conversation Analysis (cf. Goodwin, 2000; Goodwin & Heritage, 1990; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, 1987), I transcribed audio and video recordings of classroom interactions using CA conventions developed by Gail Jefferson (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984/2006), so as to enable a fine-grained analysis of talk-in-interaction (see Appendix A). While any transcript offers a selective rendering of the data (Ochs, 1979), this method of transcription and analysis was chosen for the affordances it offers in closely examining language as social action.

I analyzed ethnographic fieldnotes, interviews, questionnaires, artifacts created by participants, audio and video recordings of classroom interactions, as well as transcripts from these audio and video recordings through a process of coding and monitoring themes, patterns, ambiguities, and contradictions. Coding of data occurred at all stages of data collection, and drawing on open coding techniques developed in grounded theory (Glaser, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), I allowed coding families to emerge from what was salient in the data and then applied these codes throughout the data. Using a grounded theory approach (ibid.), I coded and analyzed data inductively, paying close attention to themes that emerged within and across different sources and continually engaging possible interpretations of the data in dialogue with the research questions and methods (Maxwell, 2005). I organized and coded my data using the qualitative research software program HyperResearch, which assisted me as I drew connections across data sources and worked through different examples of similar phenomena across the corpus of my data. Additionally, I used the traditional ethnographic method of checking in with study participants about my interpretations during the data analysis and writing phases to allow for greater validity in my findings.

My Positionality

In my ethnographic research at MacArthur High over three years, I heard students call each other names and slurs drawing on constructions of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, ability, and body size every day—sometimes many times per class period. I deliberately never interrupted such name-calling, seeing it neither as my place to discipline the students nor in my own interests in building and maintaining trust with them. This complicated decision proved useful for my research purposes, while allowing me the comforts of avoiding disciplining students—some of whom I got to know well and others I did not. This undoubtedly saved me face with the majority of students I observed and interacted with during the course of my fieldwork. It secured the privacy of student conversations that take place in the public institution of compulsory schooling and in view of my social science research, making easier my day-to-day collection of data. My lack of action over the years, however, weighed heavily on my psyche and soul, indeed oftentimes my body as well.

At times I did not interrupt language or micro-level occurrences of symbolic violence that I wish I had or wish I had possessed the courage to turn into learning moments. Because I made a point not to signal that the students were going to get in trouble, not to tattle on students for their behavior to their teachers or other school officials, and not to step in to redirect the course of students' interactions, I often was privy to see and hear students' uses of language that otherwise might have been censored in more formal classroom contexts. It is possible that the students acted in even more degrading ways because they knew I was there and would not say anything to interrupt them. My decision to withdraw from intervening in harassment and name-calling had two ethical dimensions that complicated the other. On the one hand, my not intervening allowed the youth to continue on with their affairs as usual because over time they did not come to see me as a rule enforcer or an authority figure—this represented a *laissez faire* approach to student social interactions for the purposes of my research. On the other hand, my inaction also inadvertently allowed for the perpetuation of such harassment and name-calling because I withheld my personal reactions to and disapproval of such language—this represented the ethical challenges put into effect by my silence and complicity in behavior I do not condone.

In ethnographic research, negotiating the line between adult and child or a position of authority and that of subordination is wrought with tension, as discussed by anthropologists and sociologists of education (Ferguson, 2000; Pascoe, 2007; Thorne, 1993). Indeed, in these situations I drew on ways of enacting a least-adult identity across age differences and generational lines (Mandell, 1988; Thorne, 1993) and ways of creating a least-gendered identity by drawing on masculinity and demonstrating an inability or unwillingness to be offended (Pascoe, 2007).

I worked to enact a least-adult identity by trying to not stand out as an adult—or at least, not as an adult who would discipline students, pass judgment on the students' actions, or offer unsolicited advice about how to approach class work, course content, or LGBTQ activism. My age represented the largest social distance between the youth and me. I started this research at the age of thirty, and I intentionally dressed down, wearing casual clothing like cargo pants, t-shirts, and hooded sweatshirts, so as to minimize my age and not to be mistaken as a teacher or authority figure. My decision to dress down in order to minimize my age may have inadvertently

worked to create an image of myself that did not conform to race, gender, class, and age standards, or the ways a thirty-something White lady from the university would be expected to dress in a school setting. Hooded sweatshirts—a staple in my wardrobe—have been marked as racialized and an enduring symbol of Black masculinity. Cargo pants are commonly considered a workman’s clothes—marking me as working class despite my position in the ivory towers of the academy, indexing my gender presentation as more masculine, and possibly connecting my fashion choices to racialized associations of baggy pants. Although I did not intend to minimize my whiteness or my class status, upon reflection my clothing choices may have worked to construct me as race and class non-conforming. Nevertheless, no efforts to ‘blend in’ would have been successful, and thus, I embraced the awkwardness and discomfort that sometimes accompanies participant-observation in communities from which we, as researchers, do not come.

My efforts to display a gendered identity that was non-conforming to the rigid binary between masculine and feminine behavior were reflected in my clothing choices, my posture and embodiment, and my ways of speaking. I worked hard to keep my voice even keeled and in lower registers, not allowing my vocal inflections to rise into the higher registers frequently used by teenage girls and women when excited or animated so as not to convey my emotions. I also worked hard to keep my emotions from surfacing. I tried not to show my excitement when participants provided me with ethnographic moments and analysis germane to my study, not to display disapproval when I overheard language I could not condone, and not to reveal my frustration and ennui during moments when being in high school—for a second time, but with the adult awareness that life can dramatically improve post high school and adolescence—was tedious and painful and when I was not sure what I was looking for, if I would ever observe it, or where I needed to be to find it. My attempts to appear devoid of such emotions through the suppression of such expression and the maintenance of a speaking style aiming to be cool and collected drew on masculinity and masculine gender presentation. My posture, embodiment, and clothing choices drew on masculinity as I seldom wore skirts, dresses, heels, or accessories, and I held myself with confidence. Yet, I also drew on femininity by wearing make-up, albeit minimal, and by lending myself to help when students asked me to find for them feminine products like tampons or pads from the teachers’ supplies.

My positionality as a researcher in this setting was that of an outsider—or perhaps as “the outsider within” (Collins, 1986)—in that I was not part of the school community in any way except as a graduate student conducting research, positioned within MacArthur High in order to try to collect data that would answer research questions beneficial to both my endeavors and the school’s interests. I came to this research having taught and tutored students for over a decade. This meant that my position as an educator was always at the forefront of what I did, yet I made a deliberate effort not to intervene in students’ work, academic or otherwise. As a queer woman, my involvement with the GSA and in courses that addressed gender and sexuality was a political move. The students in the GSA understood me as an adult who has remained politically active in local and national LGBTQ rights efforts, as someone with experience starting a GSA in college, and as someone accustomed to tutoring and working with students. The students in the freshman social studies courses I observed understood me as an adult from the local university who was conducting research on gender, sexuality, and anti-LGBTQ bias in their high school. My status

as a White, upper middle-class, able-bodied, and native English-speaking academic from the nearby prestigious university marked my undeniable privilege.

During classroom observations, I typically located myself apart from the student body—at the back of the room, on the sidelines next to the rows of students’ desks, and outside of or in the observing outside circle of the students’ Socratic circles. For the most part, I did not participate in the class lessons or activities. Instead, I usually sat to the side or the back of the room observing and taking notes in miniature notebooks that easily fit into my pockets. My physical location in classrooms articulated my role and presence in a telling way. My position as a researcher in the school was tenuous—I always asked permission to attend classes and GSA meetings, never assuming that I could just show up unannounced. In the case of my observations in the Freshman Humanities and History class in small school A, the teacher insisted I only observe during the five days of the school year when sex, gender, sexuality, and LGBTQ issues were to be discussed. My participation and observations in her class was always subject to her invitation, and therefore, mediated through her terms. On the other hand, in the GSA meetings I would try to sit on the periphery, but the organization and spatial arrangement of these meetings was so loose that I often found myself folded into the middle of everything—the physical orientations of students’ bodies, serious conversations, and playful social interactions. The students in the GSA, over the three years I conducted my research, incorporated me into their group in ways I never anticipated—asking me for advice on tackling anti-LGBTQ bias in their school, including me and my help in their publicity campaigns and outreach efforts, calling on me to chaperone field trips, and turning to me for moral support during their peer education panel presentations.

Students at MacArthur High were accustomed to having visitors observe their classes on occasion, as the school often allowed parents of prospective students, community members and groups, university researchers, and district officials to visit and observe the school’s daily operations. Because I occupied spaces in MacArthur High as a university researcher for three years, I was occasionally called upon to stand in as a local “expert” on matters related to gender, sexuality, and LGBTQ issues. This relationship with the school granted me access to institutional spaces and the privilege to listen and observe teachers’ and students’ interactions as they went about their daily lives. My presence was both non-intrusive as I quietly listened and observed, staying out of the way of teachers’ instructions and students’ learning, and yet, simultaneously always also intrusive as I represented the gaze of social scientific research and the university—an outside presence interpellated by my physical presence. Because research is not an innocuous academic exercise but an activity that is accompanied by stakes and interests which occurs in a set of political and social conditions (Smith, 1999), there are ethical concerns tied up with my positionality as researcher, “expert,” and representative of the university in this setting. Such ethical concerns include the knowledge that research produces, the power of research to define lives and worlds, the ties to colonialism and imperialism inherent in the history of social science research, the project of making subjects into objects of inquiry, and the risk of dehumanizing and exploiting the very people who make one’s research possible (Smith, 1999). I addressed such concerns by checking in with my informants about my interpretations, questions, and analysis; I listened closely for participants’ analysis and drew on that whenever possible; I had students and teachers read drafts of my writing; I revised my writing with the insight I gleaned from their feedback; I prioritized participants’ interests, directions, and research questions as much as

possible; and I altered my study as the years passed in accordance with the feedback I received from students, teachers, and administrators at MacArthur High.

Data Collection Across Sites

Ethnographic Observations of the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA)

This dissertation draws on ethnographic research I carried out over the course of three school years, from fall 2007 through spring 2010, at MacArthur High School. My study began with questions regarding how LGBTQ youth construct safe spaces for examining issues related to gender and sexual identity and notions of belonging across contexts in their school. As my research progressed, I followed the directions the youth in the GSA steered me toward and developed new questions that pushed me to investigate classroom interactions and curricular interventions focused on LGBTQ issues. By the end of my study, my research questions had shifted and were refined so much so that I had investigated notions and constructions of safe space, uses of linguistic expressions like “that’s so gay,” “that’s so ghetto,” and name-calling like “trans,” and methods for intervention carried out by students, teachers, and the GSA across various school contexts.

I chose to work with the gay-straight alliance at this high school because I was interested in the larger student-led social movement to address anti-LGBTQ bias in schools, and MacArthur High’s GSA welcomed me and my research. The GSA at this high school was led primarily by students and offered community and support for youth questioning their gender or sexual identity; for students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, or queer; for gender non-conforming, genderqueer, intersex, and transgender students; for straight allies and friends; for children with LGBTQ parents; and for any students concerned about LGBTQ issues, homophobia, and transphobia in their school. I started participant-observation with the GSA in September 2007, and for three years I observed weekly club meetings, attended club events like National Coming Out Day and National Day of Silence, and interviewed students and teachers affiliated with and active in the club.

During the first year of my fieldwork carried out over the 2007-2008 academic year, there was a teacher named Ms. O’Brien who was actively involved in leading the club and supporting the GSA’s student-leaders. She left MacArthur High School after that year, and the following two years the GSA had minimal teacher involvement. During these last two years, the students in the GSA were largely on their own as far as leadership and direction were concerned, and they started to draw on me more as a resource and to ask for my support in various tasks and projects. My previous experience co-founding a GSA in college and working with various LGBTQ projects and groups made me a knowledgeable person about such topics and activities. From 2008 to 2010, I was typically the only adult present at GSA meetings and activities, but there were a handful of supportive teachers who would sign forms, advise the student-leaders on club matters, and help the students address issues related to homophobia and transphobia in their school.

The students in the GSA allowed me to sit in on their lunchtime meetings, invited me to their events, utilized me as a resource in education and in LGBTQ organizing as well as an adult

chaperone for field trips, included me and my help in their publicity campaigns and outreach efforts, participated in interviews with me, and answered my questions and engaged me in ongoing conversations about their experiences at school. I engaged in participant-observation during gay-straight alliance meetings, activities, and all-school events. Some events included assemblies put on by the GSA, bake sales at lunch to raise money, film festivals, classroom panels where students from the GSA were invited to speak throughout the school, and extracurricular student club fairs. Weekly meetings for the GSA were held during lunchtime and consisted of tackling business matters, planning upcoming events, bringing in guest speakers, designing logos and visibility materials, sharing information learned at conferences and local resources for LGBTQ youth, and generally just chatting and hanging out.

Over the three years I worked with the GSA, I observed many students come and go as they graduated or moved on to other clubs and activities. The students' transitions had an emotional impact on me as I was proud of them for their accomplishments, I was nostalgic for times and relationships that had passed, and I felt the sadness and loss as well as the excitement and potential that accompany change. I also observed new students join and develop a place for themselves in the club, as it shifted year to year. At different points in time the size and demographics of the club varied dramatically. From 2007 to 2010, the GSA at MacArthur High consisted of approximately twenty to forty students with varying degrees of involvement. Typically, anywhere from two to twelve students made up its core group, which included members who regularly attended meetings as well as planned and participated in GSA-sponsored activities. An additional dozen students showed up to events and meetings occasionally throughout the year, while a total of forty students belonged to the club's facebook group and were on the email listserv. The gay-straight alliance made up a small portion (1%) of the student population at MacArthur High, and the visibility and presence of the GSA club in this school was limited.

My ethnographic observations of the GSA club's activities totaled 150 hours over the three years of my study, including two years of pilot research carried out during the 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 school years and one year of intensive dissertation data collection during the 2009-2010 school year. As I engaged in participant-observation, I wrote extensive detailed fieldnotes covering and representing my observations. During this time I also collected artifacts, including visibility materials and logos designed by the GSA, such as signs, t-shirts and sweatshirts, placards, and fliers that offered information about the club, that addressed homophobia and bias, and that were intended to designate safe spaces and allies for LGBTQ students. Appendix B provides an overview of the GSA club activities I observed, the total number of observation hours each school year, the ranges in the size of the club, and the qualitative methods I used for data collection with the GSA.

Interviews with GSA Participants

In addition to collecting artifacts and observing club activities, I audio recorded a total of 14 interviews with twenty students and 4 interviews with four teachers affiliated with the GSA. I conducted one-on-one and group interviews with twenty students involved in the GSA, which usually took the length of a forty-minute lunch hour. I developed preliminary open-ended interview protocols, and I audio recorded and transcribed each interview. Interview participants

included a representative group of students who identified across a range of sexualities including lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, questioning, straight, and pansexual or omnisequal, and a spectrum of gender identities including boy, girl, transgender, and genderqueer. They also represented a group of students who were questioning and out to varying degrees with their families, friends, and schoolmates concerning their gender identities and sexualities. The racial and ethnic makeup of the interview sample reflected that of the GSA, that is, primarily White, with some of Jewish ethnicity, as well as a number of youth of mixed Asian, Black, Latino, and White heritage. Some students identified themselves as Brazilian,¹⁰ Black and Puerto Rican, and Japanese Latina.

I conducted both formal and informal interviews: formal interviews were audio recorded and participants were given a list of questions they might be asked, while informal interviews occurred as we walked around school putting up fliers and as we chatted during lunch. Informal interviews were not audio recorded, however I took notes and wrote down the majority of the conversation immediately afterward. In total, I did 12 one-on-one interviews and 2 group interviews with students. I formally interviewed six students one-on-one and informally interviewed six other students one-on-one. I also conducted 2 group interviews: one that was formal and one that was informal and spontaneously emerged during a meeting when the agenda items were sparse and we moved onto a conversation regarding my research and my questions. At this particular meeting a dozen students were present and participated in this group interview. The other group interview consisted of four students and one teacher. Some students participated in both an individual interview and a group interview, which meant that the total number of students who participated in these 14 interviews was twenty.

Found in Appendix C, my interview questions for the students in the GSA addressed school experiences across the various small school programs and classes the students attend, the role the GSA club plays in addressing anti-LGBTQ bias in their school, the inclusion of gender and sexuality or LGBTQ issues and figures in their coursework, the kinds of support LGBTQ students receive from their teachers and school generally speaking, and the students' feelings and conceptions of school safety. A key component of my interviews with students included asking them about their experiences with homophobia, transphobia, bullying, or harassment at school, as well as the prevalence of and their perceptions of language like "that's so gay," "no homo," and "faggot."

Lastly, I conducted individual interviews with four teachers who have been involved with the GSA to varying degrees. The first teacher I interviewed was directly involved in leading the club during the first year of my fieldwork, while the other three teachers were more loosely affiliated with the GSA, the students in the club, and efforts to raise awareness about LGBTQ issues within MacArthur High. These teachers supported the GSA's activities by putting up visibility posters, helping to silk-screen GSA t-shirts, buying and wearing GSA t-shirts and sweatshirts, and serving as allies to the LGBTQ youth. My interview questions for teachers affiliated with the GSA, reproduced in Appendix D, inquired into their experiences with homophobia and transphobia at MacArthur High, the supportiveness of the school's administration in handling LGBTQ students' and teachers' concerns, the inclusion of gender and sexuality or LGBTQ issues and figures in school curricula, the prevalence of comments like "that's so gay" and name-

¹⁰ The student who identifies as Brazilian strongly insisted on the Portuguese spelling of her home country and ethnicity with an 's' as opposed to an Anglicized 'z.'

calling like “faggot” and “trans” in their classrooms, and the role the GSA and other LGBTQ students and teachers play in addressing anti-LGBTQ bias in their school.

Shifting Research Questions and Sites for Inquiry

Over the course of my first two years of ethnographic fieldwork with the GSA club, I became increasingly interested in students’ and teachers’ efforts to interrupt homophobic language and to educate students about the harmfulness of anti-LGBTQ bias and language in their school. My questions shifted to encompass how gender and sexuality norms are made explicit, taken up, enacted, played with, challenged, refused, and reconfigured in everyday social interactions between participants in a high school. My focus also shifted to students’ and teachers’ experiences of violence and unequal power relations regarding gender and sexuality in high school contexts. I began to examine students’ and teachers’ attempts to critically discuss gender, sexuality, and forms of anti-LGBTQ bias, as well as how such issues were framed in the classroom curricula. I followed the suggestions of the LGBTQ youth in the GSA at MacArthur High as to what questions to investigate, which classrooms and settings within their school to observe, and how to make sense of interpreting my data.

For my third and final year of research (2009-2010), in addition to continuing my work with the GSA, I chose to look at the site of a particular curricular intervention that incorporated gender, sexuality, and LGBTQ issues into a small portion of freshman social studies courses at MacArthur High School. I wanted to investigate how issues concerning social justice—specifically those related to gender and sexuality—were discussed, handled in the curricula, and understood by students and teachers. Teachers and students at MacArthur High specifically recommended I take a look at their freshman social studies courses as representative of the school’s attempt to address these issues through curricula and required course offerings. During the 2009-2010 school year, I examined what actually happened in those classes, what the learning moments consisted of, and how gender and sexuality were framed by different dominant discourses within these classrooms. Appendix E gives an overview of the school sites observed for this study and my data collection methods across these sites as they shifted over time.

Ethnographic Observations and Interviews in Three Freshman Social Studies Courses

The three freshman social studies courses I chose to observe during the 2009-2010 school year specifically focused on issues of identity, community, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, gender, and social justice more broadly speaking. The curricula for these freshman seminars also addressed issues related to adolescence, included sex education, and sought to empower youth to make informed decisions for themselves. These courses represented the majority of this high school’s curricular and pedagogical approach to the study of gender, sexuality, and LGBTQ issues. The courses I observed were required in three of the smaller sections of the school, which meant that approximately 20% of the total student body took one of these three courses during their freshman year. That is, approximately 170 freshmen enrolled in one of these three courses each year, bringing the total number of students who have taken a freshman social studies course focusing on gender and sexuality to about 700 in this school of 3,500. This means that eighty percent of the student body at MacArthur High is not required to take any relevant course that addresses gender, sexuality, or LGBTQ issues.

I was granted permission by the teachers and students to observe their classes, but primarily during the weeks that focused on gender, sex, sexuality, and LGBTQ issues. These three courses differed in their pedagogical approaches to the study of gender, sexuality, and LGBTQ-related material and in the amount of class time they dedicated to these topics. One teacher squeezed in five days of discussion about LGBTQ-related current events toward the end of the spring semester, another teacher ended the sexuality and LGBTQ unit two weeks before she had originally planned because she thought her students were not mature enough to handle discussing the topic, while a third teacher stuck to her twelve-week curriculum despite students' and parents' protests. As represented in Appendix F, the amount of class time dedicated these issues, and thus, my observation time, varied widely. Appendix F illustrates the range of data collection methods and total observation hours carried out in these courses, as well as the class sizes and the small school in which they were required for freshman students.

The first course, Humanities and History in small school A, only addressed LGBTQ issues on five separate days during the spring semester. The teacher for this course wanted to maintain the students' feelings of safety and trust and believed that my observations of their class would potentially jeopardize or complicate this. She granted me permission to observe her class only during those five days in which the topic was LGBTQ current events and issues. Because the Freshman Humanities and History course in small school A was divided into two cohorts, I was able to observe a total of 10 one-hour class periods across these five days. While my observations in this course were limited, I was able to glean that the students negotiated and discussed complex issues related to race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and social justice by making connections between their lived experiences, course material, current events, pop culture, and slang popular amongst the youth.

The second course, Freshman History in small school B, offered eight weeks of course material related to adolescence, sex education, gender, and sexuality, with a particular focus on media literacy and critical reading of texts. The teacher for this course allowed me to begin participant-observation during the fall 2009 semester so that I could get to know the students, the context of the course, and her class routines before the gender and sexuality unit began in February. In the fall, I observed Freshman History about once every one or two weeks, and in the spring during the gender and sexuality unit, about three times per week for eight weeks. The teacher for this course ended the sexuality and LGBTQ unit two weeks early because she thought her students could not handle the subject matter with maturity and respect. In total, I completed 35 observation hours in the Freshman History course in small school B. Additionally, I collected artifacts such as course readings, handouts, class work, and homework generated by the teacher, and I designed and handed out student questionnaires that inquired into participants' background and demographic information, perceptions of school safety for LGBTQ youth, and experiences of homophobia and transphobia at MacArthur High. In total, 11 student questionnaires out of a total of 60 administered in this freshman course were returned completed to me.

The third course, Social Studies and Humanities in small school C, provided twelve weeks dedicated to the study of gender, sexuality, sex education, LGBTQ issues, and social justice. This extensive gender, sex, and sexuality unit brought in guest speakers, drew from a range of texts, and incorporated various modes of classroom learning activities. Like in the Freshman

History course in small school B, the teacher for this course also allowed me to begin participant-observation during the fall 2009 semester before the gender, sex, and sexuality unit began in February. In the fall, I observed Freshman Social Studies and Humanities about once every one or two weeks, and in the spring during the gender, sex, and sexuality unit, about three times per week for twelve weeks. This class was divided into two cohorts, each of which met for two hours in this course every day. This meant that the students in Freshman Social Studies and Humanities in small school C met for twice as long as their counterparts in the other small schools did for their freshman social studies courses. In total, I observed this course for 75 hours, audio recorded classroom interactions for 52 hours, and video recorded classroom interactions for 12 hours.

I informally interviewed a total of twelve students from the Freshman Social Studies and Humanities course in small school C. We shared numerous conversations in passing as we walked from the classroom to the library or as we sat outside during class and chatted. I also informally interviewed students during lunchtime if they stayed in the classroom to do work or just hang out and talk. In these conversations, I asked the students about their reactions to the course material and the content of class discussions, as well as their experiences with the issues related to gender and sexuality being addressed in their class. I also audio recorded and transcribed a formal interview I conducted with the teacher of this freshman course. I collected numerous artifacts including course work generated by the teacher and samples of students' class work, notes, homework, essays, and posters. I photographed the classroom space as well as visibility materials and student work posted to the classroom walls. I distributed the same student questionnaires, of which I received 30 completed out of the 60 total administered in this freshman course.

Lastly, I conducted individual interviews with the three teachers who taught the freshman social studies courses I observed. My interview questions for these teachers, found in Appendix G, covered their experiences teaching the gender, sex, and sexuality unit, the development of such curricula, student and parent reactions to their teaching about sex, gender, and sexuality, and how issues of race, ethnicity, and class in relation to gender and sexuality are handled in the curriculum and in classroom discussions. Additionally, I asked these teachers about their experiences with homophobia and transphobia at MacArthur High, the administration's approach to handling LGBTQ students' and teachers' concerns, the prevalence of language like "that's so gay" and "trans" in their classrooms, and their perception of LGBTQ visibility and the role of the GSA at their school. I audio-recorded and transcribed the interviews, and each interview lasted approximately one hour during their lunchtime and prep time.

I observed these three freshman social studies courses over the 2009-2010 school year for a total of 120 hours. When added to the 150 observation hours I spent with the GSA, this brought my total ethnographic observation hours for this study to 270. The demographics of the 170 students in these three courses were similar to one another, yet slightly different compared to the overall demographics of the larger school, MacArthur High. The small schools had about 10% more African American students and 10% fewer White students than other programs and schools within MacArthur High. Many affluent parents elected to put their children in Advanced Placement tracks within MacArthur High. Conversely, many of the students enrolled in the small

schools programs tended to be those students who qualify for free or reduced price meals or who come from lower socio-economic standings.

News Sources as Socio-Political Context

Additionally, in order to account for the broader socio-political context in which my study is located, I monitored news sources and kept an archive of press releases and articles from January 2009 through May 2011. I focused on news stories that are related to homophobia and transphobia, bullying and harassment, abstinence-only and comprehensive sex education, organization and activities of gay-straight alliances, disputes over first-amendment rights concerning gender, sexuality, and LGBTQ identities, issues for LGBTQ students around access to bathrooms, and interpretation of laws related to the protection of LGBTQ students in schools. I have specifically delimited the parameters of my news search to stories related to gender and sexuality in schools and among youth, thus excluding issues such as same-sex marriage, gay and lesbian adoptions, hate crimes legislation, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, and the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy in the military. While these issues contribute to the larger socio-political context of the struggle for LGBTQ rights at this historical moment, they are also background to the issues in schools and among youth that I foreground in my study.

Introduction to Sites at MacArthur High

Gay-Straight Alliance Student Club

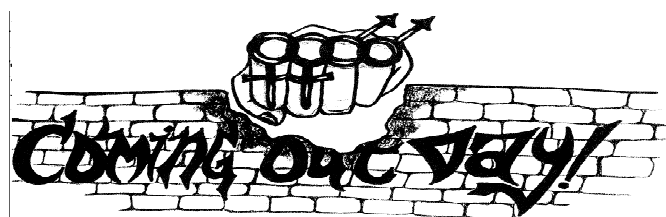
The space for the GSA shifted every school year as meetings were held in different classrooms depending on the faculty sponsor. The first year of my research (2007-2008), the GSA met in a science classroom in small school B because Ms. O'Brien, the club advisor, taught science and provided her classroom for club meetings. The next two academic years (2008-2009 and 2009-2010), the GSA met in Ms. Green's classroom in small school C. Although Ms. Green did not attend club meetings, did not participate in the club's ongoing activities, and did not serve as a leader of the club in a similar way that Ms. O'Brien did, Ms. Green did serve as the GSA's faculty sponsor by signing forms and providing a space for the students to meet. When I asked Ms. Green why she did not participate in the GSA club more than just nominally, she explained to me the busy schedule teachers in the small schools faced as they were called on to lead extracurricular clubs, serve on committees, provide office hours during which to meet with students, write letters of recommendation for students' college admissions, and collaborate in the development of curricula and direction of their small school.

During lunch hours on Wednesdays every week students would filter into the GSA club meetings—sometimes a half a dozen to more than a dozen students showed up right after the bell rang, excitedly talking and laughing with their friends, milling about and checking in with one another with hugs and hellos. On other days only a couple students would show up, quietly taking their lunches out of their backpacks and eating in comfortable silence, waiting for others to arrive. The range of participation and numbers of members varied across the school year and from year to year, but the GSA always consisted of the intentional community of those who showed up to meetings, attended events, checked in with others in the GSA during hallway passing times if they could not make it to lunch time meetings, or accessed the club through

social media like facebook and the MacArthur High School GSA's website. Both the physical spaces of the sanctioned classrooms provided by the GSA faculty sponsors, the grassy spot just outside of small school C where the GSA liked to meet on sunny days, and the outdoor courtyard during lunch time events as well as the virtual spaces of the GSA facebook group and the GSA website provided forums for students affiliated with the gay-straight alliance to meet and find community focused on LGBTQ issues at MacArthur High.

In small school B, the door outside of Ms. O'Brien's classroom was lined by two columns of National Coming Out Day fliers printed on paper of every color of the rainbow and arranged in order of the color spectrum. The yellow fliers read, "Listen up – National Coming Out Day" with a hand drawing of an ipod, while the green ones read, "No Doubt Come Out!" The orange fliers said, "Free to Be" in letters that consisted of many symbols arranged to read as alphabetic letters. For example, the 'F' was made up of wheelchair or handicapped symbols, the 'r' consisted of many pink triangles, the 'e's were shaped by the female symbol, while the 'B' was made up of male symbols. The red, blue, and lavender fliers had the logo the GSA club used in their National Coming Out Day Banner during the fall of 2007 containing text that resembled graffiti on a brick wall and the image of a fist made up of female and male symbols found in Figure 1 below. In this logo, the fist is supposed to represent same-sex couples in the form of two males together and two females together busting through a wall symbolic of heterosexism—same-sex couples coming out of the closet and breaking through boundaries of silence and invisibility.

Figure 1. GSA's National Coming Out Day logo (October 2007)



Inside Ms O'Brien's classroom, cloth tapestries and posters covered the walls representing everything from artwork to Indiana Jones. A miniature rainbow flag on a stick and a long spinning rainbow colored wind-catcher hung at the front of the classroom. Above the white board was a bright pink sign with a pink triangle that said, "Safe Person ALLY Safe Space," reproduced in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2. Safe Person ALLY Safe Space Sign in Ms. O'Brien's Classroom



The ally poster was one that the GSA photocopied and distributed around MacArthur High School. Every year, the students in the GSA approached teachers and asked them to post the ally sign in their classrooms and in their classroom windows that faced out into the hallways. Walking through MacArthur High's hallways, one would find such ally posters marking one out of a handful of classrooms and in some cases marking a cluster of classrooms grouped together where LGBTQ students could find teacher allies. The visual representations indexing LGBTQ identities and safe spaces played an important role in raising visibility and awareness of LGBTQ issues, identifying teachers sympathetic to the needs of LGBTQ students, and shaping constructions of safe space for youth who fell outside of White heteronormative binary gender norms.

While Ms. O'Brien's classroom was well adorned with LGBTQ visibility symbols such as the rainbow flag and pink triangle and with images produced by the students in the GSA, her classroom was only one of many at MacArthur High. Most classrooms did not have any representations of LGBTQ people or their concerns. Nevertheless, the classrooms I focused on for this study—by virtue of being the spaces for freshman social studies courses that contained gender and sexuality units—were more adorned with queer representations than the majority of classrooms I visited throughout the three years I was at MacArthur High. The teachers highlighted in this study—Ms. O'Brien, Ms. Sims, Ms. Oh, and Ms. Green—made a point to incorporate LGBTQ issues and figures into their curricula on gender and sexuality, and they were more inclined to hang representations of LGBTQ people and concerns in their classrooms than others. During the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 school years, the GSA met in Ms. Green's classroom in small school C, which will be discussed in more detail towards the end of this chapter.

Freshman Humanities and History Class in Small School A

The freshman class in small school A was divided into two cohorts of twenty-five students. Each cohort met in Ms. Sims' Freshman Humanities and History class for one forty-three minute class period on Mondays and one fifty-eight class period Tuesday through Friday. Over the course of the academic year, the Freshman Humanities and History class in small school A focused on LGBTQ people and issues for only a handful of days. Nevertheless, the students and teacher did not shy away from difficult discussions about gender, sexuality, and race, or about stereotyping, hurtful language, privilege, and oppression. Indeed, pedagogical structures and activities like Socratic seminars provided spaces for students to voice their opinions, hear multiple perspectives, and consider various sides to an argument or topic.

The five days I was permitted to observe Ms. Sims' class varied in terms of the class structure, activity, and topic related to gender, sexuality, and LGBTQ issues addressed. One day was spent with panels from the GSA who came to engage in peer education, lead class activities, promote awareness about the Day of Silence and anti-LGBTQ related bias in schools, and discuss LGBTQ issues with the students in Ms. Sims' Freshman Humanities and History class. Two days of the semester, the students watched the film *Milk* about the life, politics, and influence of Harvey Milk—the openly gay San Francisco City Supervisor who accomplished much for gay politics in his career cut short by his murder in 1978. On these days of watching *Milk*, the class also discussed the Briggs Initiative—the unsuccessful voter proposition on the California State

ballot in 1978 designed to ban gays, lesbians, and anyone who supported or talked about LGBTQ rights from working in California public schools. Another day was occupied by the students reading an article for class, generating questions for the upcoming Socratic seminar, and handling business matters like handing back papers and receiving mid-semester grades. The last day dedicated to gender, sexuality, and LGBTQ issues in this class was structured by a Socratic seminar in which the students discussed Proposition 8, the possibility of homophobia being the last acceptable form of discrimination, and the use of expressions like “that’s so gay.”

Readings for this course included news articles focused on Proposition 8, gay marriage, domestic partnership benefits, Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, sex education, abortion, sexual harassment, LGBTQ youth, and Lawrence King—the Oxnard, California eighth-grader who was shot by a fellow student in his school library on February 12, 2008 after enduring ongoing harassment for his gender non-conformity and his self-proclaimed gay identity.

The space of Ms. Sims’ classroom displayed various histories as traced through representations of individuals, events, symbols, and ideologies. Ms. Sims had hung on the walls the Mexican flag, the U.S. flag, a silkscreen image of a woman in a veil, and an African mask. Posters of figures such as Martin Luther King Jr., Frida Kahlo, Mujeres Libres, Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, Harry Potter, Mothers of East Los Angeles, Paul Robeson, and an image of President Obama next to text from the U.S. Constitution adorned the walls. Some posters represented historical events such as the Battle of Homestead and historical texts such as “Viva Sandino.” Similarly, these posters contained taglines such as “the importance of history” and “celebrate people’s history.” Other messages on the walls included, “power is not an excuse for ignorance,” “intolerance kills,” “individuality and safety should be protected,” and “please be a person that cares.” The white board at the front of the room had messages attending to homework assignments, immediate to-do items, and the class’s agenda for the day, while the chalkboard on the side wall contained the weekly schedule with upcoming deadlines, assignments, and activities for the class. On the bulletin board at the back of the room were small silkscreen posters that stated things like, “free speech—it’s a right,” “right to worship,” and “government is a construct, freedom is real.” On the wall next to the door, messages to and from the students filled the white board—things like smiley faces, hearts, happy birthday messages, and statements like “Lakesha is my bestie!” On this same wall, above the pencil sharpener was plastered a sticker in the shape of unfurled condom with the text, “just wear it.”

Freshman History Class in Small School B

Like in small school A, the freshman class in small school B was divided into two cohorts that met in their Freshman History class for one forty-three minute class period on Mondays and one fifty-eight class period Tuesday through Friday. The sixty-student freshman class was divided into two cohorts of thirty students each. Ms. Oh had a strict policy with regards to tardiness, and she shut and locked the classroom door as soon as the bell rang marking the beginning of class. Class always began with independent journal writing guided by a prompt Ms. Oh wrote on the white board, and students were given about five to ten minutes to complete the in-class writing. After this, Ms. Oh would open the classroom door and allow any students who were late to enter the classroom at that point before she shut and locked the door for the remainder of the class period.

The Freshman History class in small school B engaged with the guiding question of “Who am I and how do I fit into a diverse society?” through the processes of reflection, research, and participation in class discussions, activities, and student-directed projects. This Freshman History class was structured like the other freshman social studies courses I observed as culture, race, and ethnicity were the topics of study during the fall semester while part of the spring semester focused on gender, sex, and sexuality. Ms. Oh’s Freshman History class structured eight weeks of the spring semester to focus on the topics of adolescence, sex education, gender, sexuality, and LGBTQ issues. Ms. Oh’s class differed from the others in that media literacy was a central component to the lessons and activities and the unfolding of class topics and events ultimately led the teacher to alter the direction of the course.

After studying adolescence, sex education, and gender thoroughly, Ms. Oh felt compelled to shorten the unit and omit part of the curriculum dedicated to sexuality and LGBTQ issues. The teacher ended the sexuality and LGBTQ unit two weeks early after a series of classes in which some students made anti-LGBTQ comments and expressed disgust at being required to study LGBTQ issues. Ms. Oh’s assessment was that the risk of exposing some students to Leroy’s homophobia and transphobia outweighed the potential benefits of working through his anti-LGBTQ bias, while the risk of pushing students to confront Richard about his tendency to speak for the entire African American male race outweighed the benefits of challenging their silence. The immaturity these boys had displayed in class, Ms. Oh was afraid, could push other students who were considering coming out back into the closet. As Ms. Oh explained to me in an interview, she wanted to do more on sexual orientation, gender as a continuum, and sexuality beyond just straight and gay, but she “did not feel like [she] had built a safe enough space for these conversations to happen in this class.” Ms. Oh stated, “I don’t trust my interrupting and facilitating skills enough to deal with the things they say that can be really damaging. Once they say something, you can point it out and say, ‘No, don’t say that’ and process it, but you can’t take back the damage that those words do. I just don’t think these folks are ready for conversations about homophobia and sexual orientation.”

Activities in Ms. Oh’s Freshman History class included structured and teacher-directed note-taking, student-led research on sexually transmitted infections, guest speakers such as a recent alumnus who worked in a dating violence prevention program and discussed risk-taking, and the peer education program for sex education that presented information about reproduction, contraception, and safe sex practices for two consecutive days. In Ms. Oh’s Freshman History class, the students also listened and analyzed the lyrics to popular music and worked in small groups to analyze popular representations of women in advertisements through a media literacy perspective. During one class period, the students engaged in an “Act like a man” activity that focused on gender socialization and asked the students to consider what qualities and behaviors socially constituted what it means “to be a man.” Additionally, on another day the students divided by biological sex into a male group and a female group, and they participated in a fishbowl activity in which each group discussed what it was like to be a member of that biological sex while the other group listened.

For this class, students read Jamaica Kincaid’s essay, “Girl”—a one-sentence dialogue between a girl and her mother—and wrote poems about being a girl or being a boy. They watched films like

Bend it Like Beckham and Dr. Jean Kilbourne's *Still Killing Us Softly*—a lecture on advertising's depiction of women. The class watched *Hip Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes*, a documentary released in 2006 by Byron Hurt examining masculinity, homophobia, sexism, and violence in hip hop culture, and they read a letter about these issues written by Byron Hurt.

The walls in Ms. Oh's classroom contained two posters with guidelines for the students' behavior. One was entitled "How to be a good classmate" and included the rules: treat others with respect, be flexible, look out for and help others, stay focused and help others stay focused in class, and take responsibility. The other poster was called, "Small School B Values and Principles" and was discussed in detail at the beginning of the fall semester. The values and principles established here were: be on time and stay till the end of class, no electronics, agree to disagree, don't offend or put others down, discuss intelligently and intellectually, dialogue not debate, actively listen, value different perspectives, speak for yourself and let others speak for themselves, no 'they' or 'those people' assumptions, be willing to unlearn things, challenge yourself and reevaluate your thinking all the time, be open-minded, take risks, make mistakes, apologize and forgive if you offend or are offended, ask questions, and maintain confidentiality. The material on the wall at the back of the classroom rotated and frequently displayed students' poetry, creative writing, and posters made for class assignments. At the front of Ms. Oh's classroom and in the class window was a pink ally safe space poster distributed by the GSA.

Freshman Social Studies and Humanities Class in Small School C

The Freshman Social Studies and Humanities class was a required core course in small school C at MacArthur High. The course combined two disciplines: the literary and the sociological study of race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality. Ms. Green's Freshman Social Studies and Humanities class was two semesters long. The fall semester's curriculum covered culture, ethnicity, and race, while the spring semester consisted of the twelve-week gender, sex, and sexuality unit and the six-week food justice unit. The class focused on understanding the social and historical factors that have constructed and wielded race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality as forms of differentiation and systems of oppression. The fundamental question this class asked was, "Who am I and how do I fit into this complex society?" The second question was, "How are culture, race, and gender socially constructed?" followed by, "How do we gain a deep understanding across our different points of view and experiences in order to create allies for social justice?" Although Ms. Green's Freshman Social Studies and Humanities class built the foundation for the students' examination of social privilege and oppression, changing the students' ideologies was not a central goal nor realistically attainable over the twelve-week gender, sex, and sexuality unit or the semester-long culture, ethnicity, and race unit.

The sixty freshmen students in small school C were divided into two cohorts of thirty, each of which met for two class periods in Ms. Green's class. This meant that the total daily class time the students spent in Ms. Green's class was two hours Tuesday through Friday, and one and a half hours on Mondays. While cohort A met early in the morning for first and second periods back-to-back, cohort B had their class time broken up by the lunch period. Cohort B met third period before lunch and then fourth period after lunch, in the middle of the day. This meant that they really only had two fifty-eight minute class periods together, rather than the long two hour stretch of class that the early morning cohort experienced. For cohort A, the two hours of class

time proved to be a long sustained stretch of time for working through various class activities, shaping learning trajectories that moved at their own natural pace and allowing space for tangential stories or fielding students' questions. For cohort B, however, their class time always felt hurried, in the typical way that a fifty-eight minute high school class period feels rushed as teachers scramble to take attendance, give directions, lead an activity or two, facilitate discussion or reflection, and scaffold student learning for the upcoming activity or homework assignment. The rupture in cohort B's class time, with lunch scheduled in between their third and fourth period classes, usually jarred the flow of their class as they had to adjust to stopping and starting again after their break.

The two cohorts differed in some important ways. Cohort A, which met first and second periods, tended to have higher rates of absenteeism and tardiness. The number of students present in the early morning cohort was usually between twelve and twenty-two. Because they met first thing in the morning, students often looked drowsy and were considerably more quiet than the cohort that met in the middle of the day. Many of the students in cohort A tended to follow the teacher's directions, cooperate with her requests, and participate in the lesson at hand, for the most part. Indeed, many of Ms. Green's students appeared to have a close rapport that frequently involved joking and playing as well as confiding and sharing personal, sometimes sensitive, information with her. This is not to say that in neither class there were never bored looks, side conversations, or distractions from the task at hand. Cohort B, which met third and fourth periods, typically had more students present, except there were a handful of students—about six to eight—who were frequently waved out¹¹ and sent to the behavioral corrections office. In general, there were many students in cohort B who listened to and respected their teacher and actively participated in discussions. There were also, however, a handful of students who often were disruptive to the teacher's maintenance of classroom order in ways like yelling, running in and out of the room, interrupting or making faces while someone else was speaking, or fighting or playing with their classmates during class time. Other teachers in small school C corroborated they had similar experiences with these two cohorts. Because of these differences, the same lesson sometimes appeared and was carried out very differently across the two cohorts' classes.

The Freshman Social Studies and Humanities course included guest speakers, such as a community educator from a local organization aimed at raising awareness about and stopping rape, and a leader in the local youth spoken word scene who led a workshop on poetry and spoken word. The course also included various peer education components, in which MacArthur High students served on panels in classes throughout the school. Students from the health

¹¹ The process of waving students out for disciplinary matters included three incremental stages. When students were not paying attention to the class activity or instruction because they were talking with others, so much so as to be disruptive to their fellow classmates, Ms. Green would wave them out. A student's first few wave outs and the wave outs for small infractions would involve the student getting up from their desk, walking over to the foyer, taking a "time-out" by sitting in one of the desks near the door, before quietly returning to the class activity. The wave out process would reach the second stage after a student was repeatedly waved out to the immediate space of the foyer for more than a few "time-outs." At the second stage, Ms. Green waved students out to other teachers' classrooms within small school C. This was a practice shared by the teachers within this community, as occasionally a small school C senior or junior would be waved out to join Ms. Green's freshman class. The third and most serious stage of the wave out process was reserved for serious infractions, like physically fighting or threatening another student. At this stage, students were waved out and sent to the behavioral corrections office where their parents or guardians would be contacted and punishments would be meted out.

center's peer-led sex education program spoke on topics like reproductive anatomy, heterosexual sexual intercourse and reproduction, sexually transmitted infections, abstinence, and contraception. Students from the gay-straight alliance spoke about LGBTQ issues and their experiences as LGBTQ youth. The students from the health center led a workshop for two class periods over two days and students from the GSA came to speak for one class period with each of the cohorts in Ms. Green's class.

Ms. Green planned activities that targeted multiple modalities for learning. Activities included having the students listen to music related to the time period or topic of discussion, share their creative writing individually in front of the group, role-play and interact as characters from *The Color Purple*, and discuss their interpretations and perspectives with a partner of their choosing. Some activities involved students moving through the classroom, engaging with and writing positive feedback on other students' posters, or writing their reactions to an article about domestic violence and rape on a twenty foot long piece of butcher paper. Classroom modes included lectures by Ms. Green, whole group discussions, smaller group work, and individual assignments. Most classes incorporated some kind of reflection activity like quiet self-reflection time for students to write about their strongest reactions and questions to a text or reflection circles in which the students and teacher threw around an inflatable globe as they took turns sharing their most pressing reactions and questions. The pedagogical model Ms. Green worked with addressed a wide range of learning styles, included a diversity of activities, and incorporated various modes for engaging the shape and structure of participation in her classroom.

In this class, the students read literary works such as *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, *A Step from Heaven* by An Na, *Always Running* by Luis Rodriguez, and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie. The students also read other books they were able to choose from a selected reading list compiled by the teacher. For the gender, sex, and sexuality unit, these books included *Push* by Sapphire, *Ladies First* by Queen Latifah, and *Boy Meets Boy* by David Levithan. Additionally, they read current events related to the class topics and discussed them in Socratic seminars weekly. Ms. Green incorporated videos into her curriculum, including *Race: The Power of an Illusion*, *Rabbit Proof Fence*, *Roots*, and *Crash* during the culture, race, and ethnicity unit in the fall, and *Straightlaced: How Gender's Got us all Tied Up*—a documentary that looks at the ways homophobia and gender role expectations shape American teenagers' lives released in 2009 by the California-based non-profit GroundSpark, *Hip Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes*, *My Life in Pink*, and *But I'm a Cheerleader* during the gender, sex, and sexuality unit in the spring.

Ms. Green's spacious and bright classroom had white painted drywall walls with signs, posters, and two world maps. The posters on the walls included images and quotations from Nelson Mandela, Audre Lorde, Emma Goldman, Albert Einstein, Ché Guevara, Frederick Douglass, Malcolm X, and President Barack Obama. The signs consisted of poster board with hand-written information regarding the small school C community agreements and their classroom modes or modalities for working (e.g., individual work, small group work, whole class discussion, whole class lecture, and activities). Behind Ms. Green's desk was a bulletin board on which various pictures, visibility fliers, and signs were posted, found below in Figures 3 and 4. Much of the material on Ms. Green's bulletin board focused on gender and LGBTQ issues, social justice and

social change, and guidelines for maintaining a safe space for difference in the classroom and school.

Figure 3. Photograph of Ms. Green's Bulletin Board



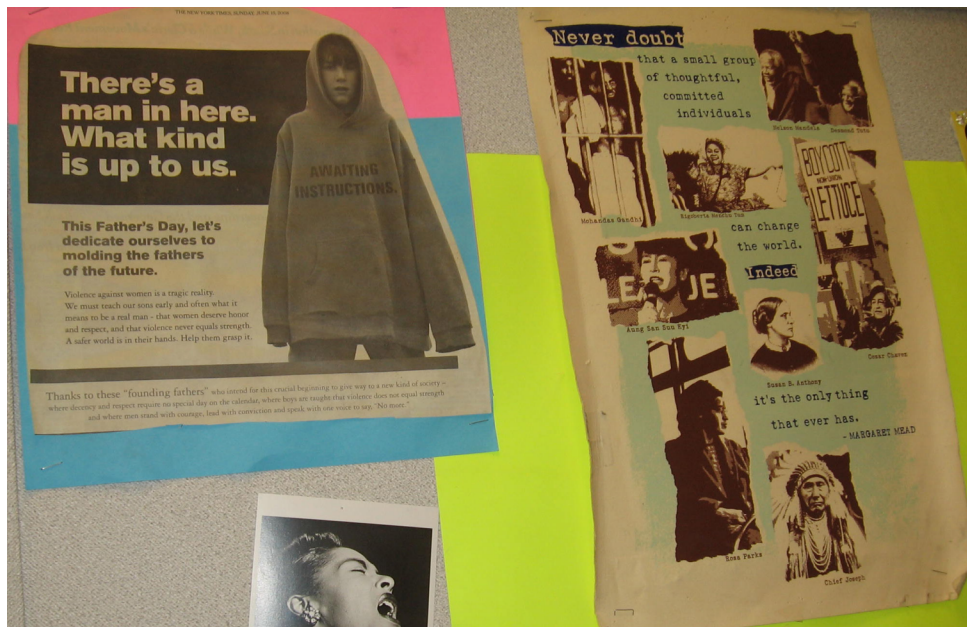
On Ms. Green's bulletin board were notices about office hours and class schedules, photographs of students and teachers in small school C, a movie poster for *Milk* starring Sean Penn, a sticker produced by the Human Rights Campaign with a yellow equal sign to symbolize marriage equality, and various visibility posters. The visibility posters included one produced by the Safe Schools Coalition of a rainbow image with a lesbian couple and a child in silhouette above the text, "All Families Welcome." Another visibility poster was produced by the organization COLAGE (Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere) and asks, "Can you tell whose parents are gay? Why does it matter?" and encourages students to "Do your part to end the hate. Don't use slurs, challenge homophobia, and respect all families." A poster with symbols like the Star of David and pink triangles meant to symbolize Judaism or Jewish people and LGBTQ people respectively contained the following text attributed to Pastor Martin Niemoller:

In Germany they first came for the Communists and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me—and by that time no one was left to speak up.

In the upper left corner of the bulletin board was a visibility poster with the Margaret Mead quotation, "Never doubt that a small group of meaningful, committed individuals can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has" and images of Mohandas Gandhi, Rigoberta

Manchu, Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, Aung San Suu Eyi, Susan B. Anthony, Cesar Chavez, Rosa Parks, and Chief Joseph. Also in this space was an advertisement ripped out of the local newspaper with the text, “There’s a man in here. What kind is up to us. This Father’s Day, let’s dedicate ourselves to molding the fathers of the future” next to an image of a boy in a sweatshirt with the words, “Awaiting Instructions.” The upper left corner of the bulletin board is reproduced in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4. Photograph of the Upper Left Corner of Ms. Green’s Bulletin Board



At the beginning of the gender, sex, and sexuality unit, the students in Ms. Green’s Freshman Social Studies and Humanities class were introduced to key vocabulary such as *sex* (as a verb and noun), *gender*, *sexual orientation*, *LGBTQQ*, *homophobia/transphobia*, *transgender* and *transsexual*, *sexual harassment*, *rape*, *incest*, *sexual abuse/assault*, *feminism*, *male ally*, *male privilege*, *straight privilege*, and *sexism*. During one lesson Ms. Green and the students went through each vocabulary word and discussed ways they thought each term could be defined and used. After they finished discussing the gender, sex, and sexuality vocabulary, Ms. Green created a sign with the words on butcher paper that remained hanging on the pillar in the classroom for the duration of the twelve weeks dedicated to the gender, sex, and sexuality unit. Working definitions for these terms discussed in Ms. Green’s class can be found in Appendix H.

CHAPTER FOUR – TEASING, JOKES, AND POWER: EXAMINATION AND GENDER REGULATION

The present chapter will look closely at critical moments in the language socialization of classroom participants—teachers and students—to norms with regards to gender and sexuality. These norms include conceptions of binary sex and gender categories, gender expectations and stereotypes, ways of reading and claiming identity, and ways of marking difference through teasing and jokes. I examine how students and teachers negotiate understandings about the ways boys and girls are expected to be as normatively gendered (hetero)sexual young people. In this chapter, I illustrate a sample lesson from the Social Studies and Humanities Course in small school C, focusing on gender stereotypes and expectations. I analyze the ways in which the teacher and students construct possibilities, highlight boundaries, index difference, and mark transgressions around gender and sexuality norms in classroom interactions. I discuss how participants wield power by joking and teasing about gender transgression, by claiming another's identity for them, and by positioning people as “other” or “spoiled identities” (Goffman, 1963). I show how such maneuvering can position people differently in the space of the classroom—allowing some people to move through the space freely while others become the site for examination and regulation of binary gender.

The everyday mundane ways in which binary gender and sex are constructed and reproduced in public schools largely shape gendered possibilities and boundaries for students. This chapter explores the complex and contradictory relationship between the disciplining forces of everyday practices and structures of schooling that position people as gendered on the one hand and the regulation of gender and sexuality done through joking and humor on the other hand. Structures like binary gender are so engrained in our society that when ambiguity enters, it presents itself as a moment of undoing and chaos. Here is where humor can enter and do something different. Humor has a range of functions including providing relief from discomfort, filling space in an interaction, expressing solidarity, and shifting power. Examining gender regulation through joking and teasing exposes paradoxes around humor.

This chapter demonstrates how joking illuminates the ambiguity of gender and sexuality and gets past a deeply engrained knowledge regime—that of the ideology of binary gender, held together by the linchpin of heteronormativity. Notions of truthfulness, authenticity, and honesty frame trans identities, and transgressions of gender boundaries are marked in identifying difference. Through classroom exercises like the ones discussed in this chapter, trans identities became exceptional identities in a spatial, symbolic, and socio-cultural sense. The structure of language, ideology, and schooling can close down and open up options in terms of gender and sexual identity and expression for participants. For a straight White boy ambiguity opened up creative possibilities for his expression and identification, whereas for a gender non-conforming Black girl ambiguity constructed her body and identity as sites for the examination and regulation of binary gender norms. As demonstrated in the discussion throughout this chapter, the ideology of binary gender was deeply engrained in both the students' and the teacher's practices, shaping possibilities for students' identification and representation as well as how participants' bodies occupied and moved through the classroom space.

A Day in the Social Studies and Humanities Class in Small School C

It was a sunny and warm Monday morning in February 2010. The rain had recently subsided, so the bees were buzzing about, pollinating the blooming cherry blossoms. Due to staff meetings, Mondays at MacArthur High always started an hour and a half later than the regularly scheduled time, which meant that class periods were shortened from fifty-eight minutes to forty-three minutes. This particular Monday marked the beginning of the third week of Ms. Green's twelve-week gender, sex, and sexuality unit in her Freshman Social Studies and Humanities class.

I got to MacArthur High School early and found Ms. Green in her classroom talking on the phone with a parent. She was an athletic and energetic woman in her forties who did martial arts and carried herself with strength. She often wore sneakers, t-shirts, hooded sweatshirts, and jeans or cargo pants. Indeed, her casual dress style was more similar to that of the youth she taught than that of some of her colleagues who wore ties, button-down shirts, and long skirts. Nevertheless, her style was not unusual for teachers at MacArthur High, many of whom dressed casually and comfortably.

Ms. Green self-identified as a White Jewish woman from New York City and a lesbian with a wife and children. She saw her gender expression as boy-girl, gender bending, and a combination of masculine and feminine qualities. As a writing example, she shared with her students a poem she wrote about her gender, sexuality, and personal experience of homophobia. In the poem she wrote, "I love the yin/yang complexity of femininity/masculinity that flows through my veins." Ms. Green's did not shy away from conversations with her students about her gender and sexuality, she conveyed a sense of pride and comfort in who she was, and she did not push students to change their opinions or beliefs but to examine their assumptions about gender, sexuality, race, and privilege.

A Lesson on Gender Stereotypes and Expectations

On this particular Monday in February, the students had homework due that entailed keeping a gender stereotypes log and recording the date, time, and source when students heard or saw things about girls, boys, women, and men. Sources they were encouraged to draw from included other people like their peers, family, teachers, and strangers; religious communities like their church, mosque, or synagogue; and media such as television, movies, advertisements, news, books, video games, music lyrics, and music videos. Ms. Green started off the lesson by asking the students to share observations they had made regarding gender stereotypes and expectations. Some things they shared involved clothing, such as associations of genders to clothing styles and differences in choices and expectations. They discussed how difficult it is to find clothing for boys with bright colors and how the spatial isolation of boys' and girls' clothing in department stores highlights social expectations that boys and girls dress differently. Students connected this to a current popular trope, "Real Men Wear Pink," used in advertising, breast cancer awareness campaigns, and popular culture as a counter-message that pink can be an appropriate color for boys and men. On television, one student saw a boy shopping, trying on a shirt with a flower on it, and being told to put it back because he was not gay. From this, he interpreted the message to be that boys who wear flowers are gay. Indeed, on television students found all kinds of messages about gender, including commentary from Olympics broadcasters about the differences

in women's and men's athletic ability, a commercial of a man choosing a beer over a girl, and a sitcom character whose unmarried status at the age of thirty-nine signified to her co-workers that she must be a lesbian. Reflecting on the messages they received from society and media, the students identified and deconstructed common gender stereotypes and expectations.

After the students shared what they observed in doing the gender stereotypes homework and reflected on the messages about gender they hear in their everyday lives, Ms. Green introduced the main activity for the day. The lesson this day was a group exercise in which the boys and the girls were to divide by biological sex. Like other institutional practices in schooling that mark and divide students as boys and girls, this practice reinforced the idea of binary gender as natural and stable. Asking students to separate themselves based on their biological sex reproduced the notion of male and female as discrete categories. The activity involved brainstorming messages they have heard with regards to how boys and girls are supposed to be as well as the social consequences one may suffer for not conforming to these expectations. The boys' group and the girls' group were given overhead transparencies on which to write these messages and consequences as well as their reactions to them. The groups had about thirty or forty minutes to complete these tasks, after which they then stood in front of the other group, projected their transparencies with the overhead projector, and shared what they had written and discussed as a group. Lastly, the entire class engaged in a reflection activity in which they threw around the inflatable globe and talked about their reactions and questions with regards to the activity and its content.

This case offers a glimpse into the daily life of the Freshman Social Studies and Humanities class in small school C at MacArthur High. I argue that mundane classroom tasks such as dividing students into groups based on their sex, outlining parameters for an activity, and continuing the line of discussion can construct certain possibilities for students while passing over another set of critical moments for learning—those in which students tease and joke, call each other denigrating names, and play with and vie for power. In the sections that follow, I examine how the teacher's and students' instructions and constructions of identities shape students' positionings and relations of power as well as co-construct contexts in which teasing and joking regulate gender and sexuality.

A Close Examination of Classroom Interaction

Giving Directions: Constructing Gendered Possibilities

At the beginning of the activity, Ms. Green gave instructions that delineated students by their biological sex, if not imposing one set of identities upon them, at least shaping possibilities for identification. In her directions, Ms. Green upheld the stability of biological categories of sex and marked those who deviate from this norm in their gender identification as different or other. While dividing the students into groups separated by biological sex or gender can afford possibilities for same-sex or same-gender specific conversations and learning, it also can highlight the reality that not everyone fits into neat, mutually exclusive, binary gender categories.

By looking closely at the ways gender identity, trans identities, and processes of identification were talked about and positioned in students' and teachers' language, one can see how power is

negotiated in classroom interactions. Here, gender identification was discussed as a process that involves honesty in traversing delicate boundaries and a unique set of questions and considerations. In student and teacher jokes, however, trans identities were both marked as exceptionalized and positioned as spoiled identities (Goffman, 1963). According to Erving Goffman, spoiled identities include stigmatized individuals as well as those who deviate from societal norms. In this case, students who did not fit into seemingly stable binary gender categories or who transgressed boundaries around heterosexual binary gender norms risked being positioned as spoiled identities or stigmatized others. One student calling another student “trans” carried various meanings, including teasing another for their gender transgression, linguistically and interactionally marking another as different or other in some way, and maintaining boundaries around White heteronormative binary gender norms.

Even teachers like Ms. Green who made conscious efforts to intervene and educate their students about forms of bias inadvertently missed occurrences of students’ name-calling and teasing. Indeed, Ms. Green frequently intervened when she heard students call each other, “bitch,” “fag,” “gay,” or other slurs. Her method of intervention included using humor to invert the word’s meaning, giving it a positive connotation, playfully highlighting the student’s use of a word she found offensive and hurtful. She explained to me, “I think that turning it around has actually had the biggest impact. I turn it around because I honestly think that has more power than lecturing them.” When Ms. Green heard her students call each other names, she usually stopped class and said something like, “Okay. This is interesting what just happened here. Why did he say that to him? How do you feel about that?” pushing her students to process what had just happened. During class time, however, a handful of side conversations were usually going on in addition to the main line of the teacher’s instructions or the class discussion. It was not possible for Ms. Green to hear every single slur or witness every speech act used to denigrate another person.

Despite Ms. Green’s many moments of intervention addressing students’ name-calling, many occurrences passed by without notice. Implicit permission was granted for students to name people as “trans” for purposes of garnering a laugh or putting another down, reinforced by participants’ laughter and silence. Because moments in which students called each other denigrating names and teased each other for transgressing gender and sexuality norms were often not heard by the teacher, their impact in shaping contexts for learning was largely overlooked. Indeed, instances of ridicule became so normalized that they blended into the everyday language that comprised classroom conversations. The iterative practices of teasing and name-calling shaped certain possibilities for students’ identification and representation within the context of this high school class.

Ms. Green directed the students to begin an activity in which they were to reflect on their gendered presentations and behaviors, the messages they receive about how they *should* express their genders, and the consequences they face when they step outside of normative boundaries and transgress gendered expectations and stereotypes. In these series of instructions, Ms. Green directed the students to divide by biological sex, inadvertently highlighting individuals’ transgressions of binary gender norms and marking trans identities as “other.” Moreover, the teacher positioned identifying as trans as an exceptionalized path wrought with problems and challenges, characterized by stigma, and permitted to be wielded as the punch line to jokes. Thus, joking and teasing helped construct trans identities as spoiled identities subject to ridicule

(Goffman, 1963). Participants' jokes that made fun of their classmates' gender transgressions in addition to the teacher's passing over of name-calling—that which fell out of her earshot—co-constructed a classroom environment in which the regulation of gender norms occurred through teasing and humor.

Dividing students by sex: gender identification as definition of self.

The practice of dividing students by biological sex and gender has long been deeply ingrained in the institution of schooling (Connell, 1996; Ferguson, 2001; Goodwin, 2006; Martin, 1998; Thorne, 1993). For example, socializing young children to line up as boys and girls in separate lines begins as early as preschool and kindergarten. Boys and girls routinely queue up in two parallel lines, mirrored binary structures, marching down the hallway to use the sex-segregated bathrooms in early elementary school. Physical education classes typically divide tasks, criteria, and teams by biological sex. Organizing students into discrete groups divided by sex begins during primary school and continues through their schooling.

Dividing students by sex into working groups in school classrooms also serves to reproduce rigid gender binaries. Schooling is an important site for learning the possibilities and limitations of sex and gender. Common practices in education shape the way teachers and administrators think of students as falling neatly into gendered categories of girls and boys, which they expect will match onto the students' assigned biological sexes of females and males. Outside of this imaginary but very real in their existence in U.S. public school systems are students who identify as transgender, intersex, or gender non-conforming, or whose gender presentation and identification may not match onto societal expectations regarding binary gender norms.

Indeed, the structure of the built environment of MacArthur High, which has traditionally had sex-segregated locker rooms and bathrooms, but no gender-neutral bathrooms, reinforced participants' expectations and conceptions of binary gender. Transgender and gender non-conforming students at MacArthur High reported being subject to the scrutiny of others when they entered bathrooms at their school—scrutiny which manifested as searching glances up and down their bodies and as declarations of “this is the *girls'* bathroom,” implying they must have entered the physical space not designated for their gender. Such scrutiny regulated which individuals, what kinds of bodies, and which forms of gendered expression and presentation are permitted to occupy and use gendered bathroom spaces. As one student who identified herself as genderqueer said, “You are forced to choose a gender when you go to use a bathroom.” Other transgender and gender non-conforming students often left campus to go to the local YMCA to use their gender-neutral bathrooms.

Students' occupations of school spaces like gendered bathrooms and locker rooms and their positions in same-sex working groups reinforced the concept of stable binary gender categories. The everyday mundane ways in which binary gender and sex are constructed and reproduced in public schools largely shape gendered possibilities and boundaries for students. One site for examining how this process occurred was teacher instructions. Inserted below, Excerpt 1 represents a moment of transition in which the teacher, Ms. Green, gave directions for the activity the students were about to do. Here, the teacher directed the students to divide by their assigned biological sex. The teacher framed biological sex (categories of male/female) as the

delimiting factor for grouping the students, but allowed for the possibilities of students identifying their gender (categories of boy/girl) in ways that may not match onto their biological sex. The teacher also described the process of gender identification as being about your definition of self, characterized by truthfulness and honesty.

Excerpt 1. Directions to divide into sex (male/female) groups (Cohort A)

- 01 Ms. G.: So, I'm going to put you into – separate you into different sex. groups.
02 And again, if you, I'm not going to –
03 if you identify with (.) one sex or another,
04 >honestly really identify with< a sex that is different from your (.) actual sex,
05 then I'm not going to ge- stand in the way of that?
06 that's really your (.) definition of self,
07 um but >other than that< we're going to divide along sex male female lines. Okay?
08 Kalil:

{	Males.
	=So, let me

 tell you what we're going to do. Um, each group (.)
09 Ms. G.:
10 Ryan: Female/s/ ((in a falsetto voice))
11 Ms. G.: And Susan is going to help with this too. Each group (.)

Ms. Green's use of the conditional "if... then" (lines 02, 03, and 05) pointed to one kind of epistemic stance,¹² but the teacher also asserted her authority by declaring that they were going to divide along sex male/female lines anyway. Because the teacher announced she was not going to stand in the way of students identifying their gender as different from their actual sex, this cued a social stance that gender and sex divide along binary lines and a stigma attached with subverting this. By saying she would not stand in their way of identifying with a sex that is different from their actual sex, Ms. Green allowed some room for student choice, but only if one genuinely identifies this way. With her quick "other than that," the teacher rushed in order to keep her turn and avoid interruption, closed off the discussion, and marked those who do really identify as the opposite sex as a unique, small group that can step outside the boundaries, but only if being truthful and honest about their transgression.

In Ms. Green's presentation of trans identities, there was tension and contradiction. She both privileged choice while trying to disentangle choice, and reinforced stable categories of binary gender while trying to disrupt binary gender. Being trans was marked as an option or a choice, which exceptionalized it, and such marking of trans identities was done through the discourse of authenticity. Thus, Ms. Green's use of "<u>honestly really identify with" (line 04) to describe the process of identification in the frame of truthfulness further naturalized trans as an exceptionalized identity. Identity was constructed around binary assumptions of truth and what a true or honest identity might or might not be. Furthermore, a student's decision to "identify with

¹² According to Ochs (1996), "*epistemic stance* refers to knowledge or belief vis-à-vis some focus of concern, including degrees of certainty of knowledge, degrees of commitment to truth of propositions, and sources of knowledge, among other epistemic qualities (Chafe & Nichols, 1986)" (p. 410). In this case, Ms. Green's conditional "if... then" indexed her epistemic stance of not knowing how her students identify their sex and of not being interested in standing in their way of identifying with the opposite sex.

a sex that is different from [their] actual sex” (line 04) would have been a marked and highly visible choice in the classroom interaction.

Despite Ms. Green’s efforts to push her students to think against binary constructions of sex and gender, she lacked the scripts in her lexicon to express the range or continuum of ways people identify themselves beyond binaries. Sex categories of male and female reproduced the binary, and later trans identities were introduced as a third choice available through processes of gender identification, but third choices do not necessarily disrupt the stability of binary constructions of sex and gender. The conundrum Ms. Green faced was trying to push on binary categories of sex and gender, while simultaneously working within the limitations of deeply rooted binary frames for gender that structure the English language (e.g., subject pronouns ‘he’ and ‘she,’ object pronouns ‘him’ and ‘her,’ possessive pronouns ‘his’ and ‘her’), that shape schooling practices of dividing students into groups by systems of categorization (e.g., sex-segregated bathroom and locker room spaces, lining up boys and girls separately), and as illustrated in the sections to follow, that influence how students interact and move through classroom space.

The teacher’s indication that she would not stand in the students’ way pointed to notions of access and begged the question of who was able to claim certain identities. In this case, who can claim a transgender, genderqueer, or gender non-conforming identity? How does one frame the activity of identifying? As an instructor, Ms. Green could but was not going to stand in the way of students identifying one way or another, but she also was not going to scaffold it as an activity to be done, discussed, and processed at that moment. This served as a framing device for how to participate in the activity—seriously and genuinely. When the teacher asserted that she would not get in the way of the students self-identifying as a sex different from their actual sex, she indicated that she was not going to deny them that choice, but she also may not support it.

Here, Ms. Green’s directions were operating at two levels: the content of the class and the instructional level. At the instructional level, the message being communicated was a command to follow these directions so the class could proceed with the planned activity. The content, on the other hand, communicated that one can identify their gender in ways that do not match on social expectations regarding their biological sex, but this process is riddled with challenges and assessed along lines of honesty and genuineness. The teacher’s directions, however, also were operating at the level of what they were *not addressing*. By not challenging or responding to Ryan’s claim to a female identity, the teacher allowed this subject position to exist as a possibility for him. Instead, Ms. Green continued giving her directions, interpellating me, Susan (line 11), to help with the activity.

This was a moment in which the teacher asked the students to move their bodies in the space of the classroom based on who they are, how they identify themselves, and where they see themselves in terms of their gender and sex. In this, Ms. Green inadvertently and perhaps even against her own intentions reproduced notions of binary gender and socially constructed boundaries between boys and girls. Her emphasis indicated that sex and gender identification are really about one’s definition of self, which is true, but marked as special and worth mention. “Honestly” and “really” modify “identify” and acted as intensifiers and assessments. By using a second redundant modifier, “really,” the teacher marked that this transgression is a problematic or contentious way of identifying oneself that needs to be taken seriously. By emphasizing that

this is something one *honestly* really identifies with, Ms. Green indicated that there's some truthfulness and some falsehood, some room for interpretation. Here she marked trans identities and bodies as exceptionalized choices, naturalized through their authenticity.

Ms. Green may have framed the directions of dividing the students by sex in terms of authenticity in anticipation of the possibility that students may take it as a joke and facetiously claim they identify as the opposite sex. Interestingly, this was exactly what Ryan did in line 10 of Excerpt 1. By stylizing a falsetto and lisped "gay voice" and claiming a female biological sex, Ryan played with, called attention to, and made fun of his gender presentation and identity. Here, Ryan made a joke of the process of claiming a gender, claimed an identity as the opposite sex, and camped up his presentation by affecting a lisped falsetto voice that was stylized as effeminate and flamboyant. The students recognized this as a joke and laughed, as they usually did when Ryan affected his effeminate "gay voice," and the teacher continued with her line of directions. The laughter evoked by Ryan's statement, "Female/s/" in a falsetto voice with a lisped /s/ (line 10), made this performative felicitous as a joke (Austin, 1962/1975).

Ryan's stylistic use of falsetto phonation carried expressive connotations and worked to construct the persona of a flamboyant diva (Podesva, 2007). Affecting a lisp on the fricative /s/, despite no correlation between gay identity and lisping, performed a persona that aligns with societal stereotypes and perceptions of the "gay lisp" (Mack & Munson, 2008; Munson, 2010; Munson & Zimmerman, 2006). Sociolinguists have demonstrated that listeners perceive and construct notions of femininity, masculinity, and sexuality based on such phonetic features and voice quality variation (Gaudio, 1994; Munson, 2007; Munson, Jefferson, & McDonald, 2006; Munson, McDonald, Deboe, & White, 2006). While Ryan's use of falsetto and a lisp did not index his sexual identification as gay—indeed, it did the opposite—it performed a situationally grounded persona of a stereotypically gay and flamboyant diva (Eckert, 2002), which operated in this moment as a joke.

Ryan's joke of playing with ambiguity around his gender and sexuality was a performance in which he would occasionally engage his classmates, usually for the purposes of humor. Ryan's flamboyant diva persona spoke with a lisp, had a limp wrist, sashayed, and flicked his long red hair. Ryan would affect the diva persona when he was jokingly outraged or enflamed, when he playfully chatted with his girlfriends, and when he brokered power through laughter. By mapping his gendered performance of hyper-femininity onto conceptions of sexuality through his persona of a flamboyant gay male, Ryan's performance conflated gender and sexuality.

Ryan, perceived by his classmates and teacher as a White, straight, able-bodied, young man was granted permission to transgress gender boundaries by occasionally dressing in women's clothing, wearing make-up, and sometimes claiming a female identity for the sake of humor. Ryan's style of dress was the current hipster style, which included tight pants, bright colors, and accessories that were throwbacks to fashion trends of the 1980s. On this particular day he was wearing purple pants with I ♥ NY all over, purple Vans sneakers with yellow laces, a yellow hat, and a sweatshirt with the New York City Metropolitan Transportation Authority subway map all over it.

In his writing Ryan identified himself as Irish, Scottish, French, and Native American from the Nez Perce tribe. Although, he did not identify himself as “White,” Ryan acknowledged that this was how most people perceived him. He also identified himself as a straight male-bodied boy who happened to straighten his hair and express his emotions by frequently crying. Although Ryan was in a long-term relationship with his girlfriend, his perception of his sexual identity was fluid and open to change. He held the belief that “gender is something that society places on us,” and he played with his gender presentation and expression through his clothing, ways of speaking, and stylized performances of gender and sexual identity.

Ryan occupied privileged social positions in terms of being able to play with his gender expression through make-up and clothing, affecting a flamboyant persona and claiming a female identity for the sake of humor, and moving through and shaping the space of the classroom in particular ways. His routine use of a stylized “gay voice” helped construct a playful, flamboyant persona that commonly evoked laughter from his colleagues. Ryan explored the boundaries between binary gender categories and defied stereotypes with regards to his gender presentation and sexuality. His gender transgression was embraced by both the teacher and students who laughed at his stylized effeminate gender performance.

Gendered possibilities: marking boundaries.

In outlining the parameters of the activity, Ms. Green constructed possibilities for gendered identification. In Excerpt 2, Ms. Green continued giving the students directions before they began the class activity in groups divided by sex. Here, she prompted the students to think about and represent the ways in which they were constrained by gendered stereotypes and the consequences they experienced when they transgressed or violated societal expectations with regards to their gender expression or presentation. Ms. Green left few possibilities open for the girls’ representations, having previously drawn the flower on their transparency before giving it to them. In discussion, she denied the girls’ requests to explore other options for their symbol, rendering those or any other choices of representation unavailable to the girls. When the girls challenged Ms. Green’s parameters by requesting permission to draw a more stereotypically masculine object such as a motorcycle or a truck, the teacher shut down the girls’ attempts to push and challenge boundaries around gendered associations. In the same brush stroke, Ms. Green granted the boys permission to change their objects to a beer bottle or even something girly, effectively telling the students that the boys’ gender transgressions were valued and sanctioned while the girls’ were not.

Excerpt 2. Inside the flower, outside of the box (Cohort A)

01 Ms. G.:okay, so, what happens if you step out of the box?
 02 (take these girls like) this stereotypical flower ((holding up a transparency))
 03 because we’re so sweet and ((singsong voice))
 04 you know, like flowers, supposedly,
 05 um, how women and girls are supposed to be,
 06 the messages that we get,
 07 so like, maybe you know, swe:et, and (not too aggre:ssive)=
 08 Ryan: Girls are supposed to be more organized

09 Ms. G.: =hang on.=
 10 Bianca: [There are a lot of girls who aren't organized.
 11 Ms. G.: [and then we're going to step out of-
 12 >and we could've done like< a skirt or a truck-
 13 >there's a million things we could've done<
 14 Helen: °a skirt or a truck° ((to G, with a little laugh))
 15 Ms. G.: um, so, what happens if we step out of the flower?
 16 Ryan: Wait! Can we do a truck?
 17 Ms. G.: >okay, if you want to do- I can't- I don't know that I can draw a truck<
 18 Bianca: I can draw a truck ((loud sing song voice, flat monotone))
 19 Kalil: two wheels on the bottom
 20 Gerard: A beer bottle
 21 Ms. G.: If you want to do a truck or a beer bottle, go right ahead.
 22 Ryan: oh, beer bottle!
 23 Ms. G.: and if you guys want to change the symbol beer to something else (.) gir:ly?!
 24 go right ahead, [okay, (.) So,
 25 Lanette: [Can we draw a motorcycle?
 26 Ms. G.: So I want you guys to brainstorm
 27 No, girls- the girls can't draw a motorcycle. Sorry. (.)
 28 [that's not the stereotype.
 29 Bianca: [That's not fair.
 30 Lanette: That's sad.
 31 Bianca: That's not fair.
 32 Ryan: Can we draw a butterfly?
 33 ((lots of overlapping talk))
 34 Ms. G.: Yep, girls can draw a butterfly.
 35 Okay, separate. You guys have fifteen minutes, go, separate.

As the teacher neared the end of her directions for this activity, the students tried to negotiate what objects they may or may not draw. Using the verb form “can,” the students asked for permission to draw certain objects of their choice (lines 16, 25, and 32). Ryan asked, “Can we do a truck?” (line 16), Lanette asked, “Can we draw a motorcycle?” (line 25), and Ryan asked, “Can we draw a butterfly?” In asking for permission to represent their genders with objects such as a truck, motorcycle, or butterfly, the students tried to negotiate the semiotics of representation of their genders as boys or girls. They chose objects that carry heavily gendered social stereotypes and associations: trucks: boys; motorcycles: boys; butterflies: girls. The girls asked for permission to use a truck to represent their gendered expression; the boys asked for permission to use a butterfly to represent theirs. Here, the students negotiated with their teacher the boundaries of their gendered representations within the confines of this classroom activity.

Ms. Green gave the girls a transparency with a flower already drawn on it, but told them, “there’s a million things we could’ve done” (line 13) like a skirt or a truck (line 12) even though she had already imposed her decision of the flower for the girls. In these directions, the teacher granted the boys the freedom to draw any object of their choice, including those that were stereotypically feminine. For the boys, the canvas was up for grabs. The girls, however, were already boxed in. They were given the shape of the flower and explicitly denied permission to draw objects that

were stereotypically masculine. These canvases, as represented in the transparencies given to the students, acted as metaphors for the students' bodies and selves—who and how they were supposed to be physically, emotionally, and socially. Despite Ms. Green's intentions to undo and challenge gender norms, her choices and actions were shaped by the larger structure and ideology of binary gender. While her interests included empowering her female students to be strong women who could recognize gender stereotypes and their regulating force, Ms. Green constrained the girls by imposing frames of femininity onto them.

For the girls, other options besides the flower were not available. The girls' requests to choose objects like a truck or a motorcycle that countered and resisted feminine gendered stereotypes were met by their teacher's objections. Ms. Green, however, embraced the boys' transgressions of masculine gendered stereotypes, as well as their choice of using a beer bottle to symbolize the gendered stereotype that boxed them in, or restricted their gendered expression and presentation. The boys' choice of a beer bottle passed rather casually in this moment, with neither the teacher nor the students questioning its appropriateness for class, its associations with alcohol consumption, or the fact that the students were all well under the legal age for drinking alcohol in the U.S. The choice of a beer bottle as the symbol to represent manhood was connected to the assumed landscape of masculinity, race, and class in urban neighborhoods—including its public schools. Moreover, the beer bottle represented a phallic symbol and equated boys to men. Further extending the gap between the two sexes, Ms. Green infantilized the girls by linking them to flowers—symbols that represented delicateness, maidenhood, and virginity.

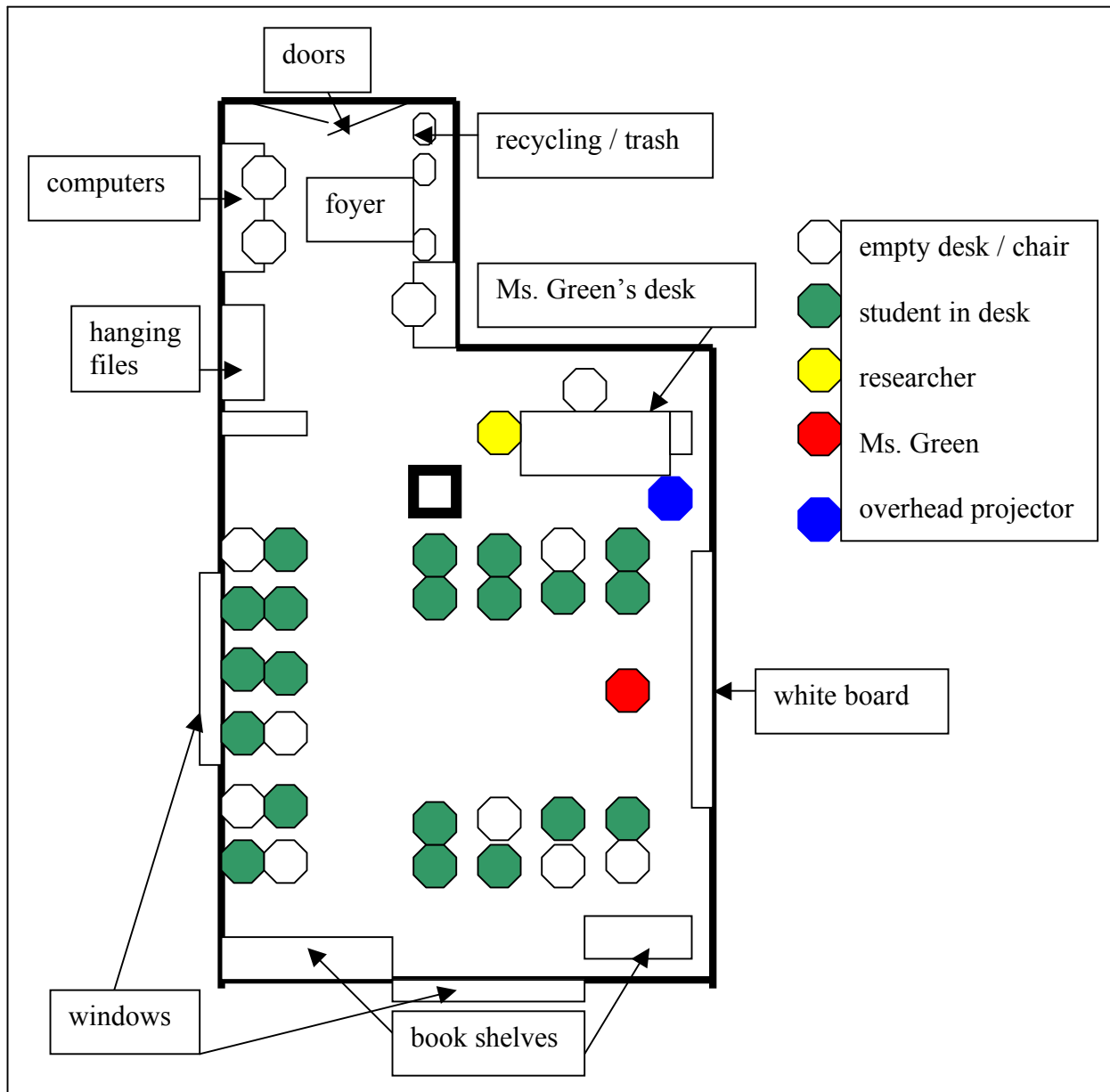
In such representations of gender, Ms. Green created openness through metaphoric side doors—by granting the boys permission to choose a beer bottle and by telling the girls they could have chosen a million things. The teacher embraced Ryan's liminal position of claiming a female identity for the purposes of getting a laugh, and she granted his request to draw a butterfly, enfolding him into the group of girls. Nevertheless, she shut down the girls' options by choosing for them a flower as their object despite their explicit requests to consider other symbols. The purpose of the exercise was to expose and reflect on social stereotypes, yet the way Ms. Green structured the activity reinforced the limitations that gender stereotypes and gender regulation impose. Here, the teacher was facilitating gender regulation through everyday practices and language, while also through structural means as the representative of the institution of the school. At the same time she tried to raise awareness of sex and gender, she fell into the constraints and structuring forces of the ideology of binary gender. She was working within the institutional boundaries of the school and trying to expose and disrupt binaries, but she was simultaneously buying into ideologies that worked against her agenda.

Dividing the Space of the Classroom by Sex

Walking into Ms. Green's spacious and bright classroom, I was always struck by its exceptionally large size and its reflection of the outside temperature and weather. On sunny days the room was warm and sometimes stuffy, whereas on rainy days it was cold as body heat escaped to the upper corners of the room. The high ceilings and the big windows on the south and east facing walls gave Ms. Green's classroom an open and airy feeling.

Near Ms. Green's desk was a large pillar that effectively created a sort of barrier between the foyer where one entered the room and the classroom space where the students and teacher interacted. On this pillar hung the butcher paper with the key vocabulary for the present unit (see Appendix H), which was switched out every time a unit ended and a new one began. The foyer was lined with three desks with chairs and computers, where the students could take a "time-out," or a moment to get away from the class, or just sit and work quietly away from the distractions of their classmates. Because the foyer also served as a passage-way, linking the doors which opened into the outside hallway to the open space of the classroom, the traffic of students coming and going to class frequently moved through the space. The foyer could be a quiet place to work alone on class assignments or exams during times when students were not coming and going. More often than not, however, students showed up late, left class at whim, meandered in the liminal space of the foyer chatting with other students, and used the space to surreptitiously hang out, gossip, text message their friends, and play with each other. A representation of the foyer and the rest of the classroom space can be found below in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Floor diagram of Ms. Green's class before the students divided by sex (Cohort A)



As approximately twenty students from cohort A arrived and entered Ms. Green's classroom, they wandered in saying hello to their friends on their way to sitting in their regularly assigned seats and desks. As usual, the desks were arranged so that two groups faced each other from across the room while a third group connected these two groups and faced the white board at the front of the room. This shape resembled a horseshoe without curves but with straight edges, and with a gap on each side. The shape served to orient the students' bodies toward the front of the room, the white board with daily and weekly announcements, and their teacher who was positioned at the opening or mouth of the horseshoe shape.

The arrangement of the students' desks shaped and enforced the classroom space as a panopticon. Drawing on Jeremy Bentham's 1791 panopticon model of the prison, Michel Foucault (1977/1995) argued that the panopticon offered a disciplinary mechanism through the conscious and permanent visibility of people. The panopticon both acts as an architectural structure, as in the case of Bentham's prison model, and as an unverifiable yet omni-present means of surveillance, as in Foucault's analysis of discipline. Foucault demonstrated that being visible and potentially supervised can prompt people to self-regulate their own behavior, internalizing forms of discipline and surveillance even more effective than punishment. In this way, the panopticon serves as an apparatus of power that works on representations and on people's minds, instilling a fear of being watched and a responsibility to monitor one's own behavior. Mapped onto this spatial metaphor of the panopticon is the discourse system of self-regulation, operating on the students and teacher while interacting in the classroom.

Positioned as their teacher with the authority and responsibility to lead the class, Ms. Green could stand at the opening of the horseshoe, and from this vantage point she was able to visually monitor most students in the room. The pillar near Ms. Green's desk obstructed some vision of the room and the foyer no matter where in the classroom one were to position their body. Alternately, while arranged in the horseshoe shape, the students could not see every other student in the room without turning their bodies or their heads to reorient their vision. That is, there was always somebody outside of their peripheral vision no matter which way the students faced. During the whole class lecture or discussion mode, the teacher could easily see her students from her position at the front of the room. In classroom arrangements like lectures, the hierarchy is apparent, with the teacher conveying the institutional authority to stand in a central position at the front of the room and to lecture to her students (Scollon & Scollon, 2001).

Although Ms. Green held a position of status as an adult and the teacher, she often shared her leadership position by trying to empower her students to lead discussions and by giving students space in their group reflections and discussions to work through their thoughts at times without heavy facilitation from their teacher. Every Friday throughout the course of the school year, Ms. Green created classroom structures like Socratic seminars in which students sat in concentric circles, with each circle taking turns at discussing an issue and listening to their peers discuss another issue. In her teaching, she often moved around the room, but at this particular moment she was sitting on a tall stool next to the meditation bell¹³ at the front of the room. Some of the students squirmed in their desks, one boy tapped his feet and swayed to music from his headphones, and some students listened and engaged in the discussion. At times the attention of the students shifted from the class discussion to side conversations or toward getting the attention of a fellow classmate across the room.

¹³ The meditation bell that Ms. Green used was a Tibetan singing bowl—a brass bowl that sat on a cushion on top of a stool and was struck with a wooden striker. Whenever Ms. Green wanted to focus the students' attention on her she would ring the bell until they quieted down. Ms. Green typically began by very softly ringing the bell—a quiet din settling over the students' talking—but she would ring the bell more and more loudly the longer it took for the students to hear it, quiet their conversations, and direct their attention to their teacher. In this way, the ringing of the meditation bell marked transitions from activities— from unstructured conversation time or from student-directed activities toward teacher-directed lectures, teacher-facilitated discussions, or group reflection activities.

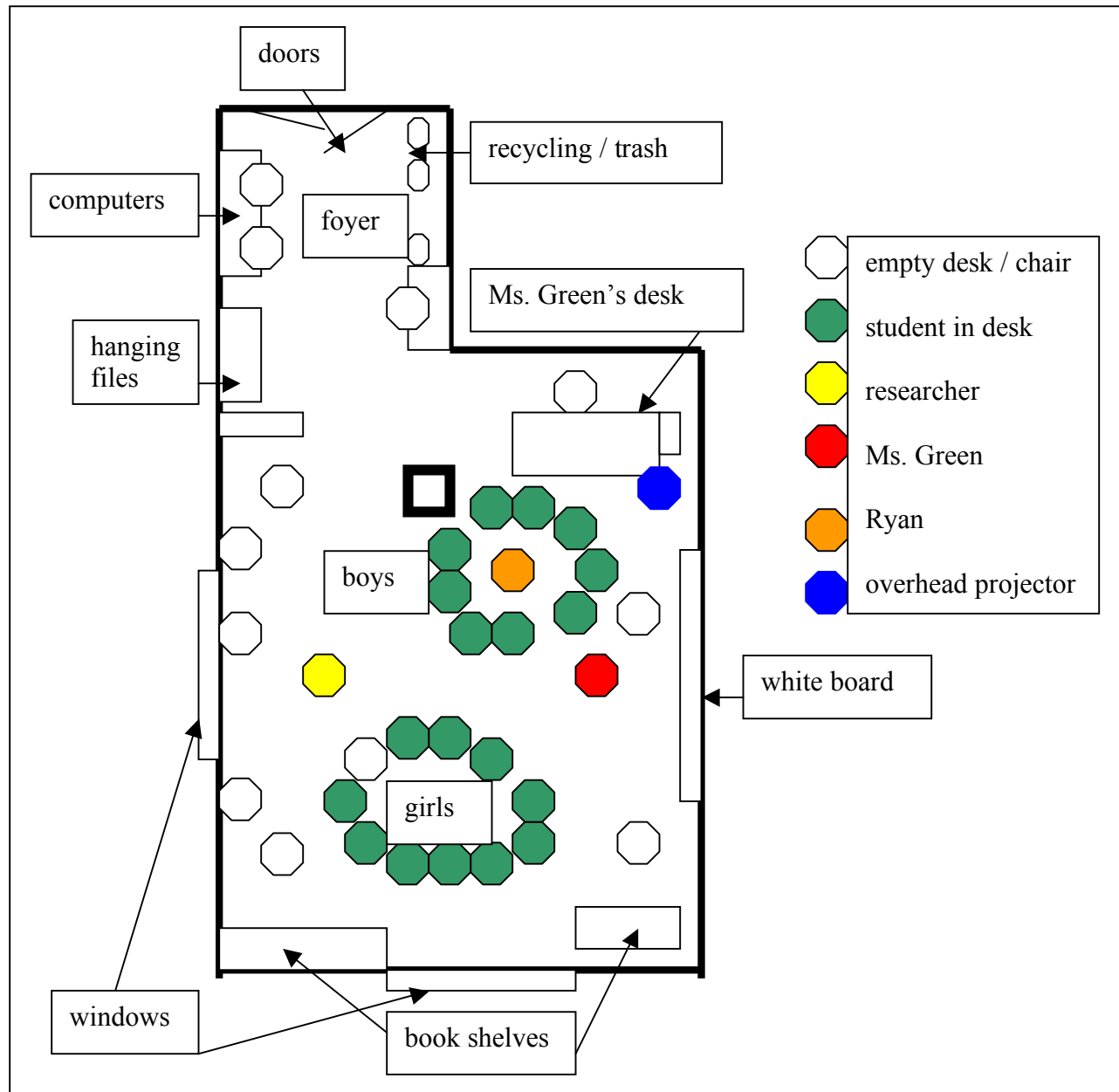
The first act of separating the students by sex shaped not only the arrangement of the students in the room, but also possibilities for the students' identification and representation. When Ms. Green issued the command to her students, "Okay, separate. You guys have fifteen minutes, go, separate" (line 35), this act of dividing the students by sex served as a speech act (Austin, 1962/1975). The speech act of telling the students to separate their bodies by their biological sex compelled them to affiliate themselves with a gendered group of people based on how they identify their sex, and to move their bodies into two distinct groups, shaping participants' interactions and the space of the classroom in a particular way.

Dividing the students' bodies by sex shaped the space of the classroom and who was able to move more or less freely or restrictively in it. As long as male-bodied students joined the boys' circle and female-bodied students joined the girls' circle, nobody disrupted the stability of this gender binary. By dividing the students' bodies according to their socially recognized biological sexes, the possibilities for identifying and representing oneself within the classroom space reinforced binary male/female sex and the exceptionalization of transgender identities. In this case, dividing by sex shaped how the students occupied the classroom space and helped to position the individual people who had the most power to move through the space freely.

As Ms. Green ordered her students to separate, they paused for a few seconds looking around at each other before starting to stand up and collect their belongings. Some students grabbed onto the front of their desks, stood up half way crouching over awkwardly, kept their bodies in their desks, and shuffled their bodies and desks together into two separate circles. Other students leapt out of their desks, took the chance to stretch their limbs, and pushed around desks into the circles. Still some students slowly got out of their desks, looked around at their classmates moving about, lethargically picked up their papers and books, and dragged their desks little by little to their new positions. Some students looked alive and awake, their eyes shining bright and their bodies bouncing almost endlessly. Other students expressed confusion, as if being awoken suddenly by the teacher's instructions and their classmates' movements. Still others rolled their eyes and sighed, perhaps out of boredom or weariness, as they joined their respective groups.

As seen in Figure 5, the students and Ms. Green arranged themselves so that the teacher was positioned in the center of the students. After this moment of instructing the students to separate by biological sex, the students shuffled their bodies and their desks into separate circles for the boys and girls. As they moved, the students directly joined one group or the other without hesitation or deliberation with regards to which group they belonged in. Although some students moved slowly and without enthusiasm, no one questioned anyone else's or their own place in the gender binary. Figure 6, found below, demonstrates the way the students arranged themselves in the classroom space according to their biological sex. The boys formed a circle with two small openings positioned close to Ms. Green's desk. Near the windows, the girls created a bigger circle and dragged extra desks close by in case more of their classmates were to show up.

Figure 6. Floor diagram of Ms. Green's class after the students divided by sex (Cohort A)



Ms. Green and I, as adults and as observers of the students' learning processes, moved back and forth between the two groups, listening and answering questions when solicited. The teacher and I, the researcher, did not need to choose our sex as either male or female to be privy to the students' conversations. The teacher and I were never forced to declare how we identified our biological sexes or to permanently locate our bodies in the spaces designated for females or males. She and I straddled the middle line, standing in between the two groups, and shifting our positions as we interacted with each group of students. On the other hand, the students were compelled to obligingly separate by sex in order to participate in the class activity or to mark

their gender identity as trans, transgender, or otherwise outside of binary gender categories—a move that would have been highly visible and marked. In line with Foucault (1977/1995), the disciplining of students' bodies worked to fix individuals into discrete categories of male/female and to supervise how well they fit or deviated from the norm established within such categories.

Ryan positioned himself in the middle of the boys' group. He decided he did not want to sit in a desk, but preferred to stand in the middle of the circle. As the boys worked one by one on the overhead transparency with the beer bottle on it, Ryan facilitated this motion by rotating in the middle of the circle and repositioning the transparency in front of the next boy at each turn. At one point, Ms. Green came over to the boys and asked, "Can we do this as a group? Is there someone to facilitate this?" Ryan claimed that he was facilitating the activity by passing around the transparency, serving as the group's pivot point. Ryan's explanation for his position was that men were lazy, drawing on a social stereotype. He further stated, "I like being in the middle. It makes me feel cool."

The shifting of students' bodies in the physical space of the classroom according to their sex or gender identification generated a certain degree of chaos and disorder in the classroom during the moment that students moved to find their groups. The chaos opened up possibilities for someone like Ryan, a straight able-bodied male, popular with his peers, and seen as racially White. A person who is socially recognized as a White male can exert privilege and not be marginalized in similar ways that women and people of color experience daily. Here, Ryan acted as the negotiator. He stood in the middle of the boys' group, occupying the space in the center of this circle, moving the students' collective class work around from hand to hand, and negotiating the way the activity took place. Ryan was both mobilizing privilege by positioning himself the ways he wanted to, and still benefiting both linguistically and spatially, as demonstrated in Excerpt 1 and Figure 6 respectively. By being in the middle of the boys' group, by being able to express his gender ambiguously, and by being able to move fluidly and freely between male and female claims to identity, Ryan negotiated and worked within the binary while maintaining his privileged position.

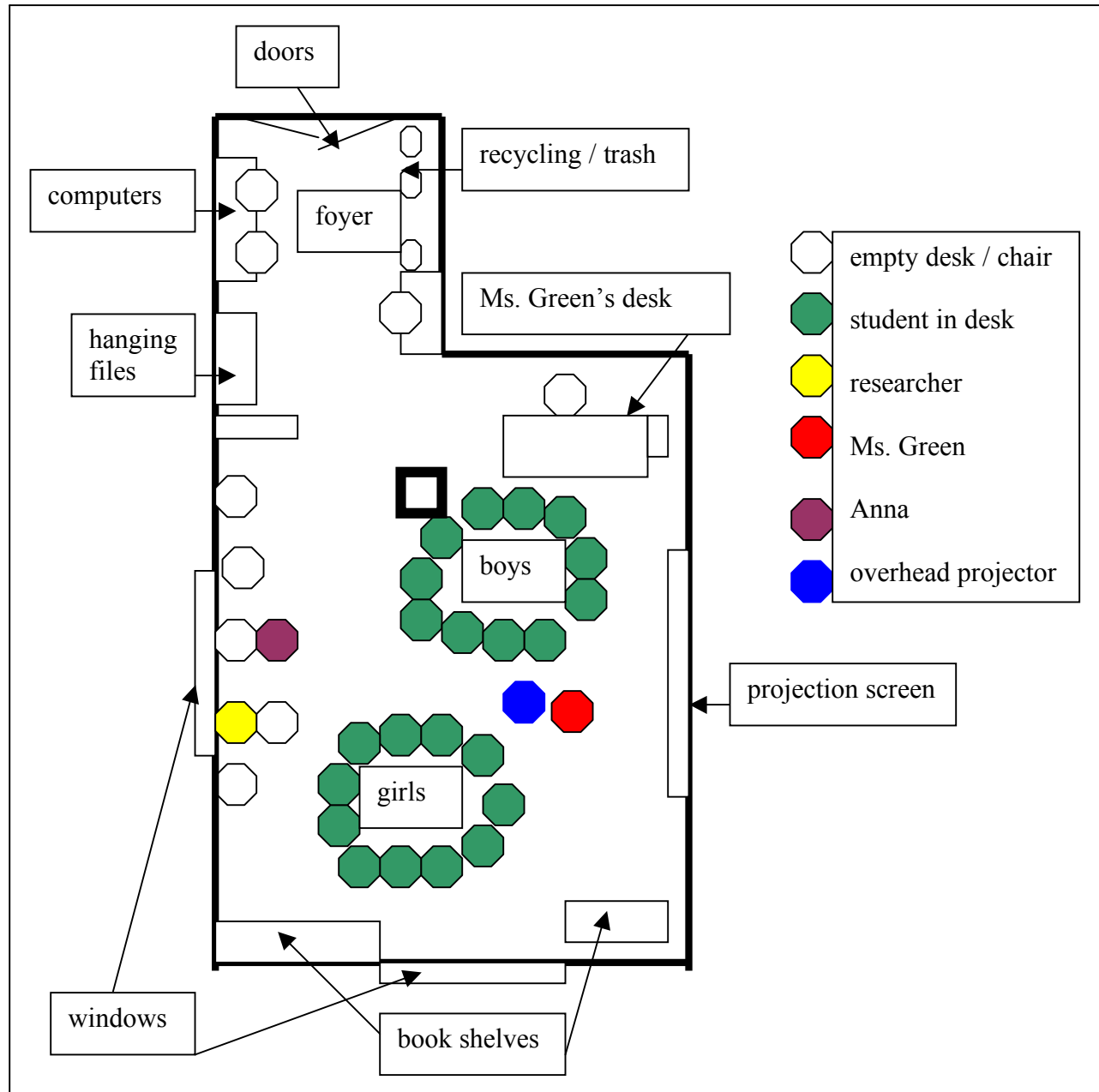
For cohort B during third and fourth periods, this series of directions and sorting students by biological sex looked similar in language but different in the ways students interacted with the space of the classroom. When the students entered the classroom, the desks were still arranged in two separate circles from the previous class. Binary structures imposed on conceptions of sex and gender had already shaped the space of the classroom and the possibilities for students' to mark their identification by positioning their bodies in one circle or the other. As the students walked in, they were chatting and laughing, some with their arms around each other. Many were moving around the desks, finding desks to sit in, and getting settled. Ms. Green directed the students to sit in either the boys' or the girls' circle. She repeated things like, "We're segregating by sex," and "Hi Tanya. We're segregating by sex, not by gender. Unless you think of yourself as trans."

Ms. Green's statement, "We're segregating by sex, not by gender," indicated that Tanya and the others were supposed to divide themselves based on their assigned biological sex as male or female, but not by their gender identification. Her next line qualified this instruction, "Unless you think of yourself as trans," marking trans identities as exceptions that cross binary

constructions of sex and gender. By using only the prefix “trans,” Ms. Green did not specify whether she meant transgender identities, transsexual identities, or a range of trans identities. Here, Ms. Green opened up the possibility that Tanya may identify her gender as transgender, hitched to a true or authentic sex as transsexual, which could then be reason for Tanya to stay with the boys with whom she was talking. The teacher’s statement, however, had the perlocutionary effect of telling Tanya that her female sex warranted she join the girls’ group and leave her position hanging out with the boys (Austin, 1962/1975).

Students meandered into the classroom, finding desks to sit in and on which to place their belongings like bags, jackets, notebooks, writing utensils, and drinks or snacks. During this transition time between class periods, the noise level was high as many students were talking at the same time. The students and the teacher took a few minutes to settle down before Ms. Green rang the meditation bell to mark the beginning of class time, as usual. Ms. Green stood near the front of the room in between the boys’ and the girls’ groups. Found below, Figure 7 shows the arrangement of people in the space of the classroom as they arrived and divided by sex.

Figure 7. Floor diagram of Ms. Green's class with the students divided by sex (Cohort B)



Ms. Green stood in the position she normally took to work on getting the attention of her students and transitioning into directions-giving mode. She was standing in front of the white board while instructing her students to sit, shaping the space so that she could use her stance vertically above her students to command some authority. As the teacher tried to begin the lesson, she reminded the students that they were supposed to be in whole class lecture mode; the sign on the wall read that during whole class lecture mode students were to raise their hands to be called upon, to engage in silent active listening, and to focus on note-taking. Such guidelines

for students to silently listen and wait until granted permission to speak by the teacher supported the structure of the lecture, in which one person—the teacher—took the position of directing the class and deciding to whom to grant the symbolic microphone.¹⁴

After leaving on Ms. Green's desk an audio recording device that could pick up the boys' conversation, I took a seat in one of the desks along the wall positioning myself a bit closer to the girls. Not taking a position in either the boys' or the girls' group, Ms. Green and I remained outside of both circles somewhere in between the two. Both the teacher and I—the researcher—occupied positions of more power than the students: Ms. Green in her role as their teacher and a representative of the school's institutional authority, and me in my role as an adult and a researcher from a local university. Neither Ms. Green nor I had to choose a gendered group with which to align, allowing us to position ourselves somewhere in the middle.

Ms. Green facilitated a discussion drawing on the students' homework about gender messages and stereotypes they observed in their everyday lives. Their conversation had been going on for about ten minutes when a student named Anna walked into the classroom and sat in a desk against the wall near me. Anna quietly sat with her head down on her desk—a position she often took in Ms. Green's class when not talking with her classmates, walking in and out of the room, or chasing her friends. Some days Anna could sleep in her desk for the majority of the hour-long class period. Other days Anna participated in class activities and group discussions as well as side conversations and playful moments with her peers.

Anna had opinions that she freely shared, and she and her classmate Rex often commiserated on how much they disliked the class. Anna expressed frustration with some of the content of the gender, sex, and sexuality unit, Ms. Green, and her Freshman Social Studies and Humanities class. In class, Anna would sometimes sigh loudly and say, "Ugh. This is so boring." At times she would vote with her feet and leave for the remainder of the class. Halfway through the twelve-week gender, sex, and sexuality unit, Anna's parents withdrew her from participating in the unit. They objected to the content of the course and stated, "My child goes to school to learn, not to worry about sex, gender, or anything else." Ms. Green interpreted their choice to pull Anna out of the unit as reflective of Anna's repressed lesbian identity, her family's deep-seated homophobia, and the curriculum's potential to stir up questions about identity and desire as well as beliefs about gender and sexuality. When I asked Ms. Green how she arrived at her interpretation, she told me about a phone call she had with Anna's mother. Ms. Green reported:

Her mother is like, "My child doesn't like your class." I said, well, I mean what I wanted to say was, "You're probably a homophobe, your kid is so obviously a lesbian, and you need to fucking deal with it. She probably doesn't like this class because it makes her really uncomfortable when you're not supporting her." But, of course I can't say that. She's obviously terrified and mind you, maybe she's not a lesbian, but I'd put some money on it. I'd put some *big* money on it.

Anna's sexuality as well as her gender presentation and sex, as discussed in the following section, served as sites for examination.

¹⁴ The symbolic microphone was an inflatable globe the students and teacher would throw around the room to one another. The person holding the globe had the right to speak—symbolically holding the microphone—and others were to actively listen and not speak when the globe was in somebody else's hands.

In contrast to Ryan's privilege to freely move across binary gender boundaries, Anna's gender presentation served as a site for scrutiny, regulation, and humor. She described her self-identification as an African American "bad girl" who was athletic, played basketball, and liked video games. While many of the girls in Anna's class dressed in bright colors, put on make-up, and carried handbags, Anna wore jeans and a baggy hooded sweatshirt, sneakers, and no make-up everyday. Her masculinity was indexed and named by participants' teasing, name-calling, and declarations of her perceived and externally imposed gendered identity. Anna's classmates and teacher objectified her gender identity, positioning it as a site for examination, despite Ms. Green's assertion that gender identification was about "your definition of self." Anna's gender transgression served as the punch line to jokes. Highlighting her breach of normative gender expectations, students called Anna "trans" to put her in a denigrated position and marked her gender and sexuality as "spoiled identities" (Goffman, 1963). Such jokes buttressed White heteronormative binary gender as an ideology and marked Anna's gender, sex, and sexuality as sites for examination and the exercise of power.

Jokes and Name-Calling: Power at Play

Identifying and marking difference.

Although Ms. Green's gender presentation played with boundaries between being boyish and girlish, like everyone else in our society she was interpellated into an ideology of binary gender. Despite her hard work to raise her students' awareness of the social construction of binary gender rooted in heteronormativity, there were ways in which her pedagogy was restricted and shaped by larger structures including language, ideology, and the institution of schooling. Ideology, in this case of binary gender, interpellates individuals and transforms them into subjects (Althusser, 1971/2011). By identifying and marking difference, Ms. Green transformed herself and Anna into sites for the examination of gender. However, difference is ambivalent—it is both necessary for the production of meaning, for social identities, and at the same time, it is threatening (Hall, 1997). It is in such ambivalence that humor can enter, working to regulate gender and sexuality.

At the moment when Anna and two of her classmates walked into class late, Ms. Green interrupted the lesson to direct the students to join the groups separated by sex. The teacher's instructions to divide students by sex resulted in identifying and marking gender difference, operating on both Anna and Ms. Green as sites for examination. Found below, Excerpt 3 shows how trans identities and ambiguous positions in the middle were marked as exceptionalized and constructed as sites for the exercise of humor. Ms. Green characterized identifying as trans as a path wrought with an entirely different or exceptional set of questions and considerations. This was taken up as a joke when a student echoed her teacher and laughed (line 06). The jokes continued when one student indicated that Anna should sit with the boys, making fun of her gender presentation and transgressions. Rather than interrupt such teasing or question the meanings and intentions behind such jokes, the teacher was complicit in identifying and marking difference in Anna's, as well as her own, gender presentation. At the end of the excerpt, the teacher further marked trans as special, by highlighting the truthfulness and exceptionalness of a trans identity.

Excerpt 3. Yeah, I know. There's a bunch of us who are kind of found in the middle (Cohort B)

- 01 Ms. G.: I'd- I'd rather you segregate by sex, not gender, so:o (0.2)
02 boys over here, girls over there
03 unless you really identify as trans? (.) then
04 that's a who:ole other set of questions
05 ((indistinguishable - students talk, yell, and laugh))
06 Gail ((laughing)): that's a who:ole other set of questions
07 Andre ((to Anna)): go back, go back over here
08 ((indicating where Anna should sit, motioning toward the circle of boys))
09 Ms. G.: Anna? Yeah, I know.
10 There's a bunch of us who are kind of found in the middle
11 We could go one way or another based on your sex or gender
12 unless you're trans
13 unless you truly identify as trans

Andre, as a boy sitting in the circle of boys, called out and characterized Anna's gender presentation as boyish or somewhat masculine for a girl (lines 07 and 08). Andre's reading of Anna's gender as masculine and his preconceived knowledge that Anna was considered to be a girl served as the basis for his joke. His joke operated as follows. Andre's line that Anna belonged back over here with the boys acted as a signifier for an imaginary signified—which, in this case, was also the implied, unspoken punch line—that Anna's biological sex must be male. By indicating that Anna should sit in the circle with the boys, Andre marked her gender presentation as masculine for a girl, *so* masculine that her biological sex *must* be male.

After clarifying that they were speaking about the same person, Ms. Green claimed an epistemic stance with regards to Anna's gender when she stated, "Anna? Yeah, I know" (line 09). Ms. Green indexed her epistemic stance that she secretly believed Anna to be a closeted lesbian and a girl who transgressed White heteronormative binary gender expectations. The teacher's "Yeah, I know" indexed her agreement with the boys that Anna's gender presentation was more boyish than girlish. The teacher claimed to *know* Anna's gender identification and to know the ways in which Anna's gender presentation transgressed boundaries around binary gender categories. With her "Yeah, I know," Ms. Green also expressed her agreement with Andre's assessment that Anna belonged with the boys. Here, the teacher supported the marking and naming of her own and Anna's gender transgressions. She described Anna's and her gender expression as, "There's a bunch of us who are kind of found in the middle. We could go one way or another based on your sex or gender" (lines 10 and 11). Ms. Green claimed knowledge about gender transgression—both her own and Anna's—and the liminal space their gender presentations occupy, found in the middle of binary gender categories, blending both masculine and feminine elements.

The way Anna reacted to the regulation of her gender differed depending on the context and valence of the situation. At this particular moment at the beginning of the class, Anna remained silent, putting her head down on her desk, not engaging with her classmates or her teacher. Her silence may have been an expression of her attempt to ignore their gender policing and teasing. When Andre motioned for Anna to sit in the boys' circle (line 07 and 08), however, Anna glared

at him, frowning and shaking her head. Other times when Anna was operated on as a site for the regulation of gender and sexuality norms, she snapped back with insults, curse words, and sharp looks.

Teasing and reading sex and gender.

Continuing with her directions for the students to divide themselves into groups based on sex, Ms. Green told Howard, “We’re segregating by sex.” Howard had just walked into the classroom and was standing in the middle of the girls’ group, chatting with Lisa, and looking for a desk to sit in. By calling Howard by name and telling him that they were dividing by biological sex, Ms. Green indicated that she read Howard’s sex as male and that by standing with the girls, he was in the wrong group. The teacher pointed this out in a teasing way, making a joke of the possibility that he may identify as female. The teacher and Andre teased Howard for being physically located in the girls’ circle because they read his sex as belonging with the biological males. Another student, Oren, echoed Andre’s earlier joke regarding Anna’s sex and gender (Excerpt 3) and exclaimed that the boys’ group needs another seat for Anna. Inserted below, Excerpt 4 demonstrates how the teacher and students co-constructed teasing and jokes around Howard’s and Anna’s sex and gender. In effect, the teacher and students collaborated in making jokes of gender transgression.

Excerpt 4. He’s with the gir:rls! We need an extra seat for Anna (Cohort B)

- 01 Ms. G.: Howard
- 02 ((Andre bangs his fists on his desk in a rhythm))
- 03 Ms. G.: we’re segregating by sex
- 04 Andre: Ha ha! He’s with the gir:rls!
- 05 Ms. G.: >Well, I mean!<
- 06 If you { identify (.) as female=
- 07 Andre: { Ha! He’s with the gir:rls!
- 08 Ms. G.: =then I guess you can be over there.
- 09 Oren: Or he’d like to go over there
- 10 Ms. G.: We’re segregating by sex.
- 11 ((indistinguishable – students talking))
- 12 Oren ((laughing)): hey, we need an extra seat for Anna!
- 13 ((boys laughing))

Ms. Green’s quick, “Well, I mean!” (line 05) marked the beginning of her joke. She was making a joke of Howard being in the wrong group and the possibility that he may identify as female. Ms. Green’s use of the conditional “if... then” (lines 06 and 08) opened up the possibility that Howard may identify himself as one of the girls. The perlocutionary effect of the teacher’s statement, “Well, I mean! If you identify as female then I guess you can be over there” (lines 05, 06, and 08) made a joke of directing Howard to join the boys’ group and the possibility of Howard identifying as the opposite sex (Austin, 1962/1975). Howard’s classmate Oren, however, interpreted Howard’s position in the circle of girls as reflective of his desires to be with the girls. Oren emphasized that Howard might be with the girls because “he’d like to go over there” (line 09), perhaps reflective of a heterosexual desire to flirt with the girls or of a desire to

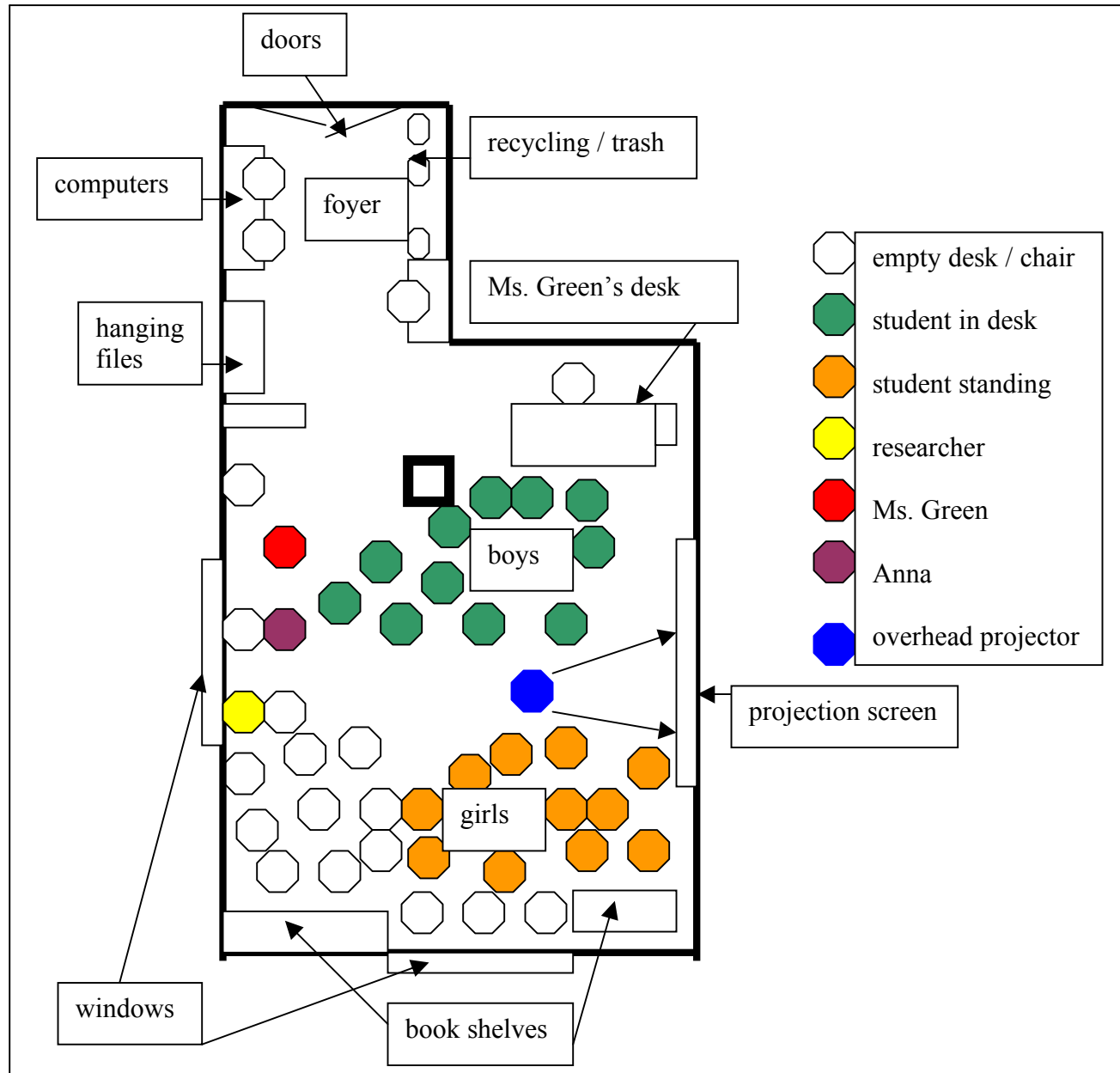
identify with and be one of the girls. Such a move also positioned Oren as the arbiter of gender and sexual difference, occupying the privileged place of naming Howard's desires and Anna's sex and gender. Howard, Oren, Andre, and Anna were all African American students, and instead of wielding power against one another along the lines of race, they deployed other axes of difference such as gender, sexuality, ability, and class.

Andre teased Howard for being with the girls, "Ha! He's with the gir:rls!" (lines 04 and 07), when the teacher directed the students to divide by biological sex, making fun of Howard's positioning in the classroom space designated for females. With his statement, "Hey, we need an extra seat for Anna!" (line 12), Oren echoed Andre's joke that Anna belonged with the boys' group because of her gender presentation and expression. The boys needed an extra chair for Anna in order for her to sit with the boys' group. The boys' laughter that immediately followed Oren's joke corroborated this interpretation and reading of Anna's sex and gender. The presence of a male-bodied boy in a group of female-bodied girls and the imagined belonging of a female-bodied girl to the group of male-bodied boys served as the punch line for these jokes. The teacher's and the students' jokes about gender transgression co-constructed a context in this classroom where teasing about gender and sexuality, normative expectations, and participants' transgressions of boundaries was sanctioned.

Whose claims to gender identity?

Two hours later at about 1:30 p.m., Ms. Green's students in cohort B returned to class after their lunch break. As we walked back into the classroom, students found desks to sit in, still separated by sex. Anna resumed her original position sitting in a desk against the wall near me, but closer to the boys' group. During this fourth period class, the students reported what they had discussed in sex-separated groups during the morning's activity. During the morning, they had worked in groups divided by sex, brainstorming and writing on their transparencies (with either a flower or a box), while also discussing, playing, laughing, and chatting in side-conversations. In the afternoon class period, the students stood as a group and reported what they wrote on their transparencies to the teacher and the group of the opposite sex. Here, the students were presenting both their individual and collective voices and ideas about what it means to be a boy or a girl, how society expects them to be as a boy or a girl, and what the social consequences of breaking these expectations look like. As seen in Figure 8, the girls presented their findings first, standing toward the front of the room, projecting their transparencies on the screen in front of the white board, and facing the boys who were sitting in their desks.

Figure 8. Floor diagram of Ms. Green's class – Girls presenting their findings (Cohort B)



The girls stood together as they read one by one what they had written inside and outside of their stereotypical flower as well as their feelings and reactions to what they had learned during the exercise. After presenting, the girls fielded questions from the boys and Ms. Green. All of the girls were standing on one side of the room, focused around the overhead projector, except for Anna who was sitting in a desk to the side of the room. Ms. Green, Anna, the boys, and I were sitting in desks facing the girls. The girls were sharing their perspectives and what they had written on their transparency with the flower. Lisa was talking when the teacher interrupted a side conversation in which Shavonne had been trying to get Anna to stand up and join the girls at

the front of the room. In this moment of the teacher's intervention, as seen in Excerpt 5, two students—Shavonne and Rex—claimed Anna's gender identity for her and the teacher passed over an instance of name-calling. Shavonne was also an African American girl and a friend of Anna's, while Rex was a White boy and also a friend of Anna's. Their social closeness as friends who joked and teased may have made the following situation in which both Rex and Shavonne claimed Anna's gender identity for her possible. Nevertheless, it was a male-bodied boy and a female-bodied girl, both rooted in heteronormative gender presentations and sexuality, who were able to exercise the power to position Anna as a site for gender and sexual regulation.

Excerpt 5. Passing over name-calling (Cohort B)

01 Ms. G.: Uh, Shavonne! We're listening to one mic,
02 Shavonne: Uh, Anna, you're a girl,
03 get in the group!
04 ((indistinguishable student talk))
05 Rex: Anna is trans.
06 ((boys laugh))
07 Ms. G.: I can't hear her!

Ms. Green's interruption, "We're listening to one mic" (line 01), told Shavonne that Lisa was the only sanctioned speaker at the moment because she was holding the symbolic microphone. The intended illocutionary force of this statement was for Shavonne to stop talking on the side to Anna while Lisa was speaking to the class (Austin, 1962/1975). Shavonne's claim that Anna was a girl was both an attempt to include Anna and an insistence that Anna physically come join the girls (lines 02 and 03). On the other hand, Rex's comment, "Anna is trans" (line 05), was a denigrating joke that garnered laughter from the boys. Here, Rex calling Anna "trans" named and marked her gender transgression while echoing previous jokes (Excerpts 3 and 4). A few boys looked at Rex and laughed, some whispering, "whoooah" as if he were going to get into trouble for his comment.

Ms. Green exclaimed, "I can't hear her!" (line 07), in an attempt to redirect the students back to Lisa—the sanctioned speaker whose words Ms. Green was unable to hear. Instead of addressing the power dynamics at play in this interaction, the name-calling, or the politics of claiming another's identity, Ms. Green continued her line of intervention to refocus everybody's attention onto Lisa as the designated speaker in the class activity. Ms. Green did not interrupt Rex's joke that named Anna's gender identity as "trans" and teased her for her gender presentation. Rather, Ms. Green used the shift in momentum to switch turns from the girls' to the boys' group, shaping this into a moment of transition.

Rex's joke buttressed already existing unequal power relations between boys and girls, between White and Black students at this school, and between gender conforming and gender non-conforming people. This event also shaped a classroom context in which jokes may regulate gender or sexual identity, expression, and oppression. Rex's calling Anna "trans" legitimized Anna's choice to remain seated in her desk apart from either group for the duration of the class activity—a choice that the teacher earlier sanctioned. As Lisa tried to continue talking about how the media and commercials affected her and her gender identity, Tanya began singing, "I'm a

Barbie girl, in a Barbie world,” unwittingly demonstrating the very point Lisa was trying to make.

This example demonstrates the ways participants’ claims of identity position others, in some cases as interpreted as belonging to a designated kind or group, while in other cases as the punch line for a joke. Anna’s classmates’ claims to her gender identity left little room for Anna to be a girl, trans, or gendered in any way she may wish. Ms. Green’s inaction in interrupting the students’ claims co-constructed a social context in this classroom in which declaring another person’s gender identity and naming gender transgressions for the purpose of a joke was allowed. Rex’s joke, the boys’ uptake in the form of laughter, and the teacher’s passing over of this name-calling socialized classroom participants into relations in which teasing was a sanctioned way to regulate gender and sexuality. Ambiguity opened up spaces for humor to work on regulating gender and sexuality, reinforcing the structure and ideology of binary gender that is difficult to step outside of and durable.

Conclusion

The examples presented in this chapter demonstrated how language socialization to norms concerning the use of jokes and teasing about gender transgression to uphold an ideology of binary gender occurred in classroom conversations and shaped learning contexts. Indexing a stereotypical gay persona or calling another student “trans” for the purposes of garnering laughter functioned to mark transgressions in participants’ gender presentation. Such jokes, however, limited the possibilities for identification and representation that were socially accepted rather than ridiculed. The language socialization occurring in these classroom interactions taught participants boundaries around White heteronormative binary gender norms. Through teasing and jokes, teachers and students indexed transgressions of gender norms while also wielding power by constructing difference and denigrating others.

Dividing a classroom and participants by sex shaped the space and who had the power to move within it. Some people were able to move in the space while other people were positioned as the space for the examination and regulation of gender and sexuality. The chaos of ambiguity opened the space for some, like Ryan, but not others like Anna. Instead, the subject of the class was both gender stereotypes and Anna. Anna was interpellated as the subject, positioned as the site to examine how gender operated and could be transgressed. In this case, Anna was the site that was being worked on by her peers and teacher. Together, choice and space interacted to reinscribe binary gender norms and to regulate who got to move around such binary poles. The complexity of joking depended on the context, infused with different valences and operating at different registers. In this case, Ryan was able to reappropriate a denigrating discourse by both reproducing it and playing with it. Anna, on the other hand, was disempowered by the moment of teasing, rendered silent. Ryan was able to exert privilege and not be marginalized in other ways. As the negotiator, he was allowed to move fluidly between male and female, to express gender in ambiguous ways, and to be situated in the privileged space of the middle. Ryan both mobilized privilege and benefited linguistically and spatially.

Such moments demonstrated how our schooled lives and schooling institutions are ubiquitously organized by an ideology of binary gender. Here, social norms shaped and restricted micro-

interactions including language and humor, and these micro-interactions in turn reinforced the social and macro-structures that operate to construct them in the first place. Schooling and classroom practices of dividing students by sex or gender highlighted the structure of binary gender, its normalized place in social institutions, participants' positions both within and outside of such categories, and the exercise of power through humor along these lines of difference and identification.

CHAPTER FIVE – SPEECH THAT SILENCES, SILENCE THAT SPEAKS: REMAKING SAFE SPACE FOR DIFFERENCE

How are gender, sexuality, class, and race co-constructed in everyday slang expressions like “that’s so gay” and “that’s so ghetto”? How are the spaces of “gay” and “ghetto” applied to certain gendered, sexualized, classed, and racialized bodies through interpellation? What are the limits of “safe space” in classroom dialogues about gender, sexuality, class, and race?

I question how linguistic expressions like “that’s so gay” and “that’s so ghetto” hail certain subjects and thus serve as conduits for power and the reproduction of ideology through their injury. I examine how these expressions marginalize the students that they target. This is not to equate “gay” and “ghetto” as equivalent constructs or to homogenize oppressions that act along lines of sexuality and gender with those that are based on race and class. Rather, my purposes are to analyze the ways subjects are constituted as representing “gay” and “ghetto” identities. The present chapter will examine the ways language like “that’s so gay” and “that’s so ghetto” leaves distinct traces of gender, sexuality, race, and class meanings and relations. Such speech acts (Austin, 1962/1975; Butler, 1997) interpellate students’ identities and social positions despite being located in an educational environment that strives toward constructing “safe” and “politically correct” space.

Considering the legacies of political correctness, colorblind racism, and other limiting discourses shaped by the neoliberal moment in which public education is presently situated, in this chapter I question what happens to “safe space” in high school classrooms when students are spatially excluded by their social locations and identities. Engaging theories of language and performativity to examine constructions of race, class, gender, and sexuality, I demonstrate how such differences are activated by “that’s so gay” and “that’s so ghetto” comments. Through an examination of educational “safe space” as it was challenged and shaped by students’ experiences, I analyze the intricacy of who gets to speak and in what ways in high school classrooms and settings.

Theoretical Framework

Notes Toward Etymologies of “Gay” and “Ghetto”

Words carry histories: histories of their meanings and connotations, histories of their usage, and histories of their contexts. As M. M. Bakhtin (1981) wrote, “... there are no ‘neutral’ words and forms—words and forms that can belong to ‘no one’; language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents. ... Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions” (p. 293). As I illustrate in this chapter, words activate histories through the process of interpellation, as subjects are called on to embody and represent the marginalized spaces of “gay” and “ghetto.”

The term “ghetto” originated in sixteenth century Venice when the Venetian Senate required some 700 Jewish households move into the Ghetto Nuovo, an island that was originally used as a foundry. The name “ghetto” for the island came from the Italian verb “gettare” meaning “to pour” or “to pour something off” (Haynes & Hutchison, 2008; Sennett, 1992). The area of land

was so named because the foundry at Ghetto Nuovo was a site for iron production. Over time the name “ghetto” became synonymous with geographic areas where Jews were forced to concentrate. Talja Blokland explains that what happened in Venice “was the spatial expression of social processes of exclusion, when Jews were defined as inferior citizens and excluded professionally from certain trades and relegated to live in certain areas” (2008, p. 375). Over the next few centuries state enforcement of residential segregation of Jews created Jewish ghettos throughout parts of Europe and northern Africa (Wirth, 1928). This process of exclusion and spatial segregation of selected classes and racialized groups of people into ghettos has been found across geographic locales since the case of Venetian ghettos in the sixteenth century.

The rise of urban ghettos in the United States came in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the social sciences, the term “ghetto” was used to describe U.S. enclaves populated by a range of communities. For example, Louis Wirth’s (1928) *The Ghetto* focused on Jewish ghettos in Chicago, whereas scholars also used “ghetto” to describe the segregation of Black populations in cities during the same period (Du Bois, 1899; Haynes, 1913). Scholars have tied the rise of ghettos in the U.S. to the first large-scale migration of African Americans from the rural South to the urban North (Beveridge, 2008; Cutler, Glaeser, & Vigdor, 1999) as well as to the influx of immigrants to American cities where they were forced to settle in places spatially separate and socially distanced from the dominant majority group (Vigil, 2008). Like the traditional Jewish ghettos, these U.S. ghettos were economically segregated from the mainstream economy. Unlike the Jewish ghettos of Europe and northern Africa, people were not mandated to live in U.S. ghettos by law or the state’s authority, but rather were compelled to live there by exclusionary practices that resulted in de-facto segregation. For example, Whites deliberately denied African Americans access to urban housing markets through a series of practices, reinforced racial segregation through violence and institutionalized discrimination, and implemented policies through which to contain growing urban Black populations, community development, and mobility (Massey & Denton, 1993).

Migration and industrial development in the early twentieth century segregated some people from newer European immigrant groups—Jews, Poles, Italians, Czechs—into ethnic enclaves. Unlike Black ghettos, however, immigrant enclaves were not homogeneous but rather contained a variety of nationalities, and most European immigrants of these ethnicities were not forced to live in such ethnic enclaves nor did they experience a high degree of isolation from American society (Lieberson, 1963, 1980; Massey & Denton, 1993; Philpott, 1978). While ghettos became an enduring and permanent feature of Black residential life, ethnic enclaves served as a more transitory space and stage in the process of immigrant assimilation (Leonardo & Hunter, 2007; Massey & Denton, 1993). Thus, the ghetto is a racialized place with an enduring position in U.S. racial relations, whereas for other groups like Eastern Europeans and Jewish immigrants the ghetto has an impermanent historical position (Leonardo & Hunter, 2007).

While Loic Wacquant (2004) emphasizes stigma, boundary, spatial enclosure, and institutional encapsulation as the four essential constituents of a ghetto, Peter Marcuse (1997) differentiates between “classic ghettos” which were the result of the involuntary spatial segregation of a group in a subordinate political and social relationship to its surrounding society and “outcast ghettos.” Today in the U.S., Marcuse asserts, the outcast ghetto is the ghetto of the excluded, in that its inhabitants are the excluded and the castaway rather than the subordinated and restricted. “The

outcast ghetto adds a new dimension to the classic ghetto: a specific relationship between the particular population group and the dominant society that is economically as well as spatially exclusionary” (Marcuse, 1997, p. 232-233). Both Wacquant (2004) and Marcuse (1997) illuminate the processes of stigmatization and marginalization that construct spatial and metaphoric ghettos and ghettoized identities. Such a distinction highlights processes of exclusion and the forces of macroeconomic development that marginalize some people from participating in the mainstream economy. These exclusionary practices did not necessarily need to be mandated by law and can be put into action through other material processes.

Education scholars demonstrate that processes of exclusion targeting race and class have developed “ghetto schooling” or “ghetto education” (Anyon, 1997; Levy, 1970; Rist, 1970, 2000). Residential segregation and the geographical compression of people of color and poor communities into restricted urban areas over decades as well as the negligence and de-funding of urban schools have fostered the development of ghetto schools. Ghetto schools are marked by decrepit conditions (Kozol, 1991, 2005) as well as violence, drugs, academic failure, and collapsing infrastructure (Rist, 2000). As Anyon (1997) illustrated, “the traumatic environment also leads to relatively high percentages of inner city students needing special services—neurological and psychological repair, remedial instruction, and other programs to address their many educational needs” (p. 160).

Processes of exclusion look different depending on their object of marginalization. While there is a racial and classed specificity to ghettoization, the marginalization of LGBTQ people occurs across other spaces—discursive spaces like the family (Weston, 1991), state institutions (Butler, 2002; Luibheid, 1998; Reddy, 2005, 2008), and national culture (Berlant, 1995). The identities and communities associated with the term “gay” are marked and positioned as outside of both the heterosexual family and society. Some scholars have appropriated the term “ghetto” to describe the urban spaces where LGBTQ identities, communities, and practices have been relegated (Califa, 1997; Davis, 1995; Levine, 1979; Sibalis, 2004). Appropriating the term “ghetto” in these cases is problematic as White gays and lesbians do not necessarily sympathize or identify with Black ghettoization. Yet, their analysis highlights the ways that what they call “gay ghettos”—the urban spaces predominantly occupied by queer bodies, identities, communities, and practices whether for housing, working, social and political networking, or entertainment—have long marked the urban landscape (Califa, 1997; Davis, 1995; Levine, 1979; Sibalis, 2004). As marginalized spaces, “gay ghettos” are known to include everything from red light districts, gay cruising sites, underground societies, clandestine speakeasies, and drag clubs to mainstream and consumer-centered neighborhoods like the Castro in San Francisco and the West Village in New York. Although designating something as “ghetto” or as “gay” carries different meanings, material effects, and histories of exclusion, there is a parallel process of marginalization I wish to analyze here. The process of marginalization that occurs with “ghetto” and “gay” relegates certain people and practices as falling outside of mainstream dominant White heteronormative society.

In contrast to the word “ghetto,” “gay” has a more obscure etymology. Experts disagree on its origins, some tracing it to Old High German “wâhi” or “gahi” meaning “pretty,” others to German “gehen” meaning “to go,” but the word has many forms including Italian “gajo,” Portuguese “gaio,” Old Spanish “gayo,” Provençal “gai,” and Old French “gai” (Selden, 2007).

Meaning “joyful” and “merry,” “lively” and “bright” as in “brilliant” and “showy,” use of these words trace back to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In the fifteenth century, “gay” took on connotations of “lewd” and “lascivious.” Into the seventeenth century, these associations brought “gay” to mean:

Originally of persons and later also more widely: dedicated to social pleasures; dissolute, promiscuous; frivolous, hedonistic. Also (esp. in *to go gay*: uninhibited; wild, crazy; flamboyant. (4b. Oxford English Dictionary)

This stronger meaning was used to refer to things such as lifestyles and places, as well as men and women, including connotations of women working in brothels.

In early twentieth century U.S. slang, “gay” came to refer to homosexual persons and places, milieus, or ways of life of or relating to homosexuals.¹⁵ Some of the earliest uses of “gay” to refer to same-sex sexuality in the U.S. included Gertrude Stein’s (1922) *Miss Furr and Miss Skeene* and Cary Grant’s line in the 1938 film *Bringing Up Baby*, when asked why he was wearing a negligee responded, “Because I just went gay, all of a sudden.” Here “gay” was positioned as something one could become—an ailment one could catch spontaneously—and associated with gender non-conformity and practices such as dressing in sexy lingerie designed and intended for the opposite sex. More so, the process of going gay was the punch line to the joke, which provided the comedic effect of challenging and subverting Cary Grant’s masculinity and heterosexuality.

Today “gay” is used to refer to same-sex desire, sexual practices, and sexual identity, carrying with it these earlier meanings and usages. More recently, “gay” has been imbued with connotations meaning “foolish,” “stupid,” and “socially inappropriate or disapproved of” (4e. Oxford English Dictionary).¹⁶ Calling something undesirable or stupid “gay” and commenting on situations as “that’s so gay” began to appear with regularity on the animated sitcom *South Park* created by Trey Parker and Matt Stone. *South Park* began airing in 1997 and, at the time of this writing, is in its fifteenth season. Such a popular television show generated a wide circulation of jokes in which “that’s so gay” or “he’s so gay” operated as the punch line. As articulated by young students, *South Park* is popular because political correctness masks the kinds of humor that are not supposed to be spoken according to social conventions of politeness, yet are shared social commentary and perspectives by many (Stevens, 2001).

The proliferation of words like “gay” and “ghetto” in the mass media has fetishized such marginalized spaces. Constructions of the ghetto are often commodified by popular culture, where living in the ‘hood has been the setting for many Hollywood screenplays and stories. Beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, popular portrayals of the ghetto were depicted through “hood films” such as *Boys in the Hood*, *Do the Right Thing*, *Menace II Society*, and *New Jack City*, among many others. Similarly, the ghetto has been the space for some artists’ lives

¹⁵ The term “homosexual” has a distinct institutional and discursive history. A series of discourses in nineteenth century psychiatry, jurisprudence, and literature shaped what Foucault (1978) called the species of “homosexuality.” Some of its earliest formulations were in 1869 when Karl-Maria Kertbeny coined the term in his writings about Prussian sodomy law, Paragraph 143, which later became Paragraph 175 of the penal code of the German Empire. Other related uses of the term are to be found in Carl Friedrich Otto Westphal’s (1870) *Archiv für Neurologie* and in Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s (1892/1908) *Psychopathia Sexualis*.

¹⁶ Research has found young people ages 18-30 years old in Australia are more likely to interpret the word “gay” as meaning stupid, lame, or boring, as in “That shirt is so gay” or “how gay is that?” (Lalor & Rendle-Short, 2007).

and creative productions, as illustrated in the music of Stevie Wonder and Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five in the 1970s and 1980s, gangsta rap in the late 1980s and 1990s, the sketch comedy television show *In Living Color*, and hip hop since its inception in the late 1970s. Black comedy has engaged with constructions of “ghetto life” and re-significations such as “ghetto-fabulousness” to highlight the everyday practices of resistance, structural inequalities, as well as human follies that populate marginalized spaces of the ghetto (Littleton, 2006).

In contemporary parlance, “ghetto” is used as an adjective to describe people’s behaviors, including speaking, dressing, and walking, as well as places or objects that are poorly maintained, run down, or badly put together (boyd, 2011). Similarly, “ghetto” is used to refer to something as cheap or trashy, pointing to sensibilities that are supposedly not those of the upper or middle class. Moreover, the ghetto is constructed as an empty space, poor and without value, neglected and forgotten, and marked distinctively as Black (Paperson, 2010). Furthermore, Whites essentialize the ghetto as the place of authentic blackness and communities of color largely because the majority of their interaction with racially minoritized people occurs through media consumption of representations of the “ghetto” and the “urban” (Leonardo & Hunter, 2007). Distinct from “the ’hood”—which can index a particular status as a positive and authentic experience of blackness or brownness (Leonardo & Hunter, 2007), the “ghetto” is coded as negative, derogatory, and marginal.

Words like “gay” and “ghetto” achieve multiple and complex meanings as illustrated in students’ uses of these terms. Words also carry histories, their etymologies tracing the connotations, affiliations, and limitations associated with them. As words are uttered in new contexts, they take on new meanings and uses. In some instances, words function as speech acts (Austin, 1962/1975; Butler, 1997)—by describing something pejoratively, by operating as hate speech, and by signifying cloaked in the ambiguity of politically correct speech. As discussed in this chapter, words activate histories of their usage and their meanings through the process of interpellation, as individuals are constituted as subjects embodying and representing the marginal spaces of “gay” and “ghetto.” These terms mark categories and relationships of power differentials between students as they take on their gendered, sexualized, classed, and raced meanings as well as their histories of marginalization and exclusion.

Constructions of “Safe Space” in Classroom Dialogue

In this chapter I draw on Leonardo and Porter’s (2010) analysis of safe space in race dialogue to further consider how gender and sexuality dialogue operates to produce and reproduce the marginalization of non-White, non-heterosexual, and gender non-conforming bodies and lived experiences. Leonardo and Porter argue that conditions of safe space in race dialogue maintain White comfort zones—spaces where Whites can avoid publicly looking racist through the deployment of colorblindness, a mode of feigning one does not see race. I am attempting to broaden their framework to include other social dynamics, such as gender and sexuality. Bonilla-Silva (2001) characterizes colorblind racism as subtle—full of double-talk and contradictions. Bonilla-Silva argues that abstract liberalism rests at the core of colorblind racism, operating through such narratives as the United States being a land of opportunity and “the use of liberal arguments—although in an abstract and decontextualized manner—to explain racial inequality” (2001, p. 161).

At the current historical moment, teachers' and students' language is situated in liberal discourses of diversity that shape education and pedagogy. In the neoliberal marketplace of the public high school classroom, colorblind ideology and political correctness shape the language participants may use in the project of maintaining safe space for open dialogue. Students are encouraged to speak from their personal experiences. Their differences, although cleansed through the language of political correctness, act as sites for examination. Multiculturalism has expanded school curricula to represent non-White cultures, but whiteness still remains at the center of the institution of schooling and pedagogy (Leonardo, 2002). The aim of politically correct language, multiculturalism, and diversity education is to create a safe space for difference, but histories of marginalization and exclusion activated through speech acts expose that truly safe spaces for difference cannot exist within asymmetrical relations of power. My suggestion is not to abandon safe space discourse altogether, but to examine its limitations. Teachers and educational leaders need to engage more in the examination of power and to place at the center of discussions of race, gender, and sexuality the structural rather than just the individual level of analysis (i.e., focus on systemic and institutional forms of racism, sexism, and heterosexism rather than individuals' perspectives and experiences of such systems of inequality). This necessarily involves identifying the unintended effects of political correctness and colorblindness in education, the centrality of whiteness and heteronormativity to the curriculum, and the limitations of additive approaches such as including a Black history month or a LGBTQ unit rather than integrating analysis of race, gender, and sexuality throughout academic subjects and timelines.

Leonardo and Porter (2010) claim that their "main criticism of safe space is that it is laced with a narcissism that designates safety for individuals in already dominant positions of power, which is not safe at all but perpetuates a systematic relation of violence" (p. 148). Thus, constructions of safe space for the purposes of liberatory pedagogy through dialogue uphold the comfort and social positions of those who benefit from such power. Whereas Leonardo and Porter assert that race dialogue runs into the formidable force of ideology (2010, p. 149), in the previous chapter I demonstrated that gender and sexuality dialogue similarly runs into ideologies that uphold White heteronormative binary gender norms. In the present chapter, I extend this argument to consider how classroom dialogues about gender and sexuality are informed and constructed by other axes of difference such as race, class, and ability. In this chapter, I also examine how identities and bodies can be designated and worked upon as marginalized spaces, like "gay" and "ghetto," in effect, silencing voices and enacting a form of violence. Whiteness and homosexuality become conflated in many ways, and when discussions of oppression become salient in classrooms, there is limited room to talk about such complicated issues that the message becomes about a hierarchy of oppressions and a privileging of diversity curricula at the expense of genuinely, deeply, even painfully, exploring oppression.

The intersectionality of multiple systems of oppression—such as race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, age, and citizenship status—is difficult to address through curricular interventions and pedagogy (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991). Targeting the interrelated goals of deepening students' understandings of systems of inequality and others' lived experiences and generating genuine structural change in a social system like a school or a classroom community proves arduous for teachers and students alike. As feminist critiques of critical pedagogy have

demonstrated, what is produced or practiced as safe space often serves the interests of those in power (Ellsworth, 1992; Luke, 1992, 1994). Hierarchies shift in different contexts, oppression is always situated, identities are fluid and multiple, social positions conflict and overlap in surprising ways, and power operates in various directions. Things can always shift, as nothing is static, rendering safe space to be a slippery construction. Despite this, efforts toward constructing safe space for difference in schools need to incorporate an analysis of power, recognition of the ways people can remain complicit and participate in unequal power relations, and room for disagreement, discomfort, painful conversations, and reflection.

Feminist critiques of radical and critical pedagogy have challenged the male-centric logic of liberal individualism and responsibility in education, which locates liberation in the personal—as a central aspect of the political—and calls on marginal groups to make public what is personal, private, and rooted in experience (Luke, 1992; Walkerdine, 1992). Indeed, democratizing the classroom speech situation and making public the personal injustices that participants experience does not alter the structural divisions upon which liberal capitalism and its knowledge industries, like the public school system, are based (Luke, 1992). Deeply embedded epistemic structures must be disrupted, as language and curricular reform alone cannot shift margins or transform ideologies.

Considering such limitations of safe space in critical dialogue and anti-oppressive education, Kevin K. Kumashiro (2001) explains that when implementing progressive pedagogies and developing safe spaces, educators must ask questions such as: Who is the Other that these spaces are for? Which differences are being affirmed? Which ones are being ignored? Do they, intentionally or not, engage in a form of identity politics that excludes their own margins? Who makes use of the safe spaces? Who feels affirmed by the progressive pedagogies? (p. 17) Taking Kumashiro's questions further, educators should ask "Who does this space harm or exclude?" and "Who does this pedagogy miss or silence?" (2001, p. 18). I suggest that examining the intricacy of who gets to speak and in what ways in school complicates the educational goals of safe space and political correctness. The limitations of safe space and the limitations of hate speech are related—as who gets to speak, how participants position others through language, and how speech acts are interpreted are shaped by the liberal discourses out of which they emerge.

Limitations of Hate Speech Discourse

The challenge in such classroom dialogues is that to try to discover the multiple truths operating for all participants—with all of their situated and emergent positionalities—dialogue and discourse have to be as open as possible. Free and open talk is generative, but also dangerous. Does describing someone or something as "so gay" qualify as hate speech? Does labeling another's behavior or social position as "ghetto" constitute hate speech? What makes hate speech so difficult to define, and thus to legislate, is the distinction between verbal and non-verbal behavior. With non-verbal behavior, actions can be agreed upon as illegal, and such actions are observable to third parties. Nevertheless, more subtle acts—like gestures and looks such as glares and eye-rolls—function in tandem with speech, and may be illegible within the legal system. Verbal behavior, on the other hand, is mediated by language, which is always ambiguous, indeterminate, and changing—indeed, language gets its meaning from the context in which it is uttered (Lakoff, 2011). There is significant debate about the legal definition of hate

speech because hate speech contains a message of inferiority and inequality while potentially falling under the purview of free speech—putting into tension the First Amendment’s guarantees of free speech and the Fourteenth Amendment’s guarantees of equality (Delgado, 1993; MacKinnon, 1993; Nielsen, 2002; Walker, 1994).

One can never tell the intentions of the speaker or if the addressees’ or over-hearers’ interpretations align with what the speaker meant to communicate. One cannot legislate intentions or perlocutionary effects (Lakoff, 2011). Moreover, who gets to decide what an utterance means? Who has the authority to judge what kinds of words may be spoken by whom in which contexts? There are no neutral words because all forms carry their condensed histories and their speakers’ intentions (Bakhtin, 1981). Ricoeur (1976) reminds us that interpretation falls in between the subjective intentions of a speaker and the objective significance of what statements mean, as interpretation is a form of decision (Leonardo, 2003a). Echoing Vološinov and Bakhtin, Leonardo (2003a) writes, “words are polysemic because they invoke as many meanings as there are situations to use them. This is an impossible situation for the social scientist and one that we make amenable by using concepts, or the temporary ‘pinning down’ of meaning” (p. 336). Moreover, perceiving always occurs from a social location, and interpretation differs between people with prior ideological commitments (Leonardo, 2003a).

Hate speech *constitutes* its addressee at the moment of its utterance, in the act of speaking and the performance of the injury where the injury is understood as social subordination (Williams, 1991). Hate speech constitutes the subject in a subordinate position. Because hate speech acts in an illocutionary way, injuring in and through the moment of speech, and constituting the subject through that injury, it exercises an interpellative function (Althusser, 1971/2011; Austin, 1962/1975; Butler, 1997). It is such interpellation—hailing someone, appealing to another’s attention, classifying and ranking others, naming who someone is and your relation to them—that constitutes ways of being visible, heard, and acknowledged. Ideology has material effects and underpinnings as it produces discourses, which recruit racialized, gendered, and sexualized subjects through interpellation (Leonardo, 2005). As Leonardo (2005) shows us, racial ideology has no outside and interpellates *every* individual into racial formation. I extend this by adding that the ideologies of binary gender and heteronormativity interpellate individuals into gendered and sexual subjects.

Butler (1997) argues that linguistic vulnerability is the ability of language to inflict physical and emotional pain. Injurious speech dislocates subjects and puts others in a marginalized space or a non-place. Injurious speech, however, causes injury *not* because of the institutional weight of certain words, but because of the iterability of discourse over time, through repetition. The histories behind individual words, the repetition of their uses through the past, and the reiteration of their injurious effects inscribe the words’ trauma on subjects’ bodies. Emotions shape the surfaces of individual and collective bodies (Ahmed, 2004). Such interpellations of being characterized and described, for example, as “gay” or “ghetto,” become incorporated, embodied, and a part of one’s habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). Because this is tied to the citational dimension of language and discourse, words and their historical density of conventions cannot be separated. Insults now echo words in the past and their condensed historicity. The condensed historicity activated in language includes words’ past iterations, connotations, affiliations, and circulations. As signs are both material and ideological and because language is a continuous generative

process realized in the social interaction of speakers, words can represent past or present meanings while also being material embodiments of such meaning (Vološinov, 1973). That is, words have material effects as well as material origins.

Names and words reach into the past, make a break with previous contexts, get resignified, and take on new meanings and illocutionary forces. Butler (1997) asserts:

...It is clear to me, especially in the example of hate speech, that contexts inhere in certain speech acts in ways that are very difficult to shake. On the other hand, I would insist that the speech act, as a rite of institution, is one whose contexts are never fully determined in advance, and that the possibility for the speech act to take on a non-ordinary meaning, to function in contexts where it has not belonged, is precisely the political promise of the performative, one that positions the performative at the center of a politics of hegemony, one that offers an unanticipated political future for deconstructive thinking. (p. 161)

Certain words are found to be so inherently problematic because of the condensed historicity they carry and represent. Indeed, speech acts are articulations of social institutions (Leonardo, 2003b). For example, the word “nigger” carries a sordid history of slavery, lynching, and institutional racism, making it nearly impossible to strip it of its sinister connotations and uses. Yet, language reflects, shapes, and is shaped by the social contexts in which it emerges (Goffman, 1981; Goodwin & Duranti, 1992; Hanks, 1996, 2006; Schegloff, 1987). The political promise of the performative is this ability for speakers to break utterances’ ties to their histories, to resignify and repopulate words with new intentions, and to use language with distance to the utterances themselves (Butler, 1997). Some examples of such a break include the reappropriation and resignification of words like “nigga” by African Americans, “queer” by queer movements and individuals, and “crip” by persons with disabilities. “Ghetto” has been resignified and commodified to mean cool, as in “ghetto-fabulous” and “ghetto-chic,” and interpreted to represent an “authentic” sense of the urban (Leonardo & Hunter, 2007).

In between the limitations of safe space and the limitations of hate speech operate the mechanisms of structuring both “safe” and politically correct speech. As I argue, discourses of safe space and diversity may actually foreclose dialogue and reinforce existing, unequal power structures. In this chapter, I interrogate the violence of performative speech acts while closely examining the thin line between politically correct speech and hate speech, which may look different yet lead to similar results—the violence of silencing. Such violence undermines the seemingly clear boundary between freedom of speech and open dialogue as well as between marginalization and silencing—showing how aiming at one can inadvertently generate the other. I argue that speech acts interpellate the identities and social positions of students in classroom interactions. By examining the ways students’ utterances render others silent, I argue that the utterances “that’s so gay” and “that’s so ghetto” marginalize others as representatives of those spaces. It is through the use of injurious speech that subjects are dislocated or spatially constituted as marginalized, and it is through the process or act of injury that this kind of interpellation takes place. In the discussion ahead, I address this process at the levels of words, speech acts, and their performativity as I examine how pedagogical efforts to create “safe spaces” for difference in dialogue can be foreclosed by the performativity of hate speech and politically correct speech.

Negotiating Safe Spaces for Difference in the Classroom

In Ms. Sims' classroom in small school A hanging just above the pencil sharpener and a safe-sex message was the flier that the gay-straight alliance made and distributed two years prior. As soon as I saw it, I was flooded with memories from my first year of fieldwork with the MacArthur High gay-straight alliance. I remembered walking around with students during their lunch periods in April of 2008, distributing these very same fliers to teachers and posting them in the hallways and common spaces. I was surprised to see the GSA visibility poster, as most of the fliers in the hallways had been ripped down within the hour of our posting them. But, occasionally in a classroom or on a bulletin board in some empty corridor, I would find the visibility materials made by the GSA student club over the years tacked to the institutional walls of the school.

For the Day of Silence in April 2008, the students in the GSA made a flier with a logo and text explaining their request that students refrain from using the expression "That's so gay." An image of the GSA's flier is found below in Figure 9.

Figure 9. GSA Visibility Poster (2008)



The text in the poster read:

"That's so gay." We hear these words every day to describe everything, from a pencil that breaks to an essay assignment. But what is the power of these words? The MacArthur High School Gay-Straight Alliance is organizing a Day of Silence. We encourage everyone, on April 18th, to be aware of their language, either by participation in this silent day of resistance or by refraining from using those three hateful words. We are only asking for a day, one day, when lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students, staff, and their allies can walk through the halls without hearing hate speech. Our hope is that by really thinking about the language we use, phrases like "That's so gay" will stop being so common and that MacArthur High will become a safer place for all of its students.

The text asks the poignant question: *What is the power of these words?* The power of these three words, the text and students in the GSA assert, is akin to hate speech. Hate speech is generally

defined as any written or oral communication that disparages a group of people based on some characteristic, like sexuality in this case, and that is used with the intention to offend, intimidate, degrade, dehumanize, incite violence, or express contempt. In this case, students in the GSA experienced the interpellative force of “that’s so gay” as hate speech. Gay and lesbian students rarely used the expression “that’s so gay,” but when they did, it was used to signify homosexual, queer, flamboyant, or of a campy aesthetic. In-group usage of the expression “that’s so gay” carries different meanings and does not convey negativity, unlike when a straight gender normative person uses the same words. Because hate speech functions in an illocutionary way, constituting its subject through its injury, the students felt the interpellative force of “that’s so gay” as a hateful insult (Althusser, 1971/2011; Austin, 1962/1975; Butler, 1997). Indeed, this feeling was strong enough to prompt the club to make and distribute these visibility posters throughout the school.

The text in the GSA poster points to the potential prospect that a school environment absent of expressions such as “that’s so gay” would be a safer place for everyone. The GSA makes a critical point that such language, commonly heard in the hallways and classrooms at MacArthur High, shapes the context in which everyone—including queer students, questioning students, gender non-conforming students, and straight students alike—must learn. The commonality of hearing “that’s so gay” to refer to something being bad or stupid and the reiterative practices of naming things as such on a daily basis, in effect, create a schooling context that is not safe for everyone.

By constituting the subject through the injury, “that’s so gay” exercises an interpellative function (Althusser, 1971/2011; Butler, 1997). It is this naming of “that’s so gay” to disparage and to subordinate that interpellates all the people and practices that are associated with and populate the word “gay.” For the students who identify as gay or for those who are seen by their peers as gay regardless of how they may identify,¹⁷ the expression “that’s so gay” interpellates them into the comment, naming them as equivalent to stupid or bad and making them the subject of the insult, if at times inadvertently. Thus, for the students in the GSA who felt “that’s so gay” was akin to hate speech, the expression caused an injury that named them as the ideological subjects of a qualifying statement whose meanings are negative and pejorative. The process of interpellation occurs in “gay” being named as representing the undesirable, stupid, and worthless quality to which something is being compared. This is experienced by the students in the GSA as the “instant recognition and location” of interpellation (Law, 2000), placing them in a subordinate social position and wielding their identity and community as the basis of an insult. It also names its superior other, or heterosexuals.

As Leonardo and Porter (2010) demonstrate, “for marginalized and oppressed minorities, *there is no safe space*” (p. 149). Attempting to construct a safer space by eliminating injurious speech such as “that’s so gay” both works against open critical dialogue and reinscribes the power of such words through silence. Through its visual medium, the GSA’s poster creates borders around what is permissible speech, but in an attempt to sanitize language, it potentially shuts down dialogue. While the sign pushes students to reconsider the meanings and effects of their words, it

¹⁷ A common misconception is that *all* the students in the GSA must be gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer, when in actuality some are heterosexual, some are unsure and questioning how they may identify their gender or sexuality, while others come from or live in queer families.

frames the students' words as derogatory and as violating rules of political correctness. The posters, meant to prevent hate speech, inadvertently enact silencing of parallel and intersecting discussions of race, class, ability, gender, and sexuality. What are the limits and unintended consequences of censorship?

Socratic Dialogues, Processes of Differentiation, and Safe Space

Early one sunny May morning, I arrived at Ms. Sims' classroom in small school A to find written on the white board, "Agenda: Socratic." Ms. Sims was an African American woman from the Midwest who was in her early thirties. She was a dancer and carried herself with youthfulness and composure. On this particular day, she wore her hair in pigtails and donned a sweatshirt with the school's name and logo on it. A student named Galen walked in with me and said to Ms. Sims, "We're having Socratic today?" to which she responded, "Yes," pointing to the board. As if on cue, students started moving around and rearranging the desks into two circles. As they pushed around desks, the sounds of metal legs screeching across vinyl flooring along with students talking and laughing filled the room. Petra, a small girl wearing a pink flower in her hair, started jokingly fighting and throwing fake punches with her classmates Marcus and Ron. In the shuffle of bodies and desks in the room, some students played, others pushed furniture around and orchestrated the arrangement of the circles, while still others lethargically dragged their belongings from one place to another, apparently still struggling to wake up.

Ms. Sims was chatting with a few of her students as the others rearranged the desks in the space of the classroom. Once the circles for the Socratic seminar were formed and the students took their seats, Ms. Sims began her morning announcements. Before observing her class, I already knew a few of Ms. Sims' freshman students from their participation in the gay-straight alliance. Because my role in the classrooms at MacArthur High was often to sit in the back or to the side—anywhere out of the way—and observe teachers' and students' social interactions, I tried to quickly settle and be as unobtrusive as possible. I scribbled furiously in my notebooks racing to capture my observations of the physical space, participants, language, and moments in interaction as they unfolded. I talked with students as they turned to me with questions and comments, taking note of the analysis they sometimes subtly hit on as they shared their perspectives with me.

Leading up to this day, throughout the course of the academic year, Ms. Sims provided tools of engagement for the students, or rules and norms for participating in Socratic seminars. She provided scaffolding for the students' discussions in the form of established guidelines for participation, feedback on process, and structure. Socratic seminars became routine class activities for Ms. Sims' students, so much so that restructuring bodies and desks in the space of the classroom to accommodate the activity required minimal instruction and direction this morning as students pushed around furniture. Additionally, the teacher's instructions may have targeted the *form* of the students' language and participation, but not the *content* of their discussions in Socratic. In Socratic seminar, dialogue was to be as open as possible for participants to explore contradictory and overlapping ideas and beliefs.

Socratic seminar was a familiar class structure and activity for Ms. Sims' Freshman Humanities and History class. During Socratic seminars the desks were arranged in two concentric circles

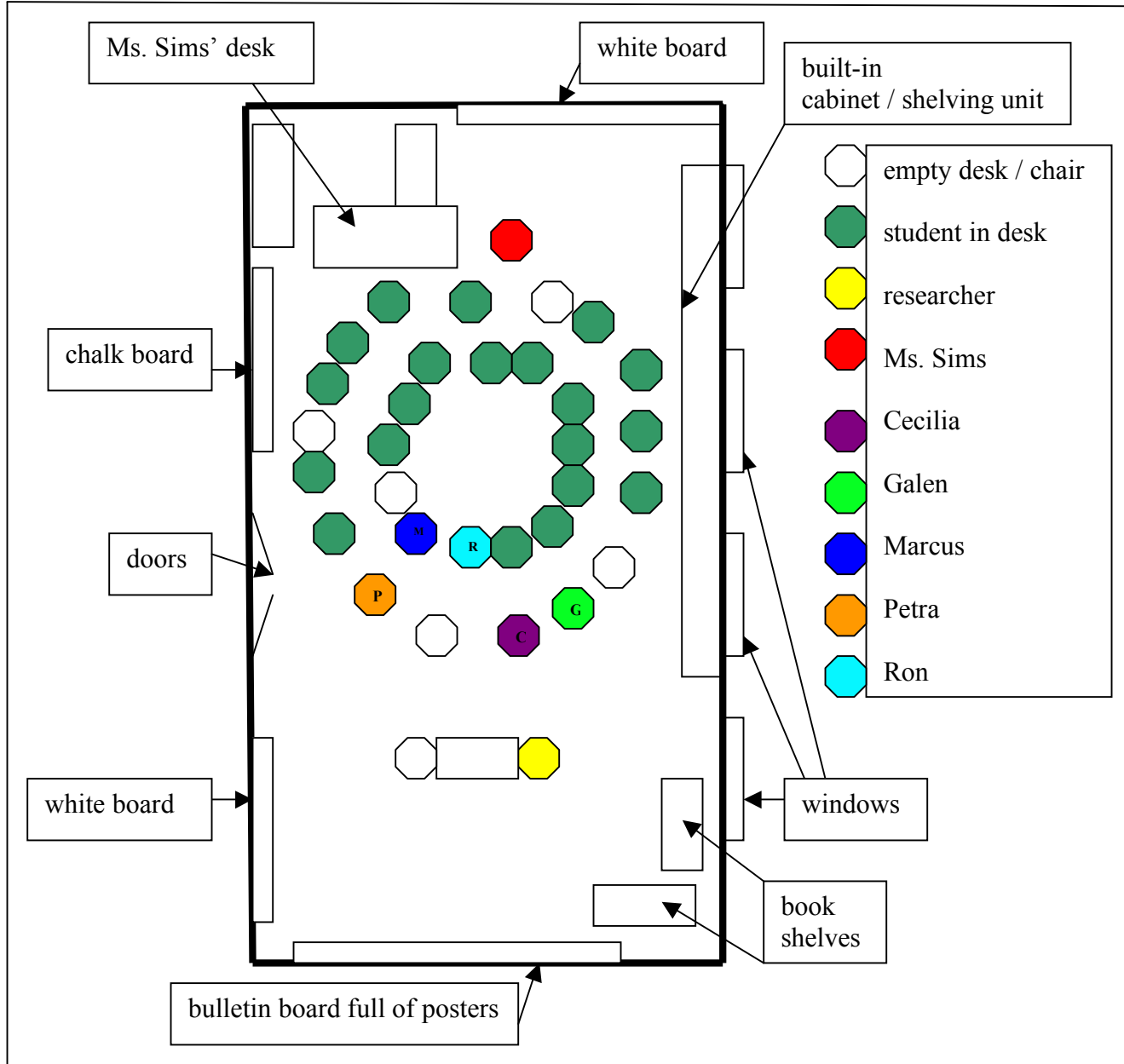
facing toward the center. Students who sat in the inside circle would carry on a discussion while the outside circle listened, and then the two groups would switch positions and roles. A list of prompts and questions were usually on the white board for the students to choose from to guide their discussion. On this particular day, some of the prompts on the board included:

1. Why is homophobia the last acceptable prejudice?
2. Is it socially acceptable to say, “That’s so gay” or “That’s hella gay”?
3. Should straight people be allowed to say, “queer” or should they say, “the Q word”?
4. Are people born straight or do they choose to be straight? How do you know?
5. Debate reasons for and against Proposition 8

These questions, in addition to many more that Ms. Sims had edited and eliminated, were generated by the students individually and in small groups during class time on an earlier day. After reading an article about Proposition 8, Ms. Sims directed the students to think of discussion prompts related to gender and sexuality for their Socratic seminar. As they thought of questions, the students wrote them on small pieces of paper and handed them in to Ms. Sims for final approval. On the day illustrated below, to begin the Socratic seminar the students sat in the two circles—one nested inside the other—and began discussing Proposition 8, the voter proposition and constitutional amendment passed in 2008 to ban same-sex marriage in California.

Marcus and Ron were seated in the inside circle while Petra sat directly behind them in the outside circle. Next to Petra in the outside circle were Galen and Cecilia. Cecilia was a tall White girl who dressed in a punk style, often wearing t-shirts of various punk bands, tight jeans with holes, Converse sneakers, and sunglasses, even while indoors during class. Cecilia was outspoken and energetic, often filling up more verbal and participation space than others around her. Throughout most of the Socratic seminar, Cecilia frequently interjected with her opinion despite being seated in the outside circle where she was supposed to quietly listen and not participate in the discussion. Galen was Cecilia’s close friend, and they often sat and hung out together in class. She was also White and had a similar punk style to Cecilia’s. Galen had green highlights in her hair and a black jean jacket she wore everyday. Galen often talked about being raised by a gay dad and how she felt it made her experience and perspective different from others with straight parents. Galen was soft-spoken in comparison with her peers, but she frequently participated in class discussions. Petra was a short Latina girl who lived with her aunt in a neighboring city known for its crime and bankrupt public school system. She carried her small frame with strength, and she spoke with conviction. Petra designed and made jewelry, and she considered herself an artist first and foremost. On this day, Petra was wearing a skirt, a scoop-neck sweater that displayed her gold necklaces, Ugg boots, and a delicate flower in her hair behind one ear. Petra often hung out with Marcus and Ron, both of whom were African American boys who went to the same middle school, and the three of them had a close camaraderie that involved playing and laughing as well as defending and supporting each other. Marcus was a member of the football team, played bass in the school jazz ensemble, and had a strong interest in history, frequently connecting current social phenomena he observed back to moments and movements in history. He sometimes talked about his experience being raised in a house full of women, connecting such lived experience to his perspective on things discussed in class. Ron was quieter than his classmates, and he usually wrote and drew in his notebook more than he spoke in class discussions. A representation of Ms. Sims’ classroom space, the arrangement of desks into concentric circles for the Socratic seminar, and the locations of key participants to the discussion can be found below in Figure 10.

Figure 10. Floor diagram of Ms. Sims' class arranged for Socratic seminar



The physical space of the classroom was divided into the central space of the two concentric circles and the outside fringes that did not fit into the circles, the space in which Ms. Sims and I—the researcher—were positioned. The arrangement of students' bodies focused inward toward the center metaphorically reflected the space of the Socratic seminar, the dialogue for which was supposed to rotate around a central topic or question. Positioning students' bodies in two concentric circles helped shape the Socratic discussion, intended to direct their attention inward toward the topic at hand and the process of conducting a seminar. The way the class was physically organized, one group—the one situated in the outside circle—was to be silent while

the other group was to speak. The spatial locations of those on the margins and those who are not permitted to speak were situated around the outside edges of the Socratic discussion happening in the inside circle.

While the group on the inside circle discussed Proposition 8, Cecilia tried to jump in and insert her opinion various times. For the most part, Ms. Sims allowed the students to direct their own conversation and to manage their own participation. As Cecilia repeatedly cut into the inner circle's discussion, Ms. Sims told her to wait her turn and to not interrupt. Ms. Sims stood outside of the circles but directly across from Cecilia so as to be in her line of vision. Although the tone of the discussion of Proposition 8 and gay marriage was civil and respectful, not all students agreed on the issues discussed. Some students spoke from their experiences in families that they believed would ostracize them if they disclosed their queer identities, acknowledging the closets in which they lived. Other students discussed their family members' oppositions to gay marriage and how their personal beliefs either resonated or conflicted with their family's. Still other students spoke about the ways Proposition 8 impacted their queer families. At one point in time, Cecilia repeatedly tried to interrupt the conversation in order to question the institution of marriage and its personal, religious, and social meanings. Even though Ms. Sims tried to rein in Cecilia's interruptions, the students engaged with her questions, debating the merits and drawbacks of distributing certain rights or privileges through lines drawn by marriage.

After about twenty minutes, Ms. Sims indicated that it was the halfway point for class period and time for the students in the inner and outer circles to switch places and roles. The students stood up and moved from their desks, switching from their positions in either the inner or the outer circle to the other. They settled into new places, and Cecilia picked up the discussion, "As I was saying..." and carried on with her thought. The students continued discussing their positions on gay marriage and the institution of marriage more generally. At one point Galen turned around to Ron and asked him about his opinion to which he replied, "I'm not in the inside circle, so I can't talk now." Despite her place in the inner circle, Petra—like Ron and the other students who were seated in the outside circle—remained silent throughout much of the discussion.

"That's so Gay" and "That's so Ghetto": Contested Comparisons

Toward the end of the Socratic seminar, with about eight minutes remaining in the fifty-eight minute class period, Ms. Sims called on two students who had not been talking much by saying, "Let's hear from Petra and Elijah."¹⁸

Petra commented, "I really don't have anything to say on this topic, but there are other things. Galen said something about how it's socially acceptable to say 'that's so gay,' and then she used the example, 'that's so Black.' But actually a lot of people *do* use that term, but in *different* words like, 'that's so ghetto' to mean that's so hard. Like seriously? I don't see why everyone is

¹⁸ I jotted down in shorthand in my field notebook the Socratic seminar conversation as it unfolded. Immediately after the end of the school day, I typed up my notes into a reproduction of the class dialogue. I have chosen to include excerpts taken from one eight-minute Socratic seminar conversation in particular. The entirety of the conversation has been reproduced in Appendix I so that the reader can see what transpired through the participants' words without my editing and perhaps also feel how tangible the frustration experienced by the participants was in the moment.

so on this whole ‘that’s so *gay*’ thing but they always discriminate against people who are from a different part of the ...”

Petra, speaking more quickly and more ardently, continued, “That you guys always get so upset about somebody saying, ‘that’s so gay’ about something, but then you think it’s okay to use the term, ‘that’s so ghetto.’ You don’t think it’s bad or that horrible to make comments based on race, but it is.”

Cecilia interrupted, “Nobody here thinks that’s okay.”

Petra asked, “Well, then why do you have this whole thing about ‘that’s so gay’ but not another term. You are still discriminating against somebody.”

Cecilia insisted, “We are not discriminating.”

Ms. Sims stopped their conversation and to Cecilia said, “You are totally missing her point.”

Cecilia answered, “No, she’s right. I agree.”

Petra yelled, “Then why the hell are you...?!” not finishing her question before she grabbed her bag and stormed out of the room. The classroom’s swinging door slammed as it shut behind her.

As this happened Ms. Sims said, “It’s okay,” and Cecilia expressed surprised with a low “Whoa.”

After Petra left the room, some students looked around at each other whispering about what had just happened while other students looked to Ms. Sims to comment. Ms. Sims tried to start her statement three times, “What you are missing here... What you guys are missing here...” but students were talking, making it difficult for others to hear her. To get their attention Ms. Sims loudly asserted, “Stop talking!” and continued more softly, “What you are missing here is that while you might agree, it does not come across that way. It sounds very contentious and very disagreeable. The way it comes out is disrespectful. You may not mean it that way, but that’s just hurting-”

Cecilia responded, “When I say something, afterwards she won’t stop talking.”

Ms. Sims explained, “But she’s not finished,” which Marcus supported by saying, “She’s not done.” Ms. Sims continued, “If you’re not done, you’re not done.”

Cecilia, “But then she starts yelling about it.”

Marcus continued, “Well, she’s not done. She hasn’t gotten her whole point out. She’s trying to get it out and then you guys are cutting her off.” Marcus, who had been observing the discussion unfold, defended Petra’s position by saying, “She felt as if you guys didn’t fully hear her. She was making her statement over and over again *because* you guys were talking *over* her and her voice was dropping off.”

A girl in the outside circle asked, “Can we please stop talking about Petra and move on?”

Betty, in her low monotone voice, slowly began, “Okay, so first. I just don’t think that... she said you guys *always* are like getting all upset about people saying ‘that’s so gay’ and not about ‘that’s so black’ and ‘that’s so ghetto’ or whatever, but how do we address that? How can people get that it’s not out of disrespect, it’s not about anger. You know in Socratic at the beginning of the year when we had the unit on race, we *talked* about this—about people saying ‘that’s so ghetto.’ We talked about that, and we’re not always getting angry about one or the other.”

Galen added, “The thing is yeah, everyone knows that and people tune it out. We were talking about that because our subject was gay marriage. We were not talking about the ghetto life or anything. Our subject was involving our sexuality. We weren’t talking about that. If we were talking about the ghetto and everything, race and stuff, of course you’d bring that up. But we are talking about sexuality right now, and that’s why we are bringing it up.”

(Excerpted from Fieldnote Small School A 3A, 1st period, 5/12/10).

“Gay” and “Ghetto”: Multivalent Interpretations and Interpellations

Interpellating Marginalized Physical and Discursive Spaces

In this example, the exclusionary spaces of “ghetto” and “gay” are applied to certain racialized, gendered, and sexualized identities through interpellation. The physical and discursive spaces of “ghetto” and “gay” are constituted through the histories of these terms, their usages, and meanings that they carry. The “safe space” for open dialogue about these issues is constructed in the classroom through the establishment of guidelines for participation. Yet, legislating responses according to norms, which are necessary for structuring the process, may be another form of violence if it is too predetermined. The marginalized identities represented by “ghetto” and “gay” structure participants’ positions and feelings as well as the façade that the “safe space” of open dialogue about race, gender, and sexuality is really neutral and safe. Students of color, queer, and gender non-conforming students come into the space of the classroom discussion already being interpellated as embodied spaces of exclusion, as represented by “ghetto” and “gay.” Here one can see what happens to safety in the space of classroom dialogue when students are already excluded through their interpellation as embodying and representing marginalized physical and discursive spaces.

As Leonardo and Porter (2010) assert, there is a need to develop a safe space for taking risks because when one student in the room is experiencing safety, someone else is experiencing violence. Safe space for gender and sexuality dialogue is typically reserved for intentional communities like the GSA, constructed as a haven from homophobia and transphobia, but challenges the order of classroom discussion. Can classrooms be safe spaces to talk about gender and sexuality? On the other hand, safe space for race dialogue is created at the expense of the safety and comfort of people of color in order to provide White people sanctioned ways to think through race while maintaining White comfort zones. Leonardo and Porter (2010) call for violence in a Fanonian way, suggesting “that a humanizing form of violence, a non-repressive

expression of power, returns people to their rightful place, just as the violence of decolonization can potentially cancel the molesting power of colonialism” (p. 140). As anti-oppressive educators have noted, disrupting the stability of racist, heterosexist, and sexist norms requires some degree of violence in the transformation of enduring systems of inequality (Kumashiro, 2001).

Petra’s silence throughout the course of the classroom discussion, until she was called upon at the end, carried various meanings. Her silence was voluntary and self-imposed, yet also structured by her classmates’ talk. Petra’s silence was expressive, in that it marked her refusal to speak, which can be read as both a means of resistance and an affirmation of identity (Luke, 1994). Petra’s silence was also expressive of her withdrawal from the conversation—a withdrawal she later extended by physically removing her body from the space of the classroom. Her silence was temporary and situational, as Petra attempted to join the conversation when called on by her teacher. At that point, Petra’s engagement was continually disrupted, as Cecilia interrupted Petra multiple times, not waiting to let Petra finish her statements. Over and over, Cecilia cut off the space in the dialogue for Petra to make a complete point, interrupting her thoughts and talking over her voice, foreclosing the opportunity for Cecilia to fully hear and understand Petra’s perspective.

When Petra did begin to speak, she referred back to a point Galen had made at the beginning of the Socratic discussion. At the beginning of their conversation, before focusing on Proposition 8 and gay marriage, the students addressed the first prompt on the board, “Why is homophobia the last acceptable prejudice?” In connecting the use of “that’s so gay” to homophobia, Galen had asked, “How would you feel if someone said, ‘Oh, that’s so Black?’ Because that’s how we feel.” Echoing Galen’s connection between “that’s so gay” and “that’s so Black,” Petra responded to Galen’s hypothetical question she had asked thirty minutes earlier. While Galen had tried to extend a hypothetical situation—what if someone said, “Oh, that’s so Black?”—Petra answered that, in fact, people *do* say such things but in different words like ghetto. “Ghetto,” as Petra explained, stands in as a signifier for Black, hard, and by extension, other communities of color living in low-income neighborhoods. In this exchange, Petra was speaking from her experience of feeling marginalized by virtue of her social location as a person of color and her physical location of home, in a neighborhood some would call the ghetto. Through her statements, Petra was positioned as representing and speaking for the space of the ghetto, her body and identity interpellated to stand in for all the connotations associated with “ghetto” as she challenged her classmates’ uncritical use of the expression “that’s so ghetto.”

The term “ghetto”—as a colorblind term—stands in metonymically for “Black.” Expressions of “that’s so ghetto,” used to signify poor in quality or poor in terms of social class, sidestep what they mean to signify: blackness and Black people. Here, colorblind ideology is at work, as saying “that’s so Black” might elicit scrutiny and censure from others as well as the worst of insults: that one is racist. “Ghetto” operates on the very colorblindness found in safe space and spaces marked by difference, while “gay” has shifted in evolution over time to signify happy, then queer, and now stupid. “Gay,” in contrast to “ghetto,” has taken on a new meaning altogether, as it has come to describe something as foolish and undesirable. The complexity of the data presented in this chapter illustrates how by using “ghetto” as a proxy, one gets at the euphemisms of not saying Black, while using “gay” signifies stupid and positions someone or

something as the object of ridicule. The fluidity of the terms “gay” and “ghetto” can be seen in their multiple uses and meanings. “Gay” can be pejorative as in stupid or bad, but it also can be positive and affirming as in “gay pride” or “gay-chic.” Similarly, “ghetto” can be negative as in trashy or low-class, can stand in metonymically for communities of color, but it also can be positive as in “ghetto-fabulous” and “ghetto-chic.” “Ghetto” has been commodified through inventions of capitalist consumerism, selling to White people as well as to people of color things that are “ghetto-fabulous” and “ghetto-chic” along with all the representations and images tied up with the terms, whereas “gay” has not been commodified in the same way. The commodification of “gay” plays on a camp aesthetic associated with flamboyance and exaggerated femininity, sold for purchase at annual gay pride celebrations, drag queen shows, and other avenues primarily targeting LGBTQ communities and consumers. The fluidity of these terms affords a wide range of possible interpretations, and as situated in the current moment of political correctness and colorblind racism, people can call something “gay” or “ghetto” whether or not they mean these terms as discriminatory epithets.

“That’s So” Formulations

Such language as “that’s so” formulations are circulated widely through the informal spaces of the hallways and courtyards as well as the more formal spaces of the classrooms and lessons. “That’s so gay” and “that’s so ghetto,” linked by their parallel ‘that’s so’ constructions, are used to denigrate, make fun of, and position people, their behaviors, objects, and certain places as marginal. This is seen in other ‘that’s so’ constructions like “that’s so retarded,” which like “that’s so gay” refers to something being stupid and undesirable, and “that’s so Asian” or “that’s so Mexican,” which position members of ethnic and racial groups as “other.” Interestingly, expressions like “that’s so Black” have little circulation, operating within the ideology of colorblind racism and political correctness, as uttering such an expression would mean acknowledging what one can instead metonymically signify with “that’s so ghetto.” Similarly, “that’s so White” was used rarely, instead often substituted with “that’s so gay” when making fun of White sensibilities. In this case, gayness is equated to whiteness, contributing to the erasure of people of color who may identify as LGBTQ. Students’ uses of “that’s so Black” did not match their use of other racial categories and expressions, as in “that’s so Asian” and “that’s so Mexican.” The former was rarely uttered and not socially sanctioned, while the latter two expressions were far more commonplace in circulation amongst the students at MacArthur High. On the other hand, “that’s so gay” was far more accepted and circulated socially than “that’s so Black,” as the latter draws attention to the racial formation of Black communities and identities, working against the sensibilities of a colorblind ideology.

“That’s so” expressions served to qualify and describe things and people, with “that” operating as a relative pronoun to stand in for the object under inquiry or the object being represented, “that’s” being a contraction of “that is,” and “so” providing emphasis on the adjective to follow. “That’s so” formulations were used to qualify and describe things as being exemplary or overly representative of a certain quality (e.g., gay or ghetto) or of belonging to a certain ethnic or gendered group (e.g., Black, Asian, guy, or girl). On some occasions, “that’s so” expressions were preceded with an “oh” to index the overly obviousness of the statement, to mark it as new information that may challenge previously held beliefs, or to heighten the emphasis of the statement. As demonstrated by linguistics scholars, responses prefaced with “oh” are used to

acknowledge new information (Heritage, 1984; Schiffrin, 1987) and to function as a change of state token, or to enact a change in participants' state of knowledge or information (Heritage, 1998).

The students connected expressions like “that’s so ghetto,” “that’s so Black,” “that’s so gay,” “you’re such a guy,” “you’re such a girl,” and “you’re so Asian,” as being similar instances of stereotyping. In a later conversation, the students extended this list of expressions to include, “that’s so Asian,” “that’s so White,” “that’s so beaner,” and “that’s so Mexican,” too. Petra was trying to argue that *all* of these expressions function to stereotype and discriminate, and therefore, any movement to target one form but not another would be hypocritical or incomplete. Because Petra was unable to finish completing her statements and their classmates were unable to hear her point, Marcus offered his interpretation. Marcus’s analysis bridged multiple axes of difference at a moment when his classmates attempted to separate and untangle race and sexuality from one another. His analysis further linked multiple marginalized communities and their feelings caused by the use of such expressions, asserting that one should not feel more justified or more hurt “because others feel really the exact same way.” Petra’s comment highlighted that statements made about sexuality became the focus of the GSA’s and other students’ interventions into sanitizing language, while comments made about race tended to pass under the radar, sanctioned as acceptable despite their discriminatory undertones.

Betty’s comment, “I think what she was saying is that the whole phrase, ‘that’s so gay’ is way over played,” demonstrated Betty’s ability to be self-reflexive and to engage in self-making projects (Giddens, 1991). Betty—a White girl who identified as straight when others pushed her to define her sexuality—was active in the GSA, had two older sisters who self-identified as queer, and frequently targeted students’ use of the expression ‘that’s so gay.’ Reflecting on Petra’s perspective, Betty stepped outside of her position as an ally to the LGBTQ community to consider Petra’s stance that Betty and others had focused too much on ‘that’s so gay’ as an offensive gesture. Engaging in a reflexive project of the self (Giddens, 1991), Betty considered how her actions might be interpreted by Petra and how her role in generating talk about ‘that’s so gay’ may be perceived.

Identifying Spaces with Bodies: Filling Spaces with Words

As Petra tried to state her point that saying “that’s so ghetto” is equally problematic, she found her body and identity interpellated through the process of enacting and representing the marginalized space of the ghetto. Indeed, Paperson (2010) illustrates that the ghetto is not just a space, but a portable status that can be cast onto bodies. Here Petra, by virtue of her social location, class, and place of residence, represented the space of the ghetto through her stance and public declaration that saying “that’s so ghetto” is stereotyping about difference.

As Leonardo and Porter (2010) argued, one symptom of structural racism is a politics of White disengagement. Whites can disengage from confronting their racial privilege, the history of racial formations and the effects, and their complicit role in reproducing unequal power relations. Whites can disengage even when they seem to engage and even when they may be unaware of what they are doing. At the heart of White disengagement is a fear and a refusal to acknowledge Whites’ participation in unequal power relations, their position of privilege and the accrued

benefits whiteness offers, and their actions that have been racist. Disavowing and ignoring race while turning away from projects that can truly revolutionize power structures and unseat White power activates White disengagement.

We can see White disengagement in Cecilia's refutations and denials of Petra's point. Cecilia interrupts Petra at various points to counter her with, "Nobody here thinks that's okay" and "We are not discriminating." Even though Cecilia is engaging in the conversation, she is disengaging from the project of hearing Petra, of recognizing race and racism, and of reflecting on her own social position, practices, and power. Although race is one of the subject matters on the table, Cecilia disengages from acknowledging its role, effects, and centrality to the issue being discussed—how "that's so ghetto," which stands in to signify "that's so Black," is or is not like "that's so gay."

Petra's disengagement, on the other hand, is disengagement from the oppressed. Petra's disengagement is evident both in her reluctance to speak during the discussion until she was called upon by an authority figure and in her impulse to leave the classroom when the conversation proved frustrating for her. Petra disengaged by removing her body from the physical space of the classroom and by removing her voice from the metaphorical space of the discussion. She excluded herself from the dialogue, in part, because she was already absent, only made present through such interpellation. As I showed in the previous chapter, such disengagement was also a common tactic used by Anna—the gender non-conforming African American girl who was often teased and called "trans" by her peers for failing to adhere to rigid binary gender norms discussed in Chapter 4.

Petra's silence performed her refusal to speak and to engage with her classmates in this discussion. Petra's removal of her body and voice from the physical space of the classroom solidified her refusal to participate in a dialogue from which she already felt excluded. Engaging in silence as a part of dialogue, Petra demonstrated how refusing to speak can perform resistance, push normative understandings, and deny one's interpellation as marginalized spaces. Petra's silence performed multiple functions—marking her refusal to participate, signifying her feelings for the issues at hand, and communicating her disagreement with her classmates. Indeed, Petra's silence was legible to others, including Ms. Sims and Marcus, who interpreted her silence and her departure from the classroom space as being steeped in multiple meanings.

The silences that emerged out of the "safe space" of the Socratic discussion were filled by the interruptions of one White girl in particular, Cecilia. Ron, on the other hand, stuck close to the rules, adhering to the management implied by the Socratic seminar classroom structure, as when he passed up an opportunity to speak by virtue of his location. The foundation of such rules implied that such discussions can be done through order. Cecilia's persistent interruptions, however, demonstrated that these rules did not work. Because the rules were not working, Petra needed to leave. Petra's absence and silence point to the illusion of "safe space." The fact that Petra felt so marginalized by the discussion that she preferred to remove her body from the classroom space indicates that the absence and silence of Petra in the "safe space" of the Socratic dialogue carried deeper meanings. Cecilia's disengagement through refusals and denials as well as Petra's silences and physical disengagement from the Socratic seminar contributed toward understanding within communicative action (Habermas, 1987).

Ms. Sims' response, in an effort to refocus her students, was to yell above her students' voices, "Stop talking!" Although this pedagogical move cut off the students' discussions as they tried to make sense of what had just happened, it served to focus the class on Ms. Sims as she began to explain Petra's frustration with the dialogue. Ms. Sims' speech act of commanding the students to stop talking generated another silence. Cecilia continued to interrupt her other classmates and Ms. Sims, prompting the teacher's exclamation that the students stop talking.

After Petra left the classroom, the students and Ms. Sims engaged in the reflective process of trying to understand what had happened in the discussion to set Petra off. The focus of their processing, however, was on the form of the students' engagement in the discussion rather than the content of their talk. They addressed procedure by focusing on the students' practices of interrupting one another, talking over each other, not listening, not feeling heard, raising their voices, and using terms of representation. Here, the conversation shifted from being about "that's so gay" and "that's so ghetto" expressions to being about the etiquette of discussion, or communication styles, rather than the content of their discussion. The intervention of the teacher was not about the injury or the content of these words, but about the communication styles deployed in the Socratic discussion. The point of Petra's intervention—to discuss the interrelatedness and juxtaposition of "that's so gay" and "that's so ghetto"—became absorbed in the discipline of the moment. The intention of the activity was to have a Socratic dialogue on the topic, but the failure of this discussion demonstrates that safe space is difficult to cultivate in a class.

In response to Petra abandoning the Socratic seminar, different students began speaking for her, including males of color who were her close friends and who were able to interpret her silences and departure as being full of significance. Cecilia began by speaking of Petra in the third person, "She's yelling at us every single time..." attempting to explain how she heard Petra's words as combative. Focusing on the level of semantics, Cecilia saw herself reflected in Petra's use of the word 'you,' taking Petra's statements as personal attacks against her, while Ms. Sims and Marcus disambiguated this term to extend to representing anyone or everyone more generally speaking. The disambiguated general 'you' Petra used was heard by Cecilia as a directed 'you' personally targeting Cecilia. Cecilia's feelings of being singled out by Petra's use of 'you' reflected her inability or unwillingness to hear Petra's 'I-statements,' or Petra's opinions like "I don't see why everyone is so on the whole 'that's so *gay*' thing."

Because she left the physical space of the classroom, Petra's intervention, in turn, was voiced by Ms. Sims and Marcus in her absence. Marcus spoke for Petra when he said, "She's not done" explaining Petra's frustration with her classmates' interruptions. Marcus, as a close friend of Petra's, a person of color, and a witness to what unfolded in their Socratic seminar, was sanctioned to speak for Petra in her absence. Marcus took on the role of interpreting Petra's affect and communicating to the class why she reacted the way that she did. He continued, "She hasn't gotten her whole point out. She's trying to get it out and then you guys are cutting her off." Marcus later expanded on this when he said, "She felt as if you guys didn't fully hear her. She was making her statement over and over again *because* you guys were talking *over* her and her voice was dropping off." Here, Marcus was positioned as Petra's spokesperson, and Marcus was given full license to read, analyze, and report on Petra's behaviors and words in her absence.

Marcus' and Petra's affective relationship—their friendship, their shared home of the ghetto dictated by their social locations, and their alliance to other communities and individuals of color—generated a strong enough alliance for Marcus to represent Petra and her opinions.

In Petra's absence, Petra's classmate requested everyone stop talking about her. This was a call to stop bringing Petra and her perspective into a discussion through speculation after she was no longer present to represent herself. In the absence of the subject, interpellation continued to work through the process of representation. Interpellation does not necessarily require one's consent or physical presence in order to call people into subject formation, but the process of interpellation can also misfire (Austin, 1962/1975; Butler, 1997). As Petra was talked about and talked for, her words and positions continued to be engaged by her classmates in the discussion. Nevertheless, as Cecilia and Galen were leaving the room, they commented on the pattern or trend within which Petra's behavior was situated. They claimed that every time they had Socratic seminars, or attempts at open dialogue about difficult issues like race, gender, and sexuality, Petra would get mad, yell, and leave. This indicated that this was not the first time Petra felt such a feeling of frustration in her body, being interpellated as a person of color or as the space of the ghetto in these classroom discussions. Petra's actions communicated her need to leave the space, to abandon dialogue altogether by giving up on talk rather than just remaining silent, and to escape interpellation—or at least witnessing her self, body, race, and class position being fixed by her classmates' words.

Reflecting on the process, Betty suggested that part of the problem was the attitude Petra conveyed through her comments. Reading Petra's engagement as attitude, Betty was beginning to consider ways of justifying how her classmates could have read Petra's words as hostile, angry, or unproductive. Leonardo and Porter (2010) explained this as, "whites interpret minority anger as a distancing move, or the confirmation of the 'angry' person of color archetype, rather than its opposite: an attempt to engage the other, to be vulnerable to the other, to be recognized by the other, to be the other for the other" (p. 151). Rather than read Petra's affect as attitude, Marcus read it as frustration. Petra's frustration can be located in the multiple interruptions she experienced, in not being heard by her classmates, and in her inability to get across her message to the group. It is through emotions, or how one responds to objects and others, that surfaces and boundaries are made: the 'I' and the 'we' are shaped by and take the shape of contact with others (Ahmed, 2004). Petra's frustration—her response to her classmates' interruptions and inability or unwillingness to hear her—shaped the Socratic discussion, her classmates' experiences, and the ways others engaged with her ideas. The ambiguities of language's multiple meanings and uses operate in the field of affect, generating multivalent interpretations that elicit a range of emotions from participants. In the discourse of political correctness, affect is further cloaked in ambiguity, veiled by the cleansing or whitewashing of language.

The students' discussion at the end of this incident reflected a larger trend I witnessed across classrooms, small schools, and clubs at MacArthur High School. This trend included the tendency to compartmentalize systems of oppression like race, ethnicity, class, ability, gender, sexuality, citizenship status, and others. When discussions became heated or emotionally charged, students and teachers tended to engage in a meta-narrative that attempted to segregate axes of difference. Participants would try to focus on which lines of difference were being activated and which lines were not salient or relevant to the issue at hand. For example, Galen's

explanation that talking about ‘that’s so gay’ was salient while ‘that’s so ghetto’ was not because they “were not talking about the ghetto life or anything” illustrated this tendency. Frequently, students were reminded by other students or by their teachers that the fall semester was focused on race issues, while the spring semester was the time to address gender and sexuality in their freshmen seminar classes. Failing to allow for the interconnected, intersecting, constitutive relationship between race, gender, and sexuality to be explored in classroom discussions shut down generative conversations about these issues. Indeed, the students’ open dialogues often naturally engaged intersecting systems of oppression, only to be closed off by boundary maintenance calling on them to compartmentalize their experiences of and their discussions about race, class, gender, and sexuality.

Separating race, class, gender, and sexuality into definable, categorized areas of study pushed students to think of systems of oppression in compartmentalized ways rather than as mutually constitutive or intersecting categories. Petra, who attempted to identify the intersectionality of their multiple identities, was ultimately silenced by individuals within the group and their interruptions. In the end, identity politics was at work in the students’ discussion, as Petra was interpellated as the space of the ghetto and all of her ‘you’s were positioned in alliance with the space of gay marginality. The data presented in this chapter illustrates the difficulty of articulating diversity as distinct from complexity and the need for frameworks outside of liberal pluralist visions of diversity (Jakobsen, 1998). By organizing the social studies curriculum around the very division of these categories, the structure of teaching about race and ethnicity in the fall and gender and sexuality in the spring reinforced notions of these categories as distinct and discrete. In this way, liberal education reproduced the very structures of oppression it sought to undo.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the activation of a colorblind term like “ghetto” and a gender- and sexuality-loaded term like “gay” to expose the fiction of sanitizing language while maintaining open dialogue. Cleansing language of loaded terms like “ghetto” and “gay” operates as a false path toward bringing about change in a classroom or society, more widely speaking. The terms “gay” and “ghetto” operate within history and ideology, and the meanings attached to them are co-constituted by ideological and structural foundations of race, class, gender, and sexuality. In this chapter, I exposed how mechanisms of structuring both “safe” and politically correct discourse actually foreclosed open dialogue and reinforced existing unequal power structures.

I have shown how the expressions “that’s so gay” and “that’s so ghetto” come to interpellate persons and spaces associated with the adjectives “gay” and “ghetto.” Because “that’s so gay” and “that’s so ghetto” exercise an interpellative function—calling into being the identities, histories, and physical and discursive spaces that populate those terms—their illocutionary force is experienced as an insult, even hate speech, by some of the students hailed by such expressions (Althusser, 1971/2011; Austin, 1962/1975; Butler, 1997). This is illustrated in the experience of Petra in the classroom, as she is called on to represent the space of the ghetto while not being heard or understood within the discourse of (White) safe space. Similarly, students in the GSA felt the hatred of the expression “that’s so gay” as calling into existence the denigrated and subordinated position of being gay within a heteronormative society.

In this chapter, I have examined the performativity of hate speech and politically correct speech in foreclosing and opening up dialogue. Language cleansed of talk that may potentially offend others is a prerequisite for the construction of safe space in classroom dialogues, yet the possibilities for language to offend always lurks in words' condensed histories and connotations. Through processes of interpellation, collectivities and individual bodies are connected to the spaces represented and signified by spatial metaphors like "ghetto" and "gay." Language is limited in achieving social change, as engaging words' histories and multivalent meanings also creates symbolic violence. In the myth of safe space, even radical pedagogy like the Socratic seminar can produce openings in dialogue for injurious speech as well as for interpellating others as marginalized.

I have demonstrated how words like "gay" and "ghetto" activate histories and identities as well as physical and discursive spaces as individuals are called on to embody and represent these terms. Through this empirical work, I developed the concept of "gay" operating as a discursive space—a field that is constituted through identities, communities, and practices. Drawing on Althusser's (1971/2011) discussion of interpellation in the process of subject formation, I analyzed the ways ideologies of binary gender and heteronormativity interpellate individuals into gendered and sexual subjects as well as the ways ideologies of race and colorblindness interpellate individuals into racial subjects through the expressions "that's so gay" and "that's so ghetto." I extend Leonardo and Porter's (2010) analysis to consider how safe space frameworks in classroom dialogues include or further marginalize non-White, non-heterosexual, and gender non-conforming identities.

CHAPTER SIX – CONCLUSION

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The gay-straight alliance student panel stood at the front of Ms. Green's classroom, in front of the white board. They pulled questions that had been written on index cards and submitted anonymously by the students in Ms. Green's freshman sociology and humanities class. Kathryn read aloud, "Is it safe to be LGBTQ at MacArthur High?"

Nikola responded, "I generally feel pretty safe, and I'm also very comfortable with myself so it helps things. So, little things that other people think aren't so little don't really bug me. Like, hearing 'fag' and 'that's so gay' doesn't really bug me. But just paying attention to the little things that people say I think is the most important. If teachers bring them aside and say, 'don't do that' or whatever, get them in trouble—like, if the person gets in trouble for saying homophobic things, then it just makes everything worse. The more important thing is that they learn about what they're saying and not necessarily that they're getting in trouble for it."

Heather added, "I don't think that at MacArthur High a lot of serious action would come from being LGBTQ, like you wouldn't get beaten up for it, but that's on campus. I don't know about off campus or anything. I'm pretty sure a lot of people are very open minded here, but then there are also those on the conservative side. It's a two-way street: there are open-minded people, but it's high school—there's a lot of bullying. I was bullied just yesterday. I mean, it happens."

Kathryn replied, "I feel like MacArthur High is a physically safe place but I would say *emotionally*..."

Heather joined, "it's not."

Kathryn finished, "it's not safe."

Nikola added, "Emotionally it depends on the person. It depends on who you are, on how comfortable you are with yourself."

Heather added, "and it depends on who you hang out with."

Elyse responded, "The only thing that bothers me is that all the time I hear comments like 'that's so gay' and 'no homo' and that bothers me a lot. I think that because I don't really look gay or bi, a lot of people say that stuff around me and I hear it all the time."

Tanya—a student from Ms. Green's freshman class—replied, "You don't like to hear people say 'that's so gay' and stuff like that. What is the issue? In what ways does that hurt you? Does it make you mad when we say 'gay'? Or, when straight people say 'gay' like, 'oh, that's so gay?'"

Anu responded, "Yeah. It's aligning being gay and gay people with something that's bad. When you say, 'oh, that's so gay,' could you say, 'this sucks' or 'it's really stupid' instead? Instead you say 'gay' like you're saying gay people are all these negative things. The connotations associated with being gay are, like, sucking and being lame."

Elijah added, "That hurts and is insulting to our community."

Dre stated, “The word ‘gay’ is so offensive because it’s like calling someone a ho, a bitch, or like that. That’s exactly how it feels to a gay person.”

Elyse added, “Or if someone called you, as an African American, the n-word.”

Many students in the classroom looked around at each other—some laughed, some shook their heads, and some commented to one another.

Dre replied, “That’s a who:ole different subject.”

Elyse built onto this, “It’s just like a racial slur except it’s a gay slur.”

Elijah finished, “Exactly. It’s a sexual slur. It’s a gay slur.”

Elyse continued, “I’m sure you probably don’t mean to hurt us by saying ‘that’s so gay’ or ‘no homo,’ but it kind of does.”

(Excerpted from Fieldnote Small School C 27A&B, 3rd period, 4/22/10 and checked against Audio Transcript #VN520026 for accuracy).

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As understood and analyzed by the students in the GSA, MacArthur High offers a physical but not an emotional safe place for schooling. This distinction between physical and psychic safety rips the social construction of safe space into two diametrically opposed parts. Yet, this distinction—between physical and psychic safety—is a potentially false dichotomy. It draws on the Cartesian dualism between the body and mind, which reproduces colonial relations of power, epistemologies, and violence (Cruz, 2001; Grosfugel, 2008a, 2008b; Smith, 1999).

In my research, MacArthur High proved to be both physically and emotionally unsafe for students who fell outside of White heteronormative binary gender. Boys who identified as gay had objects thrown at them and were chased under the threat of getting beaten up, girls who identified as lesbian were told they would be raped in order to make them straight, one bisexual boy of color described his schooling as, “endless harassment, never-ending ridicule, and non-stop verbal abuse,” and transgender students avoided bathrooms on campus for fear of violence. Students of color encountered institutional racism, which divided the student population into tracking and evaluation systems based on standardized test scores. Gender non-conforming students faced institutional transphobia as the school tried to file them into unstable gender categories. LGBTQ youth—and particularly LGBTQ youth of color—found their identities and communities erased and silenced as visual representations were torn to the ground and topics were omitted from the curriculum.

Fear locates itself and is worn in the body as well as in the psyche. Indeed, Petra’s need to run out of a classroom discussion in which her critique of students’ racist language was not being heard points to the frustration she experienced in both her mind and body and her need to remove herself from the physical space of the Socratic seminar in Chapter 5. The body and the mind, as well as physical and emotional violence, are intertwined and inseparable. The question remains as to how to alleviate some students’ emotional and physical vulnerability associated with the everyday pains of schooling and living in a society structured by systems of inequality without covering over or further marginalizing other students’ positions and experiences.

Notes Toward the Construction of “Safe Space” in Schools

Unequal gender relations and heteronormativity shape the organization of public space in ways that are naturalized to the point of invisibility (Bell & Valentine, 1995; Duncan, 1996; Ingram, Bouthilliet, & Retter, 1997; Myslik, 1996; Valentine, 1993, 1996). This dissertation demonstrates the ways ideologies such as binary gender and heteronormativity shape public spaces found across high school contexts.

An emerging metaphor of educational discourse is the idea of “safe space” which offers a figurative rendering of educational contexts that are both psychically and physically safe for participants. Safe space is constructed through social relations and is considered to be free from students’ and teachers’ judgment, isolation, alienation, and intimidation. Safe space, however, can also censor critical thinking and strip educational inquiry of the pains associated with learning such as risk taking, giving up a former condition or stance in favor of a new way of seeing things, and facing criticism (Boostrom, 1998). Although educators strive for generative ways to address complicated issues like identity, difference, and social inequality in their classrooms and schools, a critical examination of safe space is needed.

How can constructions of safe space shut down and close out various voices and perspectives? Does Socratic dialogue necessarily work against constructions of safe space or does the foundation for critical dialogue need to rest on ideals associated with building safe space in order to work through the messy friction of dialogue, critique, and reflection? Is it possible to construct safe spaces in schools that do not reproduce the marginalization of non-White, non-heterosexual, and gender non-conforming bodies, identities, and lived experiences? How can safe space be divorced from already existent deeply engrained systems of inequality and violence? How can one build safe spaces stripped of ideology, and is that even a possible or desirable goal? Can there ever be safe space in a context where many people are not safe? What does “safe” mean?

As I showed in Chapters 3 and 5, the GSA’s attempts to occupy school spaces through the medium of visibility posters reflect the students’ desire for representation, visibility, and acknowledgement. Yet, the fact that most posters were ripped down within minutes of their posting highlight the limitations of their claims to safe space through the appropriation of a queer presence in the hallways of MacArthur High. The ramifications of violence—here symbolized in the ripping down of LGBTQ presences—can occur and change school climate in a matter of minutes, erasing identities and communities. Indeed the GSA students’ claims to space and to populate the walls of their school hallways and classrooms were quickly closed down with the exception of the few strongholds—classrooms like those of Ms. Sims and Ms. Green—where such artifacts remained tacked to the walls, enduring for years. The students’ claims to safe space—a visual space in which queer identities and communities could be represented and could ask for a critical examination of language like “that’s so gay”—both challenged dominant ideologies of heteronormativity and faced immediate censure quite literally at the hands of their schoolmates.

This study concludes that the construction of safe space and the ability to move through classroom space for students are structured not only by their peers’ evaluations but also by teacher instructions. School structures dividing students by biological sex provide a unique

challenge for gender non-conforming students and for students who are marginalized because of their expression of gendered embodiment and presentation. I argue that such a commonplace teacher instruction as to divide by sex or gender can work to discipline students' bodies, fix individuals into discrete categories of male/female, supervise how well they fit or deviate from the norm established within such categories, and highlight the transgression of trans identities, bodies, and gendered expression. Binary structures such as sex and gender shape the space of the classroom and the possibilities for students' identification, complicating the very foundation of what constitutes educational safe space for difference. As I demonstrate in Chapter 4, although jokes and linguistic expressions that buttress White heteronormative binary gender can reproduce such ideology, they can also mark students' gender, sex, and sexuality as sites for examination while further mobilizing privilege and exercising power.

Socratic discussion examining gender, sexuality, class, and race has the potential to open up critical dialogue about difference while it also runs the risk of reproducing the very structures of inequality it seeks to deconstruct. The question of who gets to speak and who is heard in critical dialogues is important to consider, as is the question of how power can be identified, checked, and transformed through such dialogues. As illustrated in Chapter 5, the examination of race and class is sometimes seen as disconnected from the examination of gender and sexuality, rendering multiple systems of oppression as separate and distinct despite their complicated entanglement. The construction of safe space for discussions that critically examine privilege and oppression must also be built on participants' critical reflection of their relations to and reliance on such systems of power.

Focusing on the micro-level of violence done through performative speech acts, this research has examined how language can shape the communicative environment of classroom discussions, student interventions, and teacher instructions. Despite MacArthur High's teachers' goals of constructing a safe and politically correct space for discussions of identity and difference, the intricacy of deeply engrained power relations and systems of inequality structure participants' social interaction, language, and silence. This dissertation has highlighted the ways linguistic expressions, jokes, and name-calling as well as teacher instructions and structures of schooling can reproduce marginalization and complicate constructions of safe space across school contexts.

In this dissertation, I have sought to answer questions regarding how gender and sexuality are made salient in students' negotiations of both the physical and discursive spaces of schooling. I examined the ways joking and teasing are used in the construction of gender and sexuality and the negotiation of power relations in classroom interactions, and I explored the ways bodies, histories, and identities are interpellated through linguistic expressions like "that's so gay" and "that's so ghetto." Considering how such expressions as well as name-calling like "trans" can shape learning moments across school contexts, I focused on the ways language can communicate gender, sexuality, class, and race meanings and relations. In high school, students' reading of identity and difference while positioning others in unequal power relations through teasing, jokes, and slang can work to regulate binary gender and heteronormativity.

In my examination of the sites of peer education, classroom social interactions, curricular materials, and teacher instructions and interventions, I have analyzed the ways students and teachers teach each other and learn how to be gendered and sexual subjects as well as the ways

ideology and a “homophobic [and transphobic] state apparatus” (Cohen, 2009) like schooling interpellate such subjects. Through LGBTQ student-led activism and awareness-raising as well as through teachers’ curricular and pedagogical approaches to the study of gender and sexuality, participants at MacArthur High both construct and challenge norms regarding binary gender and heteronormativity. The implications of such educational work done by both teachers and students reflect participants’ larger goals of pushing against homophobia and transphobia, working toward social justice and a multicultural awareness of and respect for difference, while also remaining invested—even if unintentionally—in structures that reproduce inequality along the lines of gender, sexuality, class, and race.

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APPENDIX A. TRANSCRIPTION NOTATIONS BY GAIL JEFFERSON (ATKINSON & HERITAGE, 1984)

$\left[\quad \right]$	Overlapping utterances
=	Contiguous utterances and latching
(0.0)	Intervals within / between utterances in seconds & tenths of a second
(.)	Micropause
co:lon	Elongated sound or syllable
co:::lons	More colons prolong the stretch
.	Falling tone
,	Continuing intonation
?	Rising inflection
!	Animated tone
-	Abrupt cutoff
↑↓	Marked rising and falling shifts in intonation
<u>underlining</u>	Emphasis
<i>italics</i>	Slight emphasis
°quieter°	Talk that is quieter than the surrounding talk
(hhh)	Audible aspirations
(*hhh)	Audible inhalations
((double))	Description of things happening
> <	Pace quicker than the surrounding talk
< >	Pace slower than the surrounding talk
(doubt)	Transcriptionist's doubt about what was said
...	Continuation of interview before and after this transcript

APPENDIX B. GAY-STRAIGHT ALLIANCE ACTIVITIES OBSERVED SEPTEMBER 2007 – JUNE 2010

Dates	GSA Activities	Club Size	Total Observation Hours	Methods of Data Collection
September 2007 – June 2008	National Coming Out Day, weekly meetings, classroom panels, Day of Silence.	4 – 20 students	45 hours	Ethnographic observations, audio recorded interviews with students and teachers, collection of artifacts.
September 2008 – June 2009	Weekly meetings, classroom panels, Day of Silence.	2 – 15 students	45 hours	Ethnographic observations, audio recorded interviews with students and teachers, collection of artifacts.
September 2009 – June 2010	Weekly meetings, classroom panels, Day of Silence.	12 – 24 students	60 hours	Ethnographic observations, audio recorded interviews with students and teachers, collection of artifacts.

APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS IN THE GSA

- 1a. What is your name? If I were to quote you, what pseudonym would you like to go by?
- 1b. Where and when were you born?
- 1c. What languages do you speak at home? What languages have you learned in school?
- 1d. How do you identify yourself (in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, whatever...)?
- 1e. How else would you describe yourself?

- 2a. What schools have you enrolled in and attended?
- 2b. How would you describe your experiences in different academic programs and small schools at your high school?
- 2c. What has high school generally been like for you?

- 3a. What extracurricular clubs, sports, activities, and organizations have you participated in?
- 3b. What has been your experience with the gay-straight alliance (GSA)?
- 3c. In what ways does the GSA affect your school?
- 3d. How long have you participated in the GSA?
- 3e. How would you describe your level of involvement over your high school years?
- 3f. What does the GSA do?
- 3g. How would you describe the GSA community and participants?

- 4a. Have you had any classes at your high school that address issues concerning gender and sexuality? LGBTQ issues or history? LGBTQ figures in literature?
- 4b. What are those classes? How would you describe those classes? What issues get discussed? What do you read? What do you learn about?
- 4c. In what kinds of spaces are gender and sexuality, or LGBTQ issues talked about at your high school?
- 4d. Is this different across small schools and academic programs?

- 5a. In general, how safe is your high school for LGBTQ students?
- 5b. How safe do you feel at school?
- 5c. Have you experienced homophobia or transphobia in your school?
What happened? How would you describe these experiences and events?
How often do you encounter homophobic or transphobic comments or acts in your school?
- 5d. Have you ever been bullied or harassed at school? What happened?

- 6a. How often do you hear 'that's so gay,' 'fag,' or 'dyke' comments in school?
- 6b. What is the context in which they are said?
- 6c. What do you think people generally mean? or mean to do with this language?
- 6d. How often do teachers or other students intervene? What happens?

- 7a. What kinds of institutional support are available for LGBTQ students at your high school?
- 7b. How has the administration handled LGBTQ students' concerns?

- 7c. Are there adults on campus you feel you can talk to about issues related to homophobia and transphobia? LGBTQ issues?
- 7d. In what ways do you see your school creating safe spaces to discuss issues related to gender and sexuality? LGBTQ issues?
- 7e. How could your school better support its LGBTQ students?
- 7f. What do you think could be done to make your school a safer environment for LGBTQ students?
- 7g. What do you think are the biggest challenges for LGBTQ youth at your high school right now?

APPENDIX D. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS AFFILIATED WITH THE GSA

- 1a. How do you identify yourself? (in terms of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, ability, age, role in the school, etc.)
- 1b. How long have you been teaching? At MacArthur High? At your small school?
- 1c. How long have you been working with the gay-straight alliance student club?

2. Have you seen gender or sexuality issues integrated into the curriculum at MacArthur High? How so?

- 3a. How would you describe your school in terms of awareness of or support for LGBTQ issues, students, and teachers?
- 3b. What has been your experience with homophobia or transphobia at this school?
- 3c. How has the administration handled LGBTQ students' and teachers' concerns? What are their policies? How are these policies carried out or acted on?
- 3d. What kinds of institutional support are available for LGBTQ students, staff, and teachers at MacArthur High?

- 4a. How frequently do you hear language such as 'that's so gay,' 'no homo,' 'fag,' or 'trans' at MacArthur High?
- 4b. How would you characterize their use and meaning? How do you see expressions like 'that's so gay,' 'no homo,' 'fag,' or 'trans' being used?
- 4c. What are teachers' or students' reactions to such language?
- 4d. How do you handle, interrupt, or address this?

- 5a. What questions do you think we need to examine and answer in order to work toward making schools safer places for all students?
- 5b. How could MacArthur High better support its LGBTQ students?
- 5c. What do you think are the biggest challenges for LGBTQ youth at your school right now?

- 6a. What role do you see the GSA playing in the school?
- 6b. What are students' or teachers' perceptions of it?
- 6c. What is your perspective on the activities the GSA participates in and facilitates at MacArthur High?
- 6d. What has been the visibility or activity, if any, of LGBTQ students on campus? in class?

APPENDIX E. SCHOOL SITES AND METHODS FOR RESEARCH

Dates	Site - GSA	Site – Freshman Social Studies Courses
September 2007 – June 2008	Preliminary Pilot Study with the GSA – ethnographic observations, audio recorded interviews with students and teachers, collection of artifacts.	
September 2008 – June 2009	Continued participant-observation with the GSA – ethnographic observations, audio recorded interviews with students and teachers, collection of artifacts.	
September 2009 – June 2010	Continued participant-observation with the GSA – ethnographic observations, audio recorded interviews with students and teachers, collection of artifacts.	Classroom participant-observation in three freshman social studies courses – ethnographic observations, audio and video recordings, interviews with students and teachers, student questionnaires, collection of artifacts.

APPENDIX F. FRESHMAN SOCIAL STUDIES COURSES OBSERVED SEPTEMBER 2009 – JUNE 2010

Freshman Social Studies Course (and Teacher)	Small School	Class Size	Total Observation Hours	Methods of Data Collection
Humanities and History (Ms. Sims)	A	25 students x 2 cohorts = 50 total students	10 hours	Ethnographic observations.
History (Ms. Oh)	B	30 students x 2 cohorts = 60 total students	35 hours	Ethnographic observations, student questionnaires, collection of artifacts.
Social Studies and Humanities (Ms. Green)	C	30 students x 2 cohorts = 60 total students	75 hours	Ethnographic observations, audio and video recordings, interviews with students and the teacher, student questionnaires, collection of artifacts.

APPENDIX G. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS OF FRESHMAN SOCIAL STUDIES COURSES

- 1a. How do you identify yourself? (in terms of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, ability, age, role in the school, etc.)
- 1b. How long have you been teaching? At MacArthur High? At your small school?
- 1c. How long have you been teaching the freshman social studies and humanities seminar?

- 2a. How long have you been teaching this gender and sexuality unit? This curriculum?
- 2b. Who developed the curriculum? When?
- 2c. Is it used across other small schools and programs at MacArthur High?
- 2d. How has it been implemented? (What are you directed to do and use?) Is there any training on this?
- 2e. Is there a copy of the curriculum I could see? Or is it loosely defined by certain markers, criteria, resources, or activities? How does it address state standards?

- 3a. Reflecting on the gender and sexuality unit this year, what worked? What didn't work as well? What modifications did you make to adjust to things?
- 3b. How did the lessons (and the students' receptiveness) compare across the two cohorts you teach?
- 3c. How did the gender and sexuality unit compare to past years that you've taught this?
- 3d. What are typical parent reactions to the course topic of gender and sexuality? To the freshman seminar class, more generally?
- 3e. What kinds of responses to the gender and sexuality unit and curriculum did you get from parents this year? From students? How does this compare with past years?
- 3f. In classroom discussions on gender and sexuality, how do issues involving race get brought in and addressed? Under what circumstances are race, ethnicity, or class left out of the gender and sexuality unit?

- 4a. How would you describe your school in terms of awareness of or support for LGBTQ issues, students, and teachers?
- 4b. What has been your experience with homophobia or transphobia at this school?
- 4c. How has the administration handled LGBTQ students' and teachers' concerns? What are their policies? How are they carried out or acted on?
- 4d. What kinds of institutional support are available for LGBTQ students, staff, and teachers at MacArthur High?

- 5a. How frequently do you hear language such as 'that's so gay,' 'no homo,' 'fag,' or 'trans' at MacArthur High?
- 5b. How would you characterize their use and meaning? How do you see expressions like 'that's so gay,' 'no homo,' 'fag,' or 'trans' being used?
- 5c. What are teachers' or students' reactions to such language?
- 5d. How do you handle, interrupt, or address this?

- 6a. What questions do you think we need to examine and answer in order to work toward making schools safer places for all students?

- 6b. How could MacArthur High better support its LGBTQ students?
- 6c. What do you think are the biggest challenges for LGBTQ youth at your school right now?
- 7a. What role do you see the GSA playing in the school?
- 7b. What are students' or teachers' perceptions of it?
- 7c. What is your perspective on the activities the GSA participates in and facilitates at MacArthur High?
- 7d. What has been the visibility or activity, if any, of LGBTQ students on campus? in class?

***APPENDIX H. KEY VOCABULARY FOR GENDER, SEX, AND SEXUALITY UNIT
IN MS. GREEN’S CLASS***

1. sex

(as a verb) – physical, sexual behavior and acts including but not limited to intercourse for the purposes of reproduction and pleasure

(as a noun) – biological, often confused with gender. one’s sex is female or male based on hormones, chromosomes (xx, xy), and body parts like genitals

2. gender

socially constructed or created “masculine” and “feminine” roles, stereotypes, expression, and presentation

3. sexual orientation

who you are sexually attracted to—for example, straight, gay, bisexual, lesbian

4. LGBTQQ

lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, queer, questioning sexual and gender identities

5. homophobia and transphobia

learned, irrational fear, judgment, hatred, disgust, and/or discomfort with LGBTQ people. fear of difference learned in society

6. transgender and transsexual

people who do not identify their gender as aligned with the biological sex they were born into, such as a girl trapped in a male body or a boy trapped in a female body

7. sexual harassment

unwanted and repeated verbal comments, touching, facial expressions, and body language that make someone feel uncomfortable. this can also include inappropriate pictures sent through text messages or posted onto facebook, the internet, or other social media

8. rape

coerced or forced unwanted sexual intercourse

9. incest

sex between blood relatives, the laws for which vary state by state and country by country, but it usually involves sexual abuse

10. sexual abuse and assault

an umbrella category for everything from sexual harassment to incest and rape

11. feminism

a social movement concerned with equal rights for women and men and targeting oppression based on gender inequality and sexism

12. male ally
men and boys who advocate for and support women's rights

13. male privilege
benefits and advantages given to men and boys by society

14. straight privilege
benefits and advantages given to straight people by society

15. sexism
prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination on the basis of sex

APPENDIX I. FULL TRANSCRIPTION OF SOCRATIC SEMINAR CONVERSATION IN MS. SIMS' CLASS

Toward the end of the Socratic seminar, with about eight minutes remaining in the fifty-eight minute class period, Ms. Sims called on two students who had not been talking much by saying, "Let's hear from Petra and Elijah." At this point, Petra responded to a hypothetical question Galen had asked at the beginning of the Socratic seminar. Galen had asked, "How would you feel if someone said, 'Oh, that's so Black?' Because that's how we feel."

Petra commented, "I really don't have anything to say on this topic, but there are other things. Galen said something about how it's socially acceptable to say 'that's so gay,' and then she used the example, 'that's so Black.' But actually a lot of people *do* use that term, but in *different* words like, 'that's so ghetto' to mean that's so hard. Like seriously? I don't see why everyone is so on this whole 'that's so gay' thing but they always discriminate against people who are from a different part of the ..."

Petra hung in long pause, not finishing her sentence before Galen added, "Again the stereotyping," to which Petra echoed, "Yeah, it's the stereotyping."

Cecilia responded, "People do that with everything though. They'll be like, 'Oh, you're such a guy' or 'you're such a girl.' 'You're so Asian.'"

Petra replied, "Exactly. So if they say 'you're so Asian,' 'you're such a guy,' or 'you're so this,' then why do you guys get so upset? Because if you discriminate, it's the same thing, only homosexuality."

Another student, Betty, explained, "Well, I think what she was saying is that the whole phrase, 'that's so gay' is way over played."

At this point many students jumped into the conversation, multiple voices talking over one another. Ms. Sims loudly interrupted the students talking, "I felt like we didn't finish. Let her finish. I think Petra has a really important point."

Petra, speaking more quickly and more ardently, continued, "That you guys always get so upset about somebody saying, 'that's so gay' about something, but then you think it's okay to use the term, 'that's so ghetto.' You don't think it's bad or that horrible to make comments based on race, but it is."

Cecilia interrupted, "Nobody here thinks that's okay."

Petra asked, "Well, then why do you have this whole thing about 'that's so gay' but not another term. You are still discriminating against somebody."

Cecilia insisted, "We are not discriminating."

Ms. Sims stopped their conversation and to Cecilia said, "You are totally missing her point."

Cecilia answered, “No, she’s right. I agree.”

Petra yelled, “Then why the hell are you...?!” not finishing her question before she grabbed her bag and stormed out of the room. The classroom’s swinging door slammed as it shut behind her.

As this happened Ms. Sims said, “It’s okay,” and Cecilia expressed surprised with a low “Whoa.”

After Petra left the room, some students looked around at each other whispering about what had just happened while other students looked to Ms. Sims to comment. Ms. Sims tried to start her statement three times, “What you are missing here... What you guys are missing here...” but students were talking, making it difficult for others to hear her. To get their attention Ms. Sims loudly asserted, “Stop talking!” and continued more softly, “What you are missing here is that while you might agree, it does not come across that way. It sounds very contentious and very disagreeable. The way it comes out is disrespectful. You may not mean it that way, but that’s just hurting-”

Cecilia interrupted, “She’s yelling at us every single time she opens-”

Ms. Sims interjected, “Stop. Stop talking right now. And neither should you talk or address her point at the exact same time. It feels like an attack. So, even though you are allowed to go against her points, the cross is not going very good.”

Cecilia responded, “When I say something, afterwards she won’t stop talking.”

Ms. Sims explained, “But she’s not finished,” which Marcus supported by saying, “She’s not done.” Ms. Sims continued, “If you’re not done, you’re not done.”

Cecilia, “But then she starts yelling about it.”

Marcus continued, “Well, she’s not done. She hasn’t gotten her whole point out. She’s trying to get it out and then you guys are cutting her off.”

Ms. Sims commented, “I’m not pointing fingers at you guys, but you have to kind of *monitor* your own interruption. I think it’s fair that when people have something to say but are being interrupted, they get really frustrated and their voices raise.”

Cecilia explained, “I just don’t think you should accuse, not she, but anybody shouldn’t accuse people. I totally agree, but I was just saying she shouldn’t be like ‘you,’ you know what I mean?”

Ms. Sims followed, “I think we can all agree that ‘you’ is a general term. So, I don’t think ‘you’ meant you, Cecilia, but people in general. Does that make sense?”

Marcus agreed, “Yeah, it’s a general term that applies to everyone.”

Betty added, “She also started the comment with that attitude.”

Ms. Sims replied, “What attitude? I think attitude comes when people are interrupted and they can’t get their point across and get frustrated and then they get angry.”

A boy sitting in the inside circle commented, “All she did was restate her point over and over again, so that’s why we thought she was done making her point.”

Marcus, who had been observing the discussion unfold, defended Petra’s position by saying, “She felt as if you guys didn’t fully hear her. She was making her statement over and over again *because* you guys were talking *over* her and her voice was dropping off.”

A girl in the outside circle asked, “Can we please stop talking about Petra and move on?”

Ms. Sims instructed the students, “One thing for all of you in this room to consider in Socratic is that many people get upset when someone is interrupted and can’t get across their thoughts. So, stop the talk and listen. Let’s continue. You have two more minutes.”

Betty, in her low monotone voice, slowly began, “Okay, so first. I just don’t think that... she said you guys *always* are like getting all upset about people saying ‘that’s so gay’ and not about ‘that’s so black’ and ‘that’s so ghetto’ or whatever, but how do we address that? How can people get that it’s not out of disrespect, it’s not about anger. You know in Socratic at the beginning of the year when we had the unit on race, we *talked* about this—about people saying ‘that’s so ghetto.’ We talked about that, and we’re not always getting angry about one or the other.”

Galen added, “The thing is yeah, everyone knows that and people tune it out. We were talking about that because our subject was gay marriage. We were not talking about the ghetto life or anything. Our subject was involving our sexuality. We weren’t talking about that. If we were talking about the ghetto and everything, race and stuff, of course you’d bring that up. But we are talking about sexuality right now, and that’s why we are bringing it up.”

Marcus responded, “Whoa. I understand your point, but what you should look at is you feel the same way with both subjects, which is talking about it like it’s one subject, for sexuality. Now with stereotyping, when someone says, ‘that’s so black,’ you feel a certain way about that. You do. Then when someone says, ‘that’s so gay,’ there’s a certain way you feel about that. There is still a certain way you feel about both things being said. That’s what she was trying to say, but she couldn’t fully get that out. Someone shouldn’t feel that they are hurting more, because others are saying that, because others feel really the exact same way.”

A few students uttered, “oooooh,” as if now they understood. A few other students chimed in, “I agree with you. I agree with what Marcus said.”

Cecilia added the last word, “I agree with what you are saying, and I agree with what Petra was saying, but the reason that I think that I started like getting upset, was she looked at me and started saying ‘you’ nah nah nah, ‘you said,’ and I’m sorry but I didn’t say anything.”

The bell rang marking the end of class. Students gathered their belongings and got out of their desks to leave. As they exited the classroom Galen said to Cecilia, “She’s the one that started it. Every time we have Socratic, she gets mad, yells at us, and leaves.”

(Excerpted from Fieldnote Small School A 3A, 1st period, 5/12/10).