

THE SOUND OF SILENCE: EDUCATORS MANAGING AND REPRODUCING
HETERONORMATIVITY IN MIDDLE SCHOOLS

by

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A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Department of Education Studies
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

December 2010

DISSERTATION APPROVAL PAGE

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Title: The Sound of Silence: Educators Managing and Reproducing Heteronormativity in Middle Schools

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Doctor of Philosophy

College of Education

December 2010

Title: The Sound of Silence: Educators Managing and Reproducing Heteronormativity in Middle Schools

Approved: _____
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Recent national studies indicate that well over three quarters of sexual and gender identity minority high school students are subjected to verbal and physical violence related to their gender identity or sexuality. An array of sociological studies has found that adolescents openly acknowledge homophobic justification for past verbal harassment and abuse, and masculinity studies associate this abuse with affirming a normative masculinity.

This study seeks to determine what conditions could contribute to the social production of such endemic violence and simultaneously preserve a pervasive silence about its social origins. Recent educational research suggests that school based homophobic violence is a product of the overt and covert social rules defining “normal” gender and sexuality appearance and behavior. Drawing on contemporary post-structuralist feminism and queer theory, this study refers to these social norms broadly as “heteronormativity” and to the practices that reproduce these norms as “heteronormative discourses.”

To generate insight into the educational reproduction of heteronormativity, this study undertook a one-year field study in a public middle school, observing incidents of heteronormativity among adolescent youth and the faculty. Data collection included formal observations, participant observations, and semi-structured interviews. Using an embedded multi-case design, fourteen cases in which the school offered interventions into social acts of heteronormative dominance and violence directed at students are analyzed.

The study finds that the school interventions themselves often served to reinscribe the heteronormative discourses that produced the acts they purport to deter. The interpretation of and response to incidents of harassment frequently deployed heteronormative rhetoric and reasoning that reinforced narrow conceptions of gender, silenced sexual and gender difference, and contributed to the erasure of stories and lives that do not fit within the heteronormative frame of life in early adolescence. The study closes with a series of suggestions for reducing the reproduction of heteronormativity through a series of educational interventions.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Douglas Ready and Jerry Rosiek made this research project possible. Dr. Ready challenged me to continue my studies and take on this area of scholarship when I was preparing to become a school administrator. He sponsored my doctorate studies for two years and informed my sociological analysis of education. Dr. Rosiek took on mentorship of this project with a passion when Dr. Ready took a position at a distant university. Dr. Rosiek's philosophical and methodological expertise along with his academic advocacy for minority issues allowed me to complete this research. I am so thankful for the great fortune that brought each of these men into my life as mentors and as friends.

In addition I am grateful to Ellen Scott, Michael Hames-Garcia, and Ernesto Martinez, along with the entire faculty of the Women and Gender Studies Department who supported my studies throughout this project. These scholars offered me an intellectual home and generous support when I was framing this study.

I am thankful for the scholarship of C. J. Pascoe, Kevin Kumashiro, and Cathleen Lugg, who deeply informed the framing of this research. Working in this emerging and contested field I have been simultaneously informed and inspired by the courageous scholarship of each of these social theorists. I am also thankful for Dr. Kumashiro's honorary attendance and participation during my dissertation defense.

I wish to acknowledge the two anonymous administrators of this study, here named Mr. Martin and Mr. Clark. These men willingly opened their lives to my daily scrutiny and offered their insights and ideas to this project. I also wish to acknowledge the youth of Oakwood who opened up their lives to this study.

My drive to become a professional educator and further to pursue this social scholarship of education I attribute to the guidance of my parents, Catherine and David. They have been and continue to be my inspiration to act with conscience and compassion in the world. This study would not have been possible without their lifelong faith and guidance.

And finally I wish to acknowledge the support of my partner Amy and our two daughters. There is no concise way to acknowledge all that Amy's support and guidance have offered to make this project possible. I will simply say it would not have been possible to take on and to complete this study without her at my side.

This study was motivated by and is dedicated to my two daughters, Samantha and Maddie, and my partner Amy.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Section One: The Case of Brandon McInerney and Lawrence King

Brandon McInerney was accustomed to publicly harassing and physically assaulting Lawrence King, a self identified gay teenager, in the classrooms and hallways of California's Green Junior High School (Saillant & Covarrubias, 2008). On February 11, 2008, Brandon and a group of male friends publicly accosted Lawrence for self-identifying as a homosexual as well as for feminizing his body and school uniform with nail polish, high heeled boots, and jewelry (Cloud, 2008). Student witnesses to the incident exchanged text messages that day indicating that Brandon, accompanied by a group of friends, threatened to kill Lawrence the next day for being gay (Saillant, 2008b). And, tragically, the following day, February 12, Brandon arrived at school with a concealed handgun. During class he walked into the school's full computer lab and proceeded to shoot Lawrence twice before fleeing the campus. The wounds resulted in Lawrence's death two days later.

Throughout the school year Brandon's heterosexual masculine domination of Lawrence was publicly open and ongoing. As the details of the school year unfolded in investigative news reports and at community meetings, faculty and students stated awareness of Brandon's hostile aggression toward the social deviant Lawrence. The official school responses involved mediation between the boys and sending Lawrence, the victim of the aggression, to counseling (Saillant, 2008b). The failure of the school and

faculty to intervene more strongly regarding Brandon's behavior might be seen as contributing significantly toward Brandon's escalating behavior, and even as complicit acceptance of hate acts in this setting (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003; Lugg, 2003; Rottmann, 2006).¹ The decision to counsel Lawrence further suggests the school pathologized his social behavior rather than Brandon's aggression. Yet, with Lawrence's death, it was Brandon alone who was labeled as a deviant outcast by the media and political powers within the community. The school remained largely outside the scope of analysis (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 2006).²

Brandon was arrested within an hour following the crime, and upon the declaration of Lawrence's death he was labeled a "hate crime" killer. In the days following King's death, the media began portraying Brandon as an angry boy with a violent father. His violent paternal history was elaborated to suggest he was boy with no chance of acting normal (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Stein, 2003).³ His father's police record of domestic abuse and drunk driving were brought forward as possible explanations for Brandon's failed personality and abhorrent behavior (Saillant & Covarrubias, 2008).

The media lens of hindsight also began reframing Lawrence King after his death. Limited coverage appeared on his lesser and pathologized sexual and gendered status

¹ Meta-analysis of the field of educational leadership consistently points to the systemic failure on the part of educational leadership scholars and practitioners to address ongoing issues of homophobic violence in schools.

² Jane Kenway and Lindsay Fitzclarence note that the preponderance of research into school gendered violence has "individualized and pathologized" the violence which occurs within schools. Their work also notes the tendency of this analysis to blame peers, family, and the media for the violence. All approaches leave the school itself outside the scope of analysis.

³ Michael Kimmel and Matthew Mahler along with Nan Stein have done extensive analysis of research practices regarding school violence and bullying. All three note the dominant trend of individualizing and pathologizing aggressors' motivations.

within the school. Sympathetic details discussed his foster child status. The school community, his friends suggested, was his only “home.” This predisposed victim narrative (Rofes, 2004)⁴ was intertwined with subtle references to his effeminate gender and sexual orientation through praise for his beautiful singing voice, “panache” for crochet, and smart clothing accessorizing.

Finally the media arrived at a story suggesting the boys’ conflict was the result of Lawrence’s homosexual crush or romance with Brandon during Valentine’s week (Saillant, 2008a). National talk show host and self-identified lesbian, Ellen DeGeneres, framed the boys lives in the context of Valentine’s day concerns stating, “Somewhere along the line the killer, Brandon, got the message that it’s so threatening, so awful, and so horrific that Larry (Lawrence) would want to be his Valentine—that killing Larry seemed to be the right thing to do” (Dimich & Goodside, 2008). While this love-sick versus sick-love account of the boys’ relationship does recognize Valentine’s Day as a particular sexually and gendered social context within which the event occurred, the focus on the boys’ individual feelings distracts from a focus on the normative power of such a “holiday” in a middle school environment. Lawrence’s unrequited desire and Brandon’s aggressive disgust are seen as having been produced from within themselves and independent of the social context of school (Setoodeh, 2008).⁵

These individualized reconstructions of their interactions leading up to the “homophobic” murder do not take into account the school as a place for the social

⁴ In *Martyr-Target-Victim* Eric Rofes explores the divergent ways in which queer youth are portrayed in an inescapably abject position.

⁵ Six months following this crime Newsweek more fully developed this theme with the cover story *Young Gay and Murdered*. This narrative fully reconfigured the psychological nature of each boy and the personal motives for this crime. His new narrative various details from the boys’ interactions were presented through a narrative in which Lawrence took on the role of dangerous sexual aggressor while Brandon was presented as a victim who acted in self-defense.

(re)production of heteronormativity (Blaise, 2005; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Rasmussen, 2006; Renold, 2005; Thorne, 1993). In this instance, while Valentine's Day is referenced in DeGeneres's remarks, it's sexual and gendered meanings are personally located in Brandon's rejection of Larry's affection. There is no critical awareness of the daily announcements, dances, flower deliveries, candygrams, posters, and the myriad other Valentine school activities harkening back to elementary school which are related to constructing normative and consequently abnormal sexed subjects (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Thorne, 1993).

Echoing in the silence⁶ of the limitless things left unsaid in any detailed depiction of the two boys' identities and interactions is any notation of their visible racial difference from one another. Lawrence's image is rare in comparison to Brandon's in popular presses. However, the Ventura County Star released a picture of him on February 23, in which his visible dark skin, hair, and eyes give him an ethnic appearance (see appendices). Brandon's image, in contrast, seen in most publications via a school picture first released the day he was charged, is of a white child with a conservative male haircut (see appendices). While the prevalence of *hate crimes*⁷ (Mueller, 2004) at the intersection of race, gender, and sexual orientation has been documented both in research⁸ (Froyum,

⁶ Feminists first made the word "silence" a central analytic concept for social science methodology. Educational theorist Michelle Fine and Lois Wise (2005, revised) offer an example of fundamental work using the analytic concept of the silencing of class, race, and gender within the institution of schools. Foucault talks about discursive constructions of the objects of inquiry, which implies that some possible objects of inquiry can't be discussed in some discursive communities.

⁷ "A *hate crime*, also known as a bias crime, is a criminal offense committed against a person, property, or society that is motivated, in whole or in part, by the offender's bias against a race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or ethnicity/national origin."

⁸ The FBI or local designation of "hate crime" status to a crime has afforded additional means to track the particularities of biased attacks. Gail Mason has done much work consolidating knowledge in regard to the image of the "other" within this phenomenon. And most recently ethnographies by both C. J. Pascoe and

2007; Mason, 2005; Pascoe, 2007) and publicly highlighted for Californians in the intense media exposure related to the murder of teenager Gwen Araujo (Holland, 2006),⁹ there has been a colorblind silence in the even most detailed investigative reports on these two boys (Barlow, Carlson, & Wilson, 2008; Saillant, 2008a). This silence is reflected in any subtle notation of the socioeconomic status of the boys, both of whom are suggested to be from working class or lower class families participating in a mixed class middle school, though the context is never overtly stated as such. Social Class has been linked to performances of heterosexual masculinity in educational research. This research has shown both masculinity and sexuality to be contested spaces for amassing social power to offset the oppressive experience of class domination (Franklin, 2000, 2004; Froyum, 2007; Glick & Fiske, 1999; Hatty, 2000; Martin & Collinson, 1999; Plummer, 2001; Quinn, 2002; Willis, 1981).

Relative silence as to the race or social class positions of these boys reflects both the political and analytic difficulties involved in exploring the intersections of a person's fragmented positionality. The social construction of race and social class operate independent of and yet in concert with those of gender and sexuality. While the complex intersections of race and social class with gender and sexual orientation are not central to the current project, they will be considered throughout for future research and analysis.

Carissa Foyum have explored the intersectional experiences of race, sexuality, and gender within adolescent communities in relation to homophobia and heterosexism.

⁹ Transgender Latina teen Gwen Araujo's murder in 2002, the two subsequent murder trials ending in 2005, the public debate over "hate crime" status of the murder and finally the Lifetime channels 2006 release of "A Girl Like Me: The Gwen Araujo Story" have kept California's public and activist gaze on this intersectional crime for most of this decade. The intersections of subordinate race, gender, and sexuality were openly debated in relation to the crimes perpetrated on Gwen's queer body.

The emerging narrative of the two boys' lives offers particular details in the process of sense making for the violent attack on February 12 that simultaneously ignore and reinscribe heteronormative gender and sexuality domination. Research on a homophobic or, as Pascoe (2007) and Foyum (2007) noted, a heterosexist, climate within a school setting indicates that the authentic or normative male (in this case Brandon) is perceived and operates as the gender and sexuality master over both females and "counterfeit" males, who are perceived as feminized and/or as sexual minorities. Lawrence, in this case, represents the counterfeit male on multiple levels. He is perceived to have diminished male status due to the presence of effeminate, gay, lower class, and person of color markers to his appearance.

Building on past analysis of heterosexist climate for the purposes of this study, such climate implicitly includes both heteronormativity and what might be called an *androcentric* construction of male and female gender. An androcentric construction of gender places males or the masculine point of view at the center of gender definition (Gilman, 1911). While these constructions of male and female gender and sexuality are local and specific, foundational to this sexuality and gender binary is heterosexual and masculine domination of homosexual and feminine (Judith Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1990; Rubin, 1984).

Within the school climate, in this case, it was only at the point of physical destruction of the lesser-valued subject that domination was called into question. And at this point it was not each boy's social position as the gendered and sexually dominant or submissive actor that was interrogated, but each boy's individual personality and history.

Who or What: Locating Dominance and Aggression

The social practice of individualizing sexual violence suggests the need to consider the ways in which performances of heterosexual domination and violence,¹⁰ which are the unique acts of personally situated individuals, are also socially constructed by a reinforcing culture. Narratives from self-identified aggressors in confessions, witness testimony and other investigative documentation as well as psychological research suggest there is an individually manufactured drive toward this violent subjectivity.

Psychological and phenomenological research, news reports and court documents offer abundant examples of analysis of the individual enacting heterosexist violence from an internal or personal motivation or desire (BarOn, 2002; Franklin, 2000; Lindenberger, 2005; Mason, 2005; McDevitt, Levin, & Bennett, 2002). However, educational studies of the spatial and temporal embodiment of this dominance and violence indicate school leadership, curriculum, activities, and public gendered and sexual interactions are related to the social construction of gender and sexuality. Social construction research in education studies offer an abundance of discursive analysis of the production of hierarchical masculine and feminine gender and sexuality in school communities (Blaise, 2005; Blount & Anahita, 2004; Connell, 1999; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Martin & Collinson, 1999; Pascoe, 2007; Plummer, 1999). Studies locating where, when, among whom and how sexual and gendered domination is enacted show consistent themes that

¹⁰ *Sexual dominance and aggression* for the purposes of this project are verbal and physical violent acts of the self-perceived superior sexed subject upon the body of the other. While these acts of violence may be sexual in nature, they are not limited to sexual acts and may take any form of bodily violation. Object, intent, and action also can constitute this form of violence.

suggest schools themselves offer a heterosexist field of operation, in other words the school culture in some circumstances may be reinforcing such acts.

Studies of the social construction of gender and sexuality within schools rely upon discourse analysis to help explore a person's consolidation or embodiment of particular sexed and gendered attitudes and behaviors. Discourse comprises of the ideas, concepts, and categories through which meaning is given to particular social category. The discursive (re)production of a social category, for example a lesbian, comes from recognizing the linguistic signs and symbols communally associated with that category (Judith Butler, 1990). One can be seen as or can see oneself within a particular social category, for example once they have been socially identified as gay or straight.

The discourse analysis of schools examines how community members use language and symbolic means to construct versions of their experiences (Pascoe, 2007). This analysis is based on the assumption that people draw on cultural and linguistic resources in order to construct their social interactions in certain ways in order to both articulate themselves and to become legible, or seen, within a given social context. Discursive analysis of Brandon and Lawrence might explore the social expressions of acceptable and abnormal masculinity and sexuality available within their school context.

However, social constructionist views of dominance and violence are less able to take into account the individual motivation for taking up particular subjectivities. While Brandon and some of his peers were engaging in particularly dominant and aggressive heterosexist masculinity, other members of the school community were not. And getting at why this particularly violent masculine heterosexual behavior was meaningful to Brandon could tender valuable insight into preventing future violence.

In analyzing a dominant and violent subjectivity, the aggressor's orientation and behavior toward the victim can help to interpret his acts of gender and sexuality dominance (Ahmed, 2006, p. 51). An individual phenomenological analysis of the intentional desires and actions of the individual—which in the case described above might be an analysis of what Brandon was thinking and feeling in the moment of aggression—is helpful (Schultz, 1967). It may inform us of the particular style through which Brandon took up the heterosexual male position of dominance over the feminized and sexual other Lawrence. This in turn could offer deeper understanding of the experience and personal meanings of this dominance and violence (Heinämaa, 1996). Accounting for why one individual takes up this subjectivity while another does not may ultimately suggest appropriate individual interventions to reduce interpersonal violence.

However, when interpreting the dominance of a subject over a victim, an observer obviously could not stand back and observe the tangible presentation of domination and violence without intervention for safety purposes. Psychological and phenomenological analysis relies upon reconstructed and often-contradictory post incident reports. These recountings can be deeply colored for a variety of reasons, including psychological and legal. Uncovering some understanding of a situated subjectivity, an understanding of why one individual takes up violence while another does not, from within these discourses proves to be a necessary yet somewhat unreliable endeavor.

At the same time it is imperative to address the degree to which Brandon engaged in acts of sexual dominance modeled both for him and for the Lawrence through social views of gender and sexuality, including within the school. This is sexuality reproduced by something akin to what Foucault (Foucault, 1990) theorized as the technologies of

sex, and gender performances. Butler (1993) later expanded upon this theory to include it as part of the matrix of heterosexuality, and describes it as a heterosexual masculine social space.

This would mean exploring the heterosexual masculine or heteronormative social space that was available for Brandon to operate as an aggressor, based for instance on faculty and student accounts. This might tender significant though partial insight into the production of the subject's actions. Thus, the individual and specific manifestation of violence offer one window into the discursive (re)production of a dominant and aggressive male sexed subjectivity which is ongoing among U.S. adolescent communities centered on male heterosexuality (Rasmussen, 2006). The larger social (re)production offers a second view, and it is evidenced by national statistics which indicate three quarters of self identified sexual minority teens as well as three quarters of all females experience sexual intimidation during their adolescent years in school. Nearly half of those in both groups surveyed report verbal and physical sexual harassment (Franklin, 2000; Froyum, 2007; Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; Lipson, 2001; Pascoe, 2007). These findings are corroborated by studies of the enactment of homophobic aggression among the school wide communities that explore a widely practiced "fag discourse" as homophobic harassment for multiple purposes (Pascoe, 2007) the pervasive use of homophobic verbal abuse to offset racial inequities (Froyum, 2007) and the self acknowledged use of homophobic name calling and bullying by one quarter of students surveyed (Franklin, 2000).

A social context analysis of a social subjectivity like Brandon's offers an opportunity to explore the social production of a subjectivity of sexual and gendered

dominance. It is important to explore the social framework for why, how, what and upon whom, when, and where one takes up the enactment of heterosexist dominance. A better understanding of the social context of this subjectivity may offer insight into why it is taken up by some and not by others. This dissertation undertakes a discursive analysis of the (re)production of heteronormative violence within a school community.

This study consists of an ethnographic analysis of the faculty, curriculum, pedagogy, sponsored events, peer social interactions, and policies and practices related to the production of normative gender and sexuality in a single middle school. It will explore the sexed subject space of dominance and violence reproduced in epidemic proportions in schools across the United States. Both actor and discourse perform in concert in enacting heterosexist aggressive masculinity; it is imperative to now move beyond an individual unit of analysis to better understand this phenomena.

To pursue a greater understanding of these patterns of heteronormative violence in schools I pose the following research questions:

1. In what ways are specific incidents and subsequent accounts of heteronormativity related to the ongoing social production of heteronormativity in schools?
2. How do these accounts work to “naturalize” the production of this type of violence within schools?

Section Two: Theoretical Location of the Study

Overview

The theoretical location of this study begins with the broadest level of social theory and systemically addresses the related educational research down to the highly

specific questions this project hopes to address (see Figure 1). The flow chart funnels down to indicate the nesting of each body of literature beneath its super ordinate field, finally ending with the location for the present study. This section will track first the theory of *heteronormativity*¹¹ in relation to the *othering* and *abjection*¹² of the non-normative subject. This section will also explore the broad theoretical analysis of the social production of violence toward the *other* of heteronormativity (see Box A at the top of Figure 1).

Following a brief synthesis of the theory of heteronormativity in relation to the field of education (Pinar, 1998; Rofes, 2005; Rottmann, 2006; Tierney & Dilley, 1998), I move to a compilation of what is known with regard to the social production of heteronormativity within the specific institution of schools (beginning with Box B in Figure 1). Here I discuss research on historical production of heteronormativity in schools through faculty representation of sexuality and gender, sexuality curriculum with regard to homosexuality, and school student policies related to non-normative youth. I next note research exploring the discursive overlap between heteronormative discourses in schools and patriarchal discourses in schools; in other words, research that explores the ways in which normative masculinity and femininity are associated with normative sexuality.

¹¹ *Heteronormativity*, as defined for the purposes of this study is the normative discourse that will include the practices and institutions operating to privilege heterosexuality as the “natural,” fundamental, and morally superior order for gendered social relations. The first subsection below briefly details the social theories of Michele Foucault, Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick, Gail Ruben, and Adrienne Rich in the development of a theory of heteronormativity. The work of these theorists will be referenced in this section.

¹² For the present introductory purposes, the *Other* is the abnormal, unnatural, and immoral binary opposite to the central subject within normative discourse. For example in heteronormativity, the binary opposite of heterosexuality the homosexual is co-constructed as the Other. *Abjection* is the indescribable individual experiences which take place outside the bounds of normative articulation, the nameless borders of identity and experience. The first and second subsections below will go into further detail regarding Judith Butler’s theory of normative discourse *othering* and *abjection* with regard to those lives which are placed in opposition to “normal” gender and sexuality.

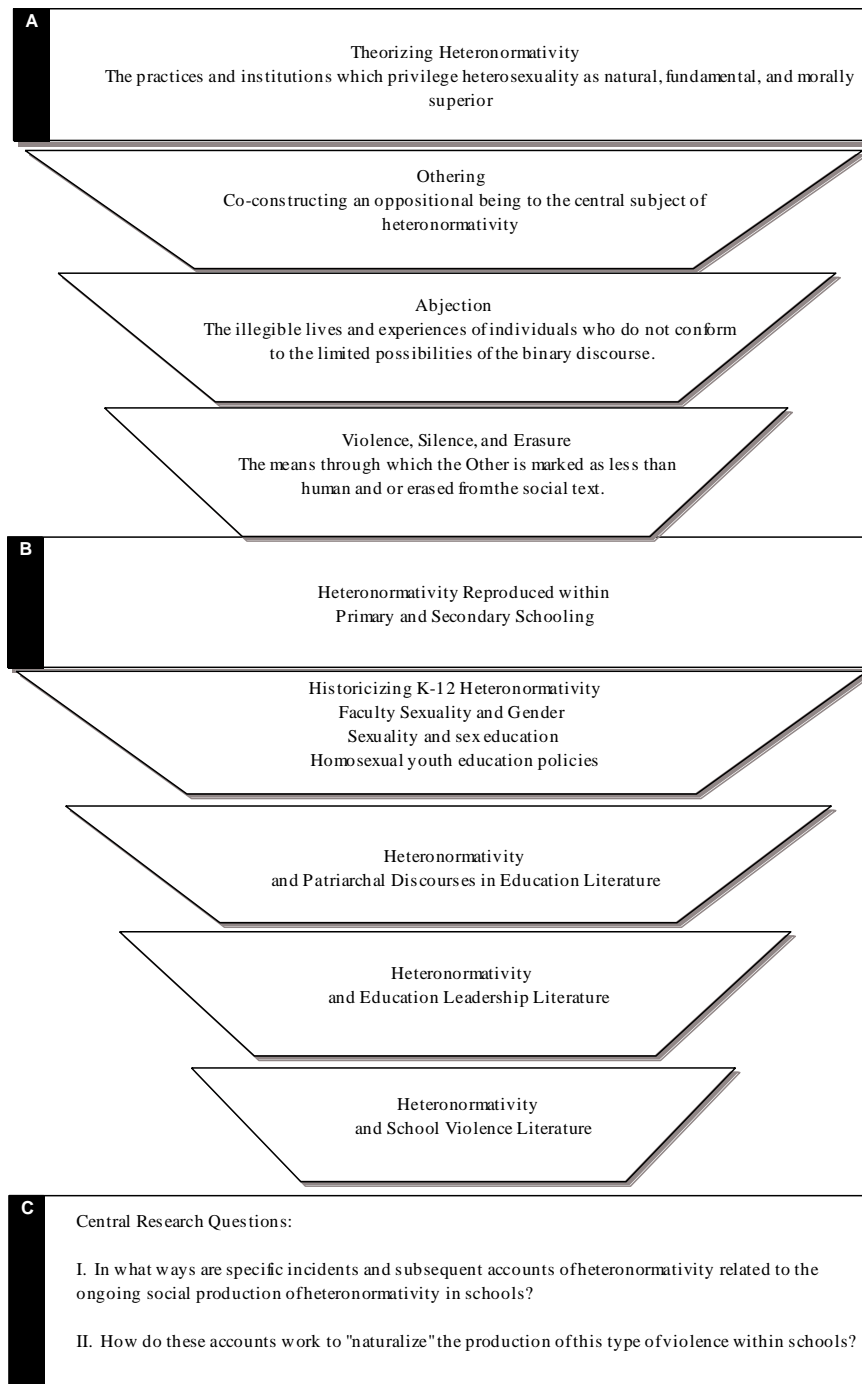


Figure 1. A conceptual map of the process for theorizing a subjectivity of heterosexual domination.

From here I will move to a synthesis of research on the violence¹³ inherent in this normative discourse within schools (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; MacIntosh, 2007; Mason, 2002; Rasmussen, 2006). Here I will locate my study within educational research related to heteronormativity and school violence. First looking at the issue in relation to the field of educational leadership where heteronormative violence has been named, cordoned off, and privately sanctioned away.

Next I will look at educational research on heteronormative violence. This research falls broadly into three areas including both gender and sexuality studies on violence as well as general research on school violence and bullying. From here I will note the gaps in the literature and finally introduce the questions addressed by my research project as shown in Box C (Figure 1) at the base of the chart.

Heteronormativity

The discursive production of the social categories of gender and sexual orientation is an ongoing iterative process. Foucault's revolutionary three volume *History of Sexuality* (1978, 1985, 1986) offered a genealogy of the historical production and regulation of sexuality. Judith Butler (1990; 1993, 2004) took up this post structural discursive analysis within feminist theory through an analysis of the category of gender. Her groundbreaking works denaturalized and analyzed the social construction of binary gender.¹⁴ Both theorists were considering the discursive production of a normative category, which encompassed the production of an Other (Judith Butler, 1993, p. 3). In

¹³ *Violence* for these purposes encompasses the othering of heteronormativity, the marking, or silencing of queers or homosexuals. This violence involves both control and assimilation, the regulating of bodies and the silencing of difference.

¹⁴ Foucault and Butler's theories of sexuality and gender brought about the beginnings of contemporary queer theory. Queer theory offers to complicate normative binary categories like both gay/straight and man/woman by suggesting identity is unstable and possesses multiple and partial positions.

the first instance the normative discourse under scrutiny was one constructed around bourgeois patriarchal heterosexuality and in the second it was a gender discourse built around essentialist male and female sex categories. I am making use of these theories together in my working definition of heteronormativity, as the infusion of gender normativity is recognized as constitutive in Western discourses of sexuality and sexual orientation (Judith Butler, 1990; Sedgwick, 1993).

For the purposes of this study then, heteronormativity will include the practices and institutions which privilege heterosexuality as the “natural,” fundamental, and morally superior order for social relations. Implicit within this working definition for heteronormativity is what Gail Ruben (1984) referred to as the sex/gender system, the system by which biological sex is transformed into “products of human activity.” Therefore, both normative sexuality and normative gender serve together in the formation of heteronormative discourses.

These discursive productions involve practices which make use of standards and norms to reify a social category like heterosexual as the assumed fundamental and morally superior position central to organizing everyone within the category of sexuality (Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004). With “compulsory heterosexuality” as the organizing category for sexuality within a society, sexual behavior is organized, defined, and regulated in concert with or opposition to the central category (Rich, 1994). As I suggested in my introduction these organized principles regulate day-to-day social interactions within a school via everything from overtly heterosexual rituals like Valentine’s Day to the gendered biologic essentialism and binary friction implicit in single sex bathrooms.

Groundbreaking naturalistic studies has most recently been done mapping the heteronormativity that is pervasive within U.S. structures and institutions, including schools, and offers analysis of the dominance and privilege conferred upon those perceived to be heterosexual subjects (Blaise, 2005; Pascoe, 2007; Thorne, 1993). The *Other*, in this case the non-normative sexual being frequently identified as the homosexual, is the necessary outsider (D'Emilio, 1983). The other or outsider named within the heteronormative frame is a necessary presence whose difference distinguishes and elevates what is named as the authentic heterosexual male or female. Difference and the marking of an outsider then operates as a fundamental organizing mechanisms of heteronormativity (Rasmussen, 2006).

The “Other.” Normative discourse defines the center in opposition to the Other. The other represents the boundaries of normal, or those ideas and performances which can never be part of the central subject. The Other in fact defines the central subject by default, and thus in the case of heteronormativity, those acts and ideas which are identified as homosexual are necessary in establishing and privileging heterosexuality as the central social sexual identity (D'Emilio, 1983). As Butler explains in *Gender Trouble*, we are forever co-constructing one another and through one another we as individuals are quite literally undone (Judith Butler, 1990). For heteronormative discourse to exist there must a subject in opposition to heterosexuality, there must be an abnormal subhuman form of sexual being to contrast the normal heterosexual (D'Emilio, 1983).

The Other of heteronormativity whether it is the seen as the binary homosexual or the plurality of queer¹⁵ states of being is inferior to the heterosexual center and therefore

¹⁵ *Queer* here is used as an expansive term used to complicate the categories of homosexual and heterosexual. It is also used to further complicate the categories created in concert or contrast to

holds a subhuman status in its articulation (Judith Butler, 1993; Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004). Historically this social position, that of the homosexual, has been criminalized, pathologized, and marginalized in relation to heterosexuality (Blount, 1996; D’Emilio, 1983; Lugg, 2003; Pinar, 1998; Tierney & Dilley, 1998).

Heteronormativity functions through social practices that point to the signifiers of homosexuality or non-normative sexuality as morally corrupt, unnatural, and less than fully human. Education scholars have begun to explore the pedagogical implications of heteronormative production a homosexual Other in an effort to disrupt the production of dominant and privileged narratives of sexuality and gender within education (MacIntosh, 2007; Tierney & Dilley, 1998).

Abjection. Within the limited framework of a heteronormative discourse there exists an expansive space of the limitless gender experiences and sexualities that cannot be named. This space outside the bounds of articulation has been named the abject by Butler who explains; “(this space is the) domain of the abject beings, who are not yet ‘subjects,’ but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject” (1993, p. 3). A common usage definition of abject as being in a lower state or condition aptly describes the experience of abjection in relation to the limited subject spaces within the binary sex and gender discourse. Heteronormative abjection occurs when experiences cannot be categorized or identified within the confines of a binary either or discourse regarding gender and sexuality. Abjection occurs where an individual experiences sexuality or gender in ways that cannot be categorized within the binary “hetero/homo” or “male/female” binary discourses of sexuality and gender.

homosexuality. The use of queer both acknowledges normative abjection while at the same time pointing to the constructed nature of all identity categories.

Butler goes on to explain the marginalized space in which this abjection occurs is necessary in preserving the normalizing discourse:

The abject designates here precisely those ‘unlivable’ and ‘uninhabitable’ zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of subject, but whose living under the sign of ‘unlivable’ is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject. (1993, p. 3)

Here as in the case of the Other, abjection shores up and reifies the homosexual and the heterosexual as real through the loss of signifiers to articulate subjectivity.

Violence toward the “Other.” Historically the heteronormative other has been unknowable outside of criminalized or pathologized terms (Blount, 1996; Lugg, 2003, 2006; Rofes, 2004; Talburt, 2004). The othering of heteronormativity, the making of homosexuals, has historically and continues to involve both control and assimilation, the regulating of bodies and the silencing of difference (Epstein, 1999; Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004). Violence toward homosexuality is enacted through silence as well as through public sanction of the non-normative body. This social violence has taken the form of criminalizing, pathologizing, marginalizing, and demoralizing the non-normative homosexual subject (D’Emilio, 1983). This discursive location of the other as subhuman has also long been associated with the prevalence of biased attacks upon perceived homosexuals or gender deviant subjects (Corbett, 2001; Franklin, 2000, 2004; Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; Lindenberger, 2005; Mason, 2002; McDevitt et al., 2002; Plummer, 2001; Stein, 2003; Tomsen & Mason, 2001).

Gender studies have done extensive work in exploring the extent to which heteronormative violence toward the other, most frequently labeled homophobic violence, operates as an organizing principal of heterosexual masculinity (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Herek, 2000; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003). As Michael Kimmel and

Matthew Mahler famously noted in their research on school shootings, “one could say that homophobia is the hate that makes men straight” (2003, p. 1446). Homophobic violence in this analysis is a necessary form of heterosexual masculine articulation. Kimmel and Mahler go on to suggest, homophobia among males should not be read as a fear of homosexuals, but rather as a fear of being perceived as a homosexual (2003).

Gail Mason (2002) and Emma Renold (2005) have done pioneering research to expand gendered analysis of this heteronormative violence beyond androcentric articulations of masculinity in order to encompass violence toward female youth and adult lesbians. While Mason notes homophobic incidents are more than twice as likely to be directed at males, her analysis of violence against 70 lesbians explores ways in which heteronormative violence toward lesbians is enacted in order to “cure” lesbians and re-center a masculine gender order and heterosexual desire (Mason, 2002).

The identification or naming of a non-normative other, coupled with the violent dehumanizing of this subjectivity, are the organizing principals of a heteronormative discourse. Heteronormativity necessitates a homosexual or queer body as the means to regularly articulate itself, normal must be actively defined in contrast to abnormal. And so while the violent Othering of queer bodies has little changed, what was first identified by social scientists on the individual level as homophobia, has since been considered on institutional level as heterosexism, and most recently explored on the discursive level as a function of heteronormativity (Herek, 2000; Pinar, 1998; Tierney & Dilley, 1998).

Reproducing Heteronormativity in Schools

The social production of heteronormativity has a long history in U.S. public school policies, practices and procedures including hiring and employment practices, sex

education curriculum, and student safety and harassment policies. As a matrix for social order, heteronormativity operates in tandem with patriarchal discourses ordering of gender normalcy. A great deal of educational research has been devoted to deconstructing and interrupting the (re)production of heteronormativity in schools.

Historicizing heteronormativity in schools. Historians have done extensive investigations into the production of sexism, heterosexism, and heteronormativity through analysis of historical social, legal, political, and economic forces upon public education. Scholars have traced heteronormativity in professional policy and practice regarding the employment of elementary and secondary teachers and administrators (Blount, 1996; Blount & Anahita, 2004; Bushnell, 2002; Lugg, 2003). Additionally work has been done to trace the normalizing practices of sex education as a patriarchal heteronormative social curriculum (Hunter, 1992; Irvine, 2004; J. P. Moran, 2002). And most recently historians have begun to look at the school policies and practices following the gay liberation movement¹⁶ with regard to the limited rights of homosexual youth in the face of homophobic violence in schools (Bedell, 2003; Griffin & Ouellett, 2003; Hunter, 1992; MacIntosh, 2007; Myers, 2002; Stader & Graca, 2007; Talburt, 2004). All of these aspects of public education operate to inform contemporary heteronormative discourses within public education.

Professional heteronormativity: A history. With the growth of public education following in the mid 1800's, single women primarily comprised the field of teaching (Blount & Anahita, 2004). These women were considered the wards of the school's

¹⁶ The 1969 Stonewall Riots marked the beginning of a transition in the public perception of homosexuality as criminal to homosexuals as a minority population. The transition featured the subsequent state-by-state decriminalization of private consensual sex between adults, the removal of homosexuality as a mental disorder by the American Psychiatric Association, and the beginnings of legal recognition of sexual orientation discrimination.

community and were paid a minimal salary and otherwise kept by a local community. Policies noted that these women could maintain a teaching position only until they were married, at which time they were dismissed from their teaching post (Lugg, 2003). By the 1920s, single subordinate non-sexual white women dominated the field of teaching.

At this time the presence of any men in the classroom was viewed with great suspicion, as teaching was a feminized profession (Blount, 1996). However, the 1920s saw the role of public education greatly expanded by the extension of compulsory education into the high school years, a social policy brought forward by labor unions to reduce child labor's impact on the labor market (Olson, 2000). Secondary education and the bureaucratizing of school systems offered what were seen as the "natural" placement for male educators, high school instruction, and school administration (Lugg, 2003). High school teaching and administrative positions were definitively masculine and heterosexual and these professional positions were posted and reserved for married males with academic credentials.

The sexuality of educators was foregrounded in the 1920s when sexuality researchers categorized homosexuality as abnormal and unhealthy behavior (Lugg, 2003). Early sexologists attributed gender performance to the production of sexual orientation thereby determining gender nonconformity to be an early indicator of homosexuality, and practiced gender conformity to be the prescription or prevention for homosexuality (D'Emilio, 1983). Public policy laws on sodomy were passed, and schools were purged of gender non-normed faculty who were seen to be promoting homosexuality (Blount, 1996; Blount & Anahita, 2004).

There was a brief respite during World War II to the sexual and gender limitations placed education professionals. The shortage in the labor market called for a moratorium on masculine and feminine professional roles for educators as well as the ability to place particular marital demands upon female educators (Lugg, 2003). This liberatory period was quickly brought to an end during the 1940s McCarthy era of Red Scare, in which pinko, commie, and queer were synonymous terms for enemies of the state (D’Emilio, 1983). Again there were purges of those perceived to be homosexual. During this era it came to be necessary for male teachers to marry in order to prove their sexuality and thereby their moral capacity to teach children (Lugg, 2003). And although single women had long dominated the female sphere of public education, the rampant homophobia and emphasis on the moral foundations of marriage transformed expectations for women in schools as well. And by the 1950s the majority of female educators were expected to be married (Lugg, 2003).

Today’s gendered and sexual professional representation remains remarkably unchanged from the Cold War era. Elementary teaching remains a feminized profession dominated by a female workforce, while secondary education is perceived as masculine and dominated by a male workforce (Blount, 1996). Current K-12 teaching positions all assume heterosexual performances of marriage or courtship as exemplar of the moral fortitude for working with children (Blount & Anahita, 2004). Administrative roles are constructed as masculine and dominated by “family” men as well (Lugg, 2003).

Throughout the professional space, heterosexuality exhibited through marriage is a general expectation of both male and female educators

Heteronormativity and sex education curriculum. Public concerns with sex education can be dated to the 1920's. At this time unwanted pregnancy and venereal disease were the cause of public concern. In addition, the newly extended years of "childhood" due to compulsory attendance laws, brought the issues of puberty and sexual development into the educational arena. This newly captive population of sexually developed clientele was seen as needing an appropriate moral education on sexuality (Irvine, 2004). However, there was deep concern at the time with any form of sex education might activate sexual desire on the part of adolescents. Therefore the education of the era was focused on perpetuating sexual fear of disease and sexual knowledge based on a desire free scientific status for human sexuality (J. P. Moran, 2002).

During the 1940's the winds shifted toward a more sex positive interpretation of sex education. At this time the Comstock laws were repealed, these laws had been passed at the turn of the century labeling contraceptives as pornographic materials. During the 40's public sentiment moved toward a framing of sexuality as an element of human relations, rather than as biological necessity. The 1950's saw sex education transform from a focus on personal hygiene and health to a new focus on family living. This move transformed the formerly medicalized and preventative sex education into a heterosexual middle class family production course (Irvine, 2004). This set the scene for a major sex education battle in the 1960's when women and racial minorities articulated differences with these prescriptive roles and demanded different forms of sex education specific to their concerns. At this time sex education provided knowledge of and some access to birth control, while simultaneously promoting a clearly middle class heteronormative family structure for sexuality and procreation (Blount & Anahita, 2004).

The 1970s saw the emergence of the Christian Right as a political body intent upon morally defining sexuality and reining in sex education. This school of thought was quite similar to that offered at the beginning of the century; among Christian Conservatives sexuality was again framed as animalistic, procreative, and socially limited to state sanctioned marriage. This was the beginnings of a new contained-sexuality movement not unlike the one at the time of the Comstock laws, which would ultimately result in the contemporary abstinence-only sex education curriculum. Such things as graphic anti-abortion shock films during sex education classes, and a return to the emphasis on disease and pathology within sexuality marked this period (Irvine, 2004). The AIDS epidemic of the 80's furthered this emphasis on sexual disease, and the pathology of non-heterosexual practices.

The present state of sex education is deeply contested. While Federal education funds are directly tied to abstinence sex education and the non-recognition of homosexuality some states have begun to reject this funding in favor of sex education that recognizes rather than stigmatizes premarital, non-marital sex, and homosexual sexuality in relation to disease and unwanted pregnancy prevention (Irvine, 2004).

Heteronormative and the homosexual student: A history. Literature regarding the presence of homosexual people in schools was focused on the social threat of homosexual teachers from the 1920's to the 1980's (Blount & Anahita, 2004). However, in the 1980's researchers in medicine, social work and psychology began to publish articles about the experiences of gay and lesbian youth (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003).

This group of youth was placed into the "at risk" educational category and literature focused on the "clinicalization" of these youth (Salvin-Williams, 1990). At this

time researchers and practitioners focused on treating the individual psychological, social and health issues of gay and lesbian youth with little focus on the heteronormative social conditions of schools. Two notable exceptions were programs focused on creating safe schools for gay and lesbian youth; the The Hetrick-Martin Institute's Harvey Milk School in New York, and Project 10 in the Los Angeles school district (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003). These programs were designed to remove lesbian and gay youth from a hostile homophobic educational environment and offer them access to education and other services.

Within a decade, Health and Human Services statistics on suicide rates among gay youth would place schools at the center of the discussion of addressing the needs of gay and lesbian youth (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003). This period of social history was however troubled by the ongoing AIDS epidemic which fueled a political firestorm between the Religious Right and the homosexual community (Hunter, 1992). Schools were being indicted as the sites of isolation, violence and trauma for gay and lesbian youth, while at the same time they were attacked by Christian fundamentalists for any educational practices that "promoted homosexuality" (Irvine, 2004).

The 1990's was a decade that saw growth in research into K-12 schools as sites of harassment for queer youth. Much of this research pointed to ways to establish "safe spaces" for queer youth (MacIntosh, 2007). During this period harassment policies became inclusive of sexual minority youth, social clubs were established often known as gay-straight clubs, and school personnel were trained about this particular "at risk" population (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003). This period is marked by a continued focus on

homophobia rather than any significant analysis of the heteronormative context of schools.

The practice of addressing sexual minority youth as a special interest group prevails to the present date in the trends toward providing education to sexual minority youth (Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004). At the same time opposition from Christian fundamentalist groups and legal battles continue to destabilize progressive or inclusive trends in education.

Throughout this entire historical period the intentional articulation of normative gender and sexuality has been at play in the role of public education to produce productive citizens (Blount & Anahita, 2004). For example, contemporary policy debates regarding schools sex education curriculum suggest it is the states responsibility to impose either Christian patriarchal¹⁷ morality on sexuality or a secular biologic “human nature” sexuality on adolescent students (“Title V - Abstinence Education Program,” 1996). While these appear to be opposing camps, both assume heteronormative procreative sexuality the fundamental defining category for their proposed interventions and both evaluate the failures of their opposition based upon heteronormative measures. Abstinence until marriage sex education, federally mandated in 1996 to reduce unwanted pregnancies, is now under ongoing scrutiny and state by state rejection of federal funding due to limited outcomes in the prevention unwanted pregnancy (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2002).

¹⁷ Here I use the term patriarchal to note the specifically identified marriage structure indicated in Abstinence Education Program. This welfare reform initiative teaches youth that abstinence from sex should only be ended by the legal marriage of a man and woman. The explicit intent of this is to form an economically viable space for procreation in which the male will be the head of household providing income and the female will provide the domestic base to the unit.

Tracking the normative bounds of sexuality and gender in public schools is at all times and in all places complicated by the multiple intersections of dominance and oppression among the expanding student population including race, social class, religion, citizenship status which forcibly impact and inform norms of gender and sexuality differently among the differing social categories.

Patriarchal discourses intersecting with heteronormativity. Discourses on sexuality are closely related to discourses on normative gender within adolescent literature (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 2006; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Stein, 2003, 2005). In their analysis of masculinity, violence and schooling, Kenway and Fitzclarence (2006, p. 207) refer to Connell's (1995) notion of a "patriarchal dividend" as the general advantage males gain from the subordination of females. They go on to suggest the gender order is internal to masculinities' dynamics. Michael Kimmel and Matthew Mahler (2003) note in their analysis of homophobic violence the association of violence with masculine virility, suggesting research finds violence to be normative for most boys.

Nan Stein offers social and legal analysis of the peer-to-peer heterosexual harassment in the Title IX, Davis law suit and the peer-to-peer homosexual harassment of the Title IX, Nobozny law suit to suggest the overlapping discourses of patriarchy and heteronormativity in relation to school violence (Stein, 2003, 2005). This analysis shows the legal trend toward the recognition of homosexual harassment as comparable and covered under the same legal policies as heterosexual sexual harassment. Additional research has been done on the intersections of heteronormativity and patriarchal discourses during early childhood, where researchers have explored the intersections of gendered and heteronormative play among young children (Blaise, 2005; Renold, 2005).

And finally, the intersection of heteronormative and patriarchal discourses has been analyzed in research related to violence directed at lesbians (Mason, 2002, 2005; Tomsen, 2006; Tomsen & Mason, 2001). The complicated intersection of sexual normativity and gender normativity is seen in the earliest structures of social play and in later social policing of gender and sexuality.

Educational research on heteronormativity. Educational researchers have analyzed what has been alternately labeled homophobic, heterosexist, or heteronormative structures and practices in schools through analysis of early childhood education (Blaise, 2005; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Thorne, 1993), educational involvement in adolescent sexuality development (Martino, 2000; J. P. Moran, 2002; L. J. Moran & Skeggs, 2004; Pascoe, 2007; Plummer, 1999, 2001; Rasmussen, 2006; Renold, 2005; Tomsen & Mason, 2001), student experiences of the intersections of masculinity with race and social class (Ferguson, 2000; Fordham, 1995; Froyum, 2007; Kenway & Fitzclarence, 2006; Pascoe, 2007; Willis, 1981), school based homophobic violence in relation to safety policies (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; MacIntosh, 2007), regulations regarding faculty representation of sexuality (Blount, 1996; Blount & Anahita, 2004; Bushnell, 2002; Lugg, 2003, 2006), and the substance of educational research itself (Dillabough, 2006; Koschoreck, 2003; Tierney & Dilley, 1998). These studies all explore aspects of the normalizing production of homosexual “otherness” within the institutional mechanisms that establish heterosexuality as the normal, natural, or authentic state of being.

An underlying theme within this broad field of educational research is the preponderance of destructive outcomes related the abjection of non-normative

community members through silences and practices most often labeled heterosexism or homophobia.

Educational Leadership and Heteronormative Violence

U.S. public schools are a focus of national and international attention with regard to ongoing heterosexist and homophobic harassment and violence. Both the United Nations and the international watchdog organization Human Rights Watch have published extensive reports on the hostile climate toward perceived sexual minority youth in U.S. K-12 schools (Bochenek & Brown, 2001; Dunne, Humphreys, & Leach, 2003). There has now been over a decade of analysis by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) of the pervasive climate of heterosexism (Lipson, 2001) and by the Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) on the pervasive homophobia (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006) in U.S. public schools. According to these studies, educational leaders in the K-12 system are operating within a system riddled with ethical, cultural, and legal concerns regarding dominant and violent heteronormativity and an imperative to address this situation (Cohan, Hergenrother, Johnson, Mandel, & Sawyer, 1996; Curcio, Berlin, & First, 1996).

Yet over the last two decades only a small body of literature has emerged directly connecting educational leadership to issues related to sexual minority youth, homophobia, heterosexism, or heteronormativity (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003; Myers, 2002; Rottmann, 2006; Ryan, 1998). However in looking beyond literature specifically within the field of educational leadership, one can find a larger body of work addressing leadership practices related to homophobia and heterosexism. This literature focuses on creating policies which address school safety for sexual minority youth (Cohan et al.,

1996; Curcio et al., 1996; Szalacha, 2003), establishing climates of tolerance and safe spaces (Goodenow, Szalacha, & Westhimer, 2006; Koschoreck, 2003; Lugg, 2006; Ryan, 1998), and analysis of past administrative practices during incidents of homophobic harassment and violence (Dunne et al., 2003; Stader & Graca, 2007; Stein, 2003, 2005).

Naming the margins: Harassment policies. The first area addressed in school leadership literature is that of establishing policies to address sexual harassment and bullying related to sexual minority youth. Sexual minority students consistently report the non-existence or non-enforcement of policies related to same sex sexual harassment or other experiences of sexual bias (Elze, 2003; Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; Stein, 2003). Educational leaders operate within a double bind legally in establishing policies related to sexual minority students. The educational rights of sexual minority youth are regularly positioned in opposition to the religious rights of Christian conservatives who protest any affirmative recognition of homosexuality (Hunter, 1992; Myers, 2002).

There are limited resources available to educational leaders regarding best practices in policies regarding this form of harassment note the schools and the school leaders personal liability for peer-to-peer harassment as well as harassment across the continuum, student to teacher and vice versa (Cohan et al., 1996; Curcio et al., 1996). Additionally, there has been little meaningful analysis of the effectiveness of policies related to harassment in relation to the overall climate of homophobia or heterosexism within a school community.

Significant research on school climate would suggest that either this form of intervention does little to reduce homophobic harassment or that few schools leaders possess or enforce such policies as the vast majority of school climate research indicates

pervasive homophobia in U.S. K-12 schools (Bochenek & Brown, 2001; Corbett, 2001; Dunne et al., 2003; Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; Lipson, 2001). In Kate Meyer's analysis of the field of educational leadership regarding sexuality, she critiques this silence regarding homophobic harassment stating, "by not confronting and addressing these issues it could be considered that educators are culpable of condoning behavior that is not considered acceptable elsewhere in society" (2002, p. 298).

Structuring the margins: Safe spaces. A second area addressed in relation to educational leadership is in the practice of providing services to sexual minority youth and establishing sexual minority school clubs often referred to as gay straight alliances (GSAs) or other marginal "safe spaces" for sexual minority youth (Griffin, Lee, Waugh, & Beyer, 2005; Russell, McGuire, Laub, & Manke, 2006; Szalacha, 2003). Research here suggests a variety of improved outcomes for sexual minority youth where school leadership has provided safe spaces within the school. Some improvements for sexual minority youth include a reduction in experiences of school violence, improved learning, and a more positive experience of school climate measures (GLSEN, 2007). Given the wealth of psychological and sociological evidence of the damage done to sexual minority youth related to homophobia in schools, discussed in detail in the following subsection, this harm reduction practice cannot be understated (Elze, 2003; Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; MacIntosh, 2007; vanWormer & McKinney, 2003).

However, the creation of a marginal "safe space," the discourse of tolerance, and the provision of psychosocial treatments for damaged queer youth also discursively operate to maintain heteronormative status (MacIntosh, 2007). As Cindy Rottmann noted in her analysis of educational leadership that the practice of focusing on providing

services to sexual minority students rather than on the overall heteronormative climate operates to both serve and to reify these youth as the other within a “homosexual/heterosexual dichotomy” (Rottmann, 2006, p. 2).

Erasing the margins: Case by case discipline. The overwhelming presence of homophobic or heterosexist “bullying” in schools is most often addressed by school leaders following violent incidents of bias (Bedell, 2003; Stein, 2005). And while researchers’ like Kenway and Fitzclarence (2006), Kimmel and Malher (2003), and Stein (2005) suggest these incidents must be analyzed from a social context they all note that the dominant trend in both research and practice is to focus on the individual students involved in the incidents.

As Jane Kenway and Lindsay Fitzclarence explain, “The dominant tendency here has been to individualize and pathologize and indeed infantilize the violence which occurs within schools and/or to blame the peer group, family and/or the media for violence both in schools and beyond” (2006, p. 213). Not unlike the introductory case of Brandon McInerney and Lawrence King, research and practice has focused on exploring and indicting the individual psychological experiences and actions of aggressors and victims perhaps at the expense of an analysis of the school context for the violence (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003). This practice operates to erase the heteronormative context in favor of analyzing the “homophobic” individual.

Heteronormative Violence in Schools

Studies of the violent outcomes of heteronormative discourses in schools fit broadly into two categories; psycho-social studies of victims and psycho-social studies of perpetrators. As mentioned previously recent literature has noted that the research focus

on individuals points to a significant gap in the literature on this violence and more analysis of the whole school as the context of violence is needed (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 2006; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Stein, 2003).

Studies of victims: Psychology of isolation, fear, and moral degradation.

Studies have found that sexually non-normative youth experience school differently than their dominant peers (Elze, 2003). These youth report experiencing verbal and physical violence at school on a regular basis (Elze, 2003; Kosciw & Diaz, 2006). Non-normative or queer youth perceive school to be a dangerous place (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006), an unwelcoming place (Plummer, 1999), and a place where their rights will not be protected with regard to their perceived gender or sexuality difference (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 2006; MacIntosh, 2007).

Research has pointed to the negative outcomes of this heteronormative marginalization upon these students, noting a greater tendency toward school dropout rates, chemical abuse, homelessness, and suicide among sexual minority youth (vanWormer & McKinney, 2003). This literature primarily offers educators individualized practices for treating the psychological and educational effects of pervasive homophobia within schools (MacIntosh, 2007; vanWormer & McKinney, 2003). Noted sexual minority educational researcher Eric Rofes (2004) suggested the subject positioning of this type of research places queer youth in the perpetual position of abjection, what he called the “martyr-target-victim” social location of queer youth.

Studies of aggressors—From criminal typology to social context. National educational research on “bullying” and school violence has tended to generalize and psycho-pathologize the “youth violence” or “teen violence” that goes on at school

(Nansel et al., 2001; U.S. Surgeon General, 2001). This form of research does not fundamentally take into account the social context for school violence, but rather looks for prevailing patterns among aggressors.

Michael Kimmel and Matthew Malher (2003) in their analysis of 30 school shootings suggest the focus on the psychology of violence ignores the “content” of violence came to conclude that, “. . .instead of asking psychological questions about family dynamics and composition, psychological problems, and pathologies, we need to focus our attention on local school cultures and hierarchies, peer interactions, normative gender ideologies, and the interactions among academics, adolescents, and gender identity” (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003, p. 1444).

Fortunately there is a growing body of research centered on homophobic harassment and violence that does take into account the social context for school violence (Franklin, 2000, 2004; Herek, 2000; McDevitt et al., 2002; Quinn, 2002). This research takes into account the pervasive homophobia within a school community in exploring the patterns and trends in school bullying and violence (Franklin, 2000). Here the research suggests in-group affiliation and gender ideology may be associated with this form of violence (Franklin, 2000; Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Mason, 2002).

Heteronormative Violence: Moments of Social Articulation

Research has plainly indicated the pervasive heteronormative discourse within schools (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Pascoe, 2007). Further this discourse has long been associated with dominance and violence toward non-normative youth (Blount & Anahita, 2004; D’Emilio, 1983; Rofes, 2004; Talburt, 2004). And while educational leaders are aware of their legal and ethical responsibilities to address this problem, their research and

practitioner interventions have been limited to what one might call organizing the crisis (Rottmann, 2006). Scholars focused on issues related to sexuality within schools have exposed the strengths and limitations of an ongoing focus on addressing and treating the victims experience without interrupting the larger heteronormative discourse (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 2006), as well as the limitations of addressing the aggressors on a case-by-case basis (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003). A review of literature on heteronormative, heterosexist, and homophobic violence in schools points to a gap in the literature with regard to the workings of heteronormativity in relation to homophobic violence within the school setting (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003).

Gaps in the Literature

The past two decades of sexuality and educational research offer a fundamental platform for investigating heteronormative violence within schools. However there are significant gaps in knowledge that this research will also attempt to address. First, the overwhelming majority of past research has focused on students in grades nine through twelve (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003). There are significant contributions in within elementary studies (Blaise, 2005; Epstein & Johnson, 1998), but very little knowledge has been gathered with regard to the middle school years in relation to heteronormativity and homophobia. Therefore this study considers the (re)production of heteronormativity within a traditional three-grade middle school.

Secondly educational leadership literature has been remiss in reflecting upon leadership practices in relation to homophobic violence and heteronormativity within schools (Griffin et al., 2005; Myers, 2002; Rottmann, 2006; Ryan, 1998). Therefore this

study analyzes the implementation of policies and practices among educational leaders in relation to moments of heteronormative dominance and violence within a school.

And finally school violence and bullying research has profoundly missed the mark on addressing the social context of heteronormativity in relation to school violence (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Stein, 2003). Past research suggests the benefits of a closer examination of educational practice in the moments of heteronormative dominance. And it would appear from the body of research that these moments are quite clearly articulated against the backdrop of “homophobic” violence.

Therefore this project offers an examination of the school performance related to bullying within specific incidents of heteronormative domination. Here I offer an examination of how a middle school community organizes, explains, and understands the experiences of both the dominant aggressor and the sexual minority youth within these accounts. In this study offers a cross case comparison of the incidents of heteronormative domination and violence in order to address the stated research questions:

1. In what ways are specific events and accounts of heteronormativity related to the ongoing social (re)production of heteronormativity in schools?
2. How do these accounts work to naturalize the (re)production of heteronormativity in schools?

Methodology

This study applied naturalistic fieldwork of multiple sorts, including, participant observations, non-participant observations, individual interviews, and group interviews. At the broadest level this project adopted the form of ethnography, meaning that the unit

of analysis for the study is the socially distributed narratives of school events and activities made by members of the school community being studied. Given that the primary theoretical tradition in which this study is located is post-structuralist sociology, this unit of analysis is more precisely described as the *social discourses* that enable and constrain those interpretations. And given the specific focus of this study, this can be further narrowed to say that the study's unit of analysis is the operation of heteronormative discourses in a public school setting.

There are many ways to document the discourses that shape both individual phenomenological experience and patterns of social activity. For the purposes of this study, I will have organized data collection and analysis around an effort to identify several moments, events, or actions at the study site that make visible or explicit the salience of normative discourses about gender and sexuality to students lives. I have developed case studies that draw out the broader theoretical implications of these moments, events, or actions. Specifically, these episodes are analyzed for the insight they can provide into how heteronormative discourses function in middle school settings—where they operate, how are they are reinforced and reproduced, and how students are interpolated into them.

Finally, a cross case analysis pulls together the disparate narratives to explore common themes and moments of contradiction (Yin, 2003, p. 47). This cross case analysis has been supplemented with an analysis of data collected that fell outside of the individual cases, and combined to provide a thick description (Geertz 1973) of the operation of heteronormativity in a public middle school setting.

In presenting the case study methods I plan to employ, it is important to briefly review of the questions I propose this project will address.

1. In what ways are specific accounts of heteronormativity related to the ongoing social production of heteronormativity in schools?
2. How do these accounts work to naturalize the production of heteronormativity in schools?

Ontological and Epistemic Assumptions

Embedded in both my research questions and the methods I have used to address them are ontological and epistemic assumptions that need to be explicitly noted.

First, this study is critical of essentialist conceptions of gender and sexuality. It rejects the idea that gender identity and sexual identity are natural features of human life. On the other hand, it assumes the reality of heteronormative discourses—shared mutually supporting habits of social meaning and action—that enable and constrain the development of gender and sexual identities. The empirical and theoretical literature supporting these premises includes the work of Foucault (1971, 1978) and Butler (1990, 1993, 2004) as well as the later work of a variety of educational researchers (Pinar, 1998), as reviewed in the previous section. The object of this study is these heteronormative discourses.

Given any ontology, certain epistemic questions follow: (a) how can one know about the object of study, (b) what can one know about it, and (c) what is the nature of that knowledge. In general, this study answers these questions as appropriate for a traditional cultural ethnography: (a) cultural and social meanings are real and can be inferred from an observation and analysis of group activities and behaviors; (b) one can

infer shared meaning from coordinated actions, but cannot infer private idiosyncratic meanings; (c) the knowledge is objective in an interpretivist sense, and this objectivity is achieved by the use of certain standard procedures such as member checking, triangulation of data sources, coding, constant comparative analysis, and explicit delineation between low-inferences and high-inference components of data interpretation.

These epistemic questions and answers, however, are further complicated within a poststructuralist theoretical framework. Post-structuralism presupposes that the categories we use to discern knowledge from opinion, and rationality from irrationality are themselves discursive constructions. In other words, this study starts with the premise that not only are the binary categories of male and female, heterosexual and homosexual, masculine and feminine, products of historically and culturally contingent social discourses. It also operates on the premise that ideas about what can be known and what cannot be known about sexuality and gender and identity are also products of historically and culturally contingent social discourses.

This means that there can be no claims made about the objects of this study that pretend to rise above the influence of historically and culturally situated discourses. Knowledge claims, in a post-structuralist study, are always therefore situated in the discursive context that makes them possible (Haraway, 1988). In a more traditional cultural ethnography (or hypothesis testing study), objectivity is achieved through adherence to particular procedures. According to poststructuralist critiques, these procedural forms of objectivity fail to critically analyze the culturally contingent assumptions about knowledge on which they are based and the power dynamics through which that contingency is made invisible. Specifically, they fail to examine the way

certain conceptions of “science,” “knowledge,” and “objectivity” are deployed ideologically in ways that narrow the range of appropriate objects of study. In poststructuralist inquiry, these weaknesses of procedural objectivity are supplemented and to some extent displaced with a *strong objectivity* grounded in a reflexive transparency about the social origins of knowledge claims (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2006; Harding, 1998; Hartsock, 1987; Lather, 2001; St. Pierre, 2000).

Returning to the third epistemic question above, then, the answer for the purpose of this study is as follows: *What is the nature of that knowledge?* The knowledge claims made in this study will not be presented as transcending the cultural and historical context in which the study takes place. No such transcendence is assumed to be possible. Instead, knowledge will be distinguished from opinion and belief by the degree to which claims provide both supporting evidence *and* a reflexive transparency about their discursive foundations.

Methodological Implications of Ontological and Epistemic Assumptions

These ontological and epistemic assumptions have methodological implications which need to be conceptually explained as they have been operationalized in this study. Reflexivity functions as a methodological regulative ideal in poststructuralist sociological research, much like procedural objectivity operates as a regulative ideal in post-positivist research. Just as perfect objectivity is not practically possible, neither is perfect reflexivity possible. A researcher cannot perfectly locate her inquiry process and knowledge claims within all the social and historical conditions that make the inquiry and claims possible. Methodological decisions, therefore, are aimed at creating the best approximations to this ideal.

Also as with post-positivist research where there are many competing ideas about how best to achieve appropriate levels of objectivity, there are many competing ideas about how best to achieve appropriate levels of reflexivity in a poststructuralist sociological study. Some favor the use of first person reflection and inclusion of autobiographical elements in a study (Behar & Gordon, 1995; Reed-Danahay, 2001). Others advocate for power sharing and shared authorship with the persons and communities being studied (Lather, 1991). Others argue for the use of more arts-based forms of representation, representation whose persuasive power is grounded less in logical coercion to the acceptance of a single truth, and in an invitation to consider multiple possible perspectives on a subject (Barone, 1992; Derrida, 1976; Derrida & Ewald, 1995; Foucault, 1971; Haraway, 1988; Rosiek, 2007; Spivak, 1995; St. Pierre, 2000). Still others argue for saturating research texts with philosophical and theoretical interrogation of the rhetoric of inference used in empirical studies.

All of these views have to some extent informed this study. That being said, this study has taken a conservative methodological approach to the ideal of reflexivity. The study design is based on that of a traditional cultural ethnography, one grounded in traditional notions of objectivity. The design is then supplemented with more reflexive elements only where it is deemed necessary, given the focus and purpose of the inquiry.

The study design begins as a cultural ethnography of a school site, one that relies on non-participant and participant observations, as well as individual and group interview data. Analysis of this data include transcription of notes and interviews, coding of those interviews for themes, and content comparative analysis of those themes in relation to one another and existing theory in the field. A key component of the analysis involve the

development of a series of case studies of moments in which heteronormative discourses at the school become visible and salient to students lives.

The study's reflexive elements primarily involve the use of first person phenomenological reflections on the research process and autobiographical reflections that situate both the author and the study within the social discourses that make it possible. Reflexive analysis also involved extensive ongoing philosophical and theoretical interrogation of the concepts used in the analysis. The latter was particularly important given that with any study of gender and sexual identity, there is a risk that the very use of terms related to sexuality and gender serve to reinscribe the procrustean social discourses that the study is in fact attempting to problematize.

Study Setting—School Site

Exploring the social context of adolescents requires an immersion into their interlocking worlds. Therefore I conducted a one- year field study within a public sector middle school to gather data on the phenomenon in question. Observations and interviews took place throughout the 2008-2009 school year beginning the first week of school and lasting until the final day of the school year. I was on site a minimum of three days per week during this school year for a minimum of three hours each day. Overall the observations and interviews resulted in over three hundred hours of data collected during the 2008-2009 school year.

The middle school site selected for this research exists in an urban school district within the Pacific Northwest region of the United States. The school typifies the racial and socioeconomic variance within the region and offers a relatively standard and traditional methodology of public education. For this study I have renamed the site

Oakwood Middle School. I have also applied pseudonyms for all of the individual subjects within this study.

The specific middle school “Oakwood” selected for this research was identified for several reasons. First and foremost, the period of middle school was selected as the focal age as this period has been noted as a pivotal time for sexuality identity development work among children (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Rasmussen, 2006; Renold, 2002, 2005; Salvin-Williams, 1990; Thorne, 1993).

Second, as noted above, the demographics of Oakwood school typify those of the region, with youth identifying as 73% white, 10% Latino, 3% black, 6% Asian, and 6% Native American, and approximately 20% of the student body identified as economically disadvantaged. Faculty demographics are also illustrative of those for the field of middle school education as well as for the region. Faculty age in range from 24 to 55, identify as white, Latino, Asian, and Native American, and have on average 16 years of education. There is a large economic gap between certified and classified faculty. There are also heteronormative gender patterns in the assignments of professional duties in both certified and classified staff, for example the clerical staff is all female, the administration is all male; and among teaching staff clerical and organizational capacities disproportionate fall to female certified staff.

Of particular interest to the researcher in selecting this site was the faculty willingness and ability to engage in the overall topic of this study. Prior to site selection I interviewed and was interviewed by administrative teams at a series of middle schools with similar demographics. The team at Oakwood Middle School was in the process of initiating a Gay Straight Student Alliance (GSA) and was developing “Expect Respect”

assemblies around a variety of issues of difference and diversity including gender expression and sexual orientation. Rather than a concern of bias, these activities indicated to me as the researcher that my observations and interviews would not be injecting a conversation into the community. The activities also suggested a greater possibility for public discourse regarding otherwise silenced (non-normative) identities.

Data Sources

Archival data have been used where they are directly associated with school policy and practice related to sexuality and gender norms. Non-participant and participant observations took place in classrooms, hallways, unstructured and structured social time, during faculty meetings, in the administrative offices, during unstructured and structured interactions between administration and the school community, and during parent and community meetings. And finally semi structured interviews with students and faculty occurred throughout the year. Below are details on the methods and purposes for each form of data collection.

Archival data. The study makes use of available policy related documentation related to bullying, homophobic harassment, sexual harassment etc. This includes school and district documentation. The archives include harassment policies, dress codes, sex education curriculum, etiquette curriculum, student club bi-laws, employment policies, faculty handbook, student handbook etc. All archival documentation considered here is of a general nature and not related to specific incidents or subjects of the study. This documentation was made available to me upon request through the administrative team at the school site. This study did not make use of any confidential student records or documentation.

Non-participant observation. For the purposes of this study, non-participant observations is defined as the occasions in which the researcher is visibly present within a context, but not speaking or participating in the activities or discussions. Rather the researcher observed heteronormative discourse or was engaged in note-taking based on the observation protocol designed for the particular context (see Observation Protocol appendices). Non-participant observations were recorded during and immediately following the researcher's observation of a school activity or interaction related to the specified topic of the research. Details regarding the setting for non-participant and participant observations follow the brief section below on participant observations

Participant observation. In contrast to non-participant observations, participant observations are the occasions in which the researcher was visibly present within a context and was speaking or participating in the activities or discussions. The researcher acted as an assistant or tutor, engaged in casual conversation, or responded to inquiries from members of the site community. Participant observations were recorded immediately following the researchers participation in a school activity or interaction related to the specified topic of the research (see Observation Protocol appendices).

Observation settings. Both types of observations took place in classrooms, hallways, unstructured and structured social time, during faculty meetings, in the administrative offices, during unstructured and structured interactions between administration and the school community, and during parent and community meetings.

Marginal "safe spaces" observations. The school has designed three mechanisms for providing gender and sexuality support to non-normative and struggling students. There are small therapeutic groups for female students facilitated by a professional

counselor from a local nonprofit agency, small support groups facilitated by the school guidance counselor, and a school club for sexual minority students and their allies.

Observations took place in all three types of meetings. Safe spaces offered theoretical insight into the ways in which groups construct and identify themselves in this middle school community. Confidentiality and research subject protection precluded observational notes in the context of counseling groups in which I acted as a moderator.

Elective and core curriculum course observation. In order to explore classroom spaces, I frequently observed elective and core curriculum. On occasions I acted as classroom aid while at other times I observed the class as an “outsider” strictly documenting the interactions that occurred in these settings. All students, families, and faculty were informed of my presence and proposed research observations.

Administrative intervention observation. To better understand the coordination and implementation of harassment policies related to sexual harassment and homophobia, I frequently observed administrative practices related to incidents as well as those related to the prevention of incidents. Strict confidentiality procedures were applied to protect the identities of any subjects observed in this area.

Individual interviews. Open-ended interviews were conducted with eleven faculty members and twenty four students regarding the social context for forming or affirming ones gender identity or sexual orientation (see Interview Protocol appendices). These interviews were approximately sixty minutes in length and were designed to explore the local context for constructing normal and abnormal subjects in relation to gender identity. Additionally these interviews explored what is seen within the community to be “natural” gendered behavior in relation to normative sexuality.

Interviews were conducted on a voluntary basis with community members from a variety of social locations. Interviews with minors were done with the consent of a parent or guardian.

Analysis

Transcription of notes and interviews. For this project I was solely responsible for field notes and interview transcriptions. The act of transcribing interviews brought me as the researcher closer to the data. In addition analysis was involved in distilling notes jotted in the field into usable field notes. And finally I made analytic notes to myself related to the research questions in the data as I transcribed it.

Coding for themes. Data were organized along thematic lines related to ongoing theorizing and analysis of the research questions. Thematic codes were established to address moments of salient heteronormativity and the naturalization of homophobic violence. Thematic coding was driven by the research questions, for example, one theme encoded was the intersection of social class identities and normative gender construction. Some coded themes were predetermined as related to earlier work within this field (See for example: Pascoe, 2007). Other codes for themes emerged from recurring linguistic and social patterns as well as the researchers evolving knowledge of the setting. (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Development of case studies. Fourteen specific events or cases in which heteronormativity was explicit and salient were selected for analysis (Stake, 2006, p. 22). Cases were opportunistically chosen however I did not select just any moment within the school day for analysis. The particular instances selected contribute to my efforts to illuminate and theorize the ways events that involve performances of gender and

sexuality dominance relate to the ongoing social production of heteronormativity in schools. The cases selected involve both the explicit enforcement of those norms and moments in which certain forms of discursive and physical violence were publically noted and subsequently naturalized in schools.

Therefore, the criteria for case selection was as follows: selected cases involve incidents of heteronormative dominance or violence as defined in the previous section; incidents involved took place at school, or at a school related event; cases involve students and faculty from the community; and cases encompass the history and subsequent events for those involved wherever possible.

Through this study I have tracked these fourteen incidents through which I have attempted to contextualize heteronormative dominance and analyze the (re)production of this dominance through these individual events and lives. Cases include everything from the familiar homophobic bullying incidents in which a male and female students are harassed and demeaned by peers and faculty for non-normative gender behaviors; to incidents of physical violence associated with asserting heterosexual masculine dominance and homophobic violence; to publically exploiting and manipulating heteronormative discourses to amass social power; to heteronormative requests or educational demands made by students and parents related to peer behaviors.

A comparative discursive analysis has been done of these particular cases. Case comparisons have explored both similarities and differences among the cases (Stake, 2006, p. 82). The comparisons and contrasts add complexity to our understanding of the phenomena. Themes have been developed and explored along lines of comparison. This is not to suggest generalizability among the themes, but rather to highlight theoretical

possibility within the findings. In other words this comparative analysis uses recurrent themes help to illuminate the workings of a heteronormative discourse in schools by comparing similarities within these cases dominance and violence toward the other.

Analytic Checks

Triangulation. This research has taken place across the broadest segment of the site as possible. The ethnographic project has allowed me to maximize opportunities for data collection that has allowed for the triangulation of information and inferences.

Triangulation involve accessing data from divergent points, including a diversity of individuals, divergent social roles (student/teacher), segments of the school, data sources, and across analytic approaches—coding vs. case studies. This triangulation offered a primary means for validating the theories brought forward through this research.

Divergent voices in both individual identity and social role offered a range of experiences and expressions of community norms. Interview and participant observations offered the opportunity to collect a range of perspectives related to heteronormative discourse. Observations across the community provided data on the activities and behaviors of a multitude of subjects. The use of multiple subjects aided in moving beyond private meanings to inferences about the shared meanings for sexuality and gender identity among youth and adults within the community.

The process of coding and analyzing both low inference data, for example clothing or hair style, and high inference data, for example seating choices or free play activities within the cafeteria offered a means for comparing and considering the accuracy of the analytic inferences being made within the research. For example the high

inference observation that play at the cafeteria ping pong table is saturated with heteronormative masculinity may be supported, reduced, or further complexified by a cross analysis with the low inference observation that all sports team members, football, basketball, etc. move to the courtyard during lunch. In the present example ongoing observations at both the ping pong table and within the courtyard to gather additional high and low inference data could offer windows into what Connell (2004) referred to as the multiple masculinities constructed within heteronormativity.

It is in this way that the complementary practices of data analysis, coding and case studies will offer the means to interrogate and support the analysis for this project.

Coding. Coding offered an additional means of analytic check. Assumptions were tested against prevailing patterns, and disconfirming data were used to dispel faulty conclusions. As discussed earlier, for this project some coded themes were predetermined as related to earlier work within this field (See for example: Pascoe, 2007). Other primary codes for themes emerged from recurring linguistic and social patterns as well as the researchers evolving knowledge of the setting (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For example, while the use of body weight references to police female gender performances was not originally established as a theme for coding gender construction. However this practice arose in multiple interviews and was subsequently used to track gender construction practices. Coding and subsequent analysis of observed data both established repetition as well as amplifying outliers.

In this emerging field of study there has been an iterative approach to data collection—meaning the coding was ongoing throughout data collection, and in some instances served to redirect observations and interview priorities.

Basic coding was based on categories identified from earlier data as well as from prior related research. This coding fell under the theoretical categories of gender construction, erasure, silences, and abjection. From this early analysis properties and dimensions were developed which offered the “general or specific characteristics or attributes of a category as well as the location of the property along a continuum or range” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 117). For example, in this study the category of heteronormative gender construction was further identified with the property of the institution’s systemic failure to articulate a democratic gender identity standard. This property could then be broken into the dimensions of *lack of mechanisms to track gender domination, lack of systems to record gender domination, and lack of professional practices to transmit knowledge related to gender dominance.*

In this analysis, to further expand upon the above example, instances of gender harassment complaints brought to the administration could be brought together through comparative analysis to interpret the recurrences of this particular property in relation to the analysis of heteronormative dominance. In other words, *a lack of a democratic standard regarding gender identity* could be identified as occurring most commonly in relation to classroom harassment, could be identified as having particular subject participants, etc. Here arose the possibility of capturing the dynamic of the particular recurrence within these events.

Member checking. Mechanisms were in place throughout this project which allowed the faculty and students involved to critique and inform the analysis. In this project I sought a comprehensive rather than a singular understanding of the multiple

ways gender and sexuality are informed by a community during this developmental period of a child's life.

Member checking involved group discussions with the administrative team at the site. Member checking also took place during participant observations among students involved in minority status clubs (i.e., the Multicultural Club and the Gay Straight Alliance) in relation to the themes developed throughout this research.

Reflexivity

Post-structuralist feminist research denies the possibility of any purely objective observation; it demands intentional subjectivity from the researcher (McLaren, 2002). According to these theories, I can never unify my fragmented identity, nor can I fully determine which part of me is informing my interpretation of a given experience. Additionally, post-structuralist theories highlight how processes of knowledge production are never fully transparent and, through the process of representation, offer power to some at a cost to others. As such, every act of research representation needs to be simultaneously subject to methodological, ethical, and ideological scrutiny. More precisely, given contemporary developments in the philosophy of science and social science (Barone, 1992; Collins, 1999; Derrida & Ewald, 1995; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1998; Lather, 2001) these three kinds of considerations can no longer be considered separately.

The specific risks entailed with this study concern the use of received categories of gender and sexuality difference. Although the purpose of this study is to undermine the naturalized status of gender and sexual identity constructs operating in schools, the study does deploy terms and categories of male and female, masculine and feminine,

heterosexual, homosexual, as well as other related terms. The very use of these terms risks reinscribing the culturally constructed categories that the study seeks to problematize. These are the inescapable conditions under which studies of this sort are undertaken.

In an effort to put reflexive analytic checks on these potential rhetorical excesses, this study uses representational strategies for both the author and the use of the social discourses that make it possible to problematize taken-for-granted authority of the author. These strategies include the use of first person phenomenological reflections on the research process as well as autobiographical reflections relevant to the work (Behar & Gordon, 1995; Lather, 1991). These first person representational strategies attempt to avoid conveying a sense of transcendent certainty with regard to the topic. Care has been taken to avoid narcissism in the inclusion of first person reflections, and to use these devices to express ambivalence about and ironic distance from the categories deployed in the study. This sort of “doubled epistemology” is well characterized by Lather, who explains:

Avoiding the position of the grand theorist and master interpreter, we grant weight to lived experience and practical consciousness by situating both researcher and researched as bearers of knowledge while simultaneously attending to the “price” we pay for speaking out of discourses of truth, forms, or rationality, effects of knowledge and relations of power. (2001, p. 215)

These phenomenological and autobiographical reflections are accompanied by extensive ongoing philosophical and theoretical framing that highlights the intended significance of those reflections. This is accomplished through ongoing interrogation of the concepts used in the analysis, and the relation of the concepts to the social, historical, and personal context from which they arise for the author. This alloy of first person and

theoretical reflections is the primary means through which reflexive checks are built into this study.

Organization of the Study

In representing these cases I have attempted not to foreclose on alternative readings of the events brought forward as specific cases of heteronormativity. The representation here is not meant to create a narrative that might turn into a totalizing representation of experiences of the members of the school community as unified and coherent, as opposed to the fragmented and contested. I have however produced a traditional educational research document, tracking the progress and key findings of this project along with its implications for policy and practices.

This dissertation includes an analysis of fourteen episodes where heteronormative discourses become salient to student experience of schooling. This is followed by a cross case analysis which makes use of additional ethnographic data, culminating in a representation of the (re)production of heteronormativity within the middle school community.

Chapter II begins with the singular case study of Elizabeth Buchanan. The chapter opens with a narrative retelling of the heteronormative story of Elizabeth's experiences of gender and sexuality at Oakwood. From there I go on to offer a queer reading of Elizabeth's experiences at Oakwood. In this section I analyze both the gendering of Elizabeth and the erasure of her life and experiences within a heteronormative context. The analysis of this singular case then serves as a jumping off point for Chapter III and Chapter IV where heteronormative gender construction and erasure are explored through a multitude of instances.

Chapter III considers a series of eight vignettes or cases through which I analyze the heteronormative gendering of members of the Oakwood community. Chapter IV considers a series of five additional vignettes through which I analyze the erasure of individual lives and experiences of heteronormativity at Oakwood. Chapter V brings together the prevailing patterns among these many cases to draw some conclusions about the (re)production of heteronormativity at Oakwood. The chapter closes with a series of suggestions for reducing the (re)production of heteronormativity through a series of educational interventions.

CHAPTER II

ELIZABETH'S STORY

Part One

The Case of Elizabeth: An Ethnographic Biography

Elizabeth Buchanan is a 13 year old girl who attended the seventh grade at Oakwood Middle School. Her seventh grade year involved a series of enactments, events, and interpretations of Elizabeth as a female and as a sexed being among the students at Oakwood. During this particular school year Elizabeth's gender was regularly questioned as was her sexual orientation. This ethnographic biography will explore the relevant events which took place over the course of this particular school year. Discursive analysis of these events will follow the narration of these moments and events in Elizabeth's life.

Composing a Self

It was kind of hard because kids already knew me. I didn't want to stand out. It was just really hard. And it still is.

~ Seventh grade student Elizabeth explaining her desire to fit in and be anonymous at Oakwood

The first time I met Elizabeth Buchanan, she was wearing an oversized brown sweatshirt, sagging and faded denim blue jeans, and thick soled tennis shoes. When she walked into the office where my research interviews were taking place, she had both hands pushed deeply into the pockets of her sweatshirt and her head was tilted down toward the ground with her chin nearly resting on her chest. She moved slowly and intentionally throughout the room and finally used her feet to move the chair I offered her

back away from the table. Once seated she sat forward in the chair, hands deeply buried in her sweatshirt pocket, and silently peered up at me from beneath her eyebrows maintaining the forward tilt of her downcast head.

In my initial intake of her being, I glanced from the child to the consent form in front of me and back to the child, thinking to myself that I had been expecting a girl for the first interview of the day rather than this skateboard clothed young boy. Her first words, in a soft and higher pitched voice, along with the female name on the form beneath my hand confirmed for me that I was interviewing a girl. And for a fleeting moment I felt a self conscious worry that she had registered this series of thoughts as they crossed my face.

In the quiet of her settling into her seat I took in Elizabeth's pale white freckle faced, light blue eyes and sandy colored hair. Her face was somewhat square and soft still having what appeared to be the rounded contours of early childhood, and her hair was cut cleanly around her head and was no more than a few inches in length. And though I could see that she was about 5 feet tall, the size and shape of her adolescent body was a mystery beneath the folds of oversized clothing she was wearing on the day of the interview.

Elizabeth came to the interview process through a classroom recruitment call I had made a week prior. That week I had announced to all of the humanities classes that I was seeking interview candidates for a research project on bullying, harassment and homophobia and I suggested that anyone could consider herself an expert on these topics as everyone had witnessed bullying of some sort at sometime during their schooling. Elizabeth was among the many students who asked for a parent consent form following

the recruitment pitch and then she was among the few to actually return the form signed and requesting an interview.

Our initial interview took place in the spring of Elizabeth's first and only year attending Oakwood. During the interview she immediately told me that she had transferred to the school in the fall, having attended another school five miles away during sixth grade. When I asked her to consider her feelings about the students and teachers at Oakwood she immediately expressed an underlying tension that she connected with her personal history and how she was perceived by the students at Oakwood, "Oakwood is so much better than my old school, but it's still really hard because of who I am. Because everyone knows who I am."

She looked directly at me with a serious expression explained how hard it was for her that once people saw or recognized her they always, "knew her story." At that point I explained that I did not know what she was talking about.

Once I made it clear that I did not know what personal history she was talking about she explained, "Kids here knew me before I came. It was tough because a violent crime happened to my family and was on the news a lot. So it was hard because everyone was talking about it. I just wanted to be here and not have that here too." This painful entrance into the new community seemed to drive her desire to be present and yet unseen, unquestioned, and hopeful that she could move through her days relatively invisible.

Elizabeth's face was expressionless as she explained her history and her struggle to meet new people at Oakwood. As she spoke she held her body perfectly still recounting her arrival at Oakwood Middle School on the heels of a family tragedy of newsworthy proportions. As she recounted her story I silently remembered the news

coverage of the events she was describing. And just as she had suggested, once I made that connection, I too – felt that I knew who she was and she could no longer escape my public gaze.

Our interview took place in April eight months into Elizabeth's student life at Oakwood.

Finding a Gender Fit

I tried to go girlie girl and it did not work.

~Elizabeth reflecting on personal and peer reactions to her different gender performances

As a newcomer, Elizabeth's Oakwood story began on the first day of seventh grade. Her year involved both attempts to fit into the male/female binary gender norms of the community, as well as to resist them. At all points her self-conscious gender performances were observed, publically discussed, and reported on by peers as well as with her teachers. As that year was coming to a close, Elizabeth and I discussed the year in review.

By late in the year Elizabeth was committed to a particular skater (skateboarder) style of public gender presentation. She wore oversized clothing that concealed her body in layers of fabric. Her styles were designed and marketed toward skateboarders and worn by a significant subculture of seventh grade boys in her class. Like these skater boys she often carried a skateboard around after school hours. She kept her hair cut very short and wore no make-up or jewelry. And her favorite topic for discussion was skateboarding, a sport she greatly enjoyed. She was known to be highly skilled at this sport, which was locally considered a male activity in which only males excelled. While

she was not alone in her unique embodiment of femininity, there were for example other female students engaged in skating culture, as well as other single females outside of any clique performing variations on the clothing, make-up and social interactions, Elizabeth was clearly in a visible minority in this new community.

Elizabeth regularly uses the term “skater” in reference to her appearance and often Elizabeth used term interchangeably with the word “boy.” So in a single conversation she might refer to her personal appearance and style as “skater,” then “boy,” and then revert back to the term “skater.” As in this self description: “I wear skater cloths, you know boy cloths. I just always looked like a guy, and it fits because I am a skater, a real skater, not like those preppy skaters who wear girl cloths and all that.” In thinking back on her year at Oakwood, she recalled how early in the school year as she was attempting to create a space for herself at Oakwood, she developed a friendship with Laura, one of the seventh grade’s preppy, popular girls.

Laura was the older sister of a skater friend of Elizabeth’s and she took an interest in Elizabeth when they were introduced. As the two girls friendship grew, Laura decided to take it upon herself to make Elizabeth over as a “girlie girl.” When I asked Elizabeth what this meant she replied, “Oh you know, preppie cloths, make-up, hair done, stuff like that.”

Elizabeth explained that she went along with this project though she was not interested in making this transition. Following the guidance of Laura and a small clique of friends, Elizabeth was transformed into what her humanities teacher would later identify simply as a “girl” for a single week. And in the retelling of this period, Elizabeth reported being uncomfortable with every physical aspect of this transition. In fact, in the

retelling of this memory, Elizabeth could not emphasize quite enough how much she hated this week long experiment.

ELIZABETH: I have tried to go girly and it did not work. I tried to go more skater and it did not work so I just am how I am now.

RESEARCHER: Did not work how?

ELIZABETH: Like because I could not wear my hood in class so I have to take it down and then I look weird.

RESEARCHER: You just felt like you looked weird? But nobody was like bothering you more? Or were they?

ELIZABETH: No.

RESEARCHER: When you tried to look more girly why did that not work?

ELIZABETH: Because it is just not me and my friends told me it is not me either so it did not work for me.

RESEARCHER: What would be more girly, like what did you do different?

ELIZABETH: Like I wore a bunch of girl clothes and I wore make-up.

RESEARCHER: This year?

ELIZABETH: Yes. And it did not work for me.

RESEARCHER: You just felt like it was not really who you were?

ELIZABETH: Yes.

While discussing this transition, Elizabeth regularly looked down at the table or into her lap. Her body tensed as she concentrated on remembering this period of the school year.

RESEARCHER: So you tried that this year?

ELIZABETH: Yes.

RESEARCHER: Before this other stuff (*Elizabeth had just reported to me that she is being verbally and physically harassed about her gender*) was happening? How come?

ELIZABETH: Because like well my friend told me like she wanted to see what I look like in it and so I did. I was like girlie for a week and then it just...

RESEARCHER: Was that fun?

ELIZABETH: No.

RESEARCHER: No. You are always girlie because you are a girl, right?

ELIZABETH: Well, yes but I am more look and act more like a guy and so that is like – and I have been since I was five.

RESEARCHER: It is just the way you are more comfortable? So it was not even fun to pretend?

ELIZABETH: No.

RESEARCHER: It just felt weird or what?

ELIZABETH: Yes.

RESEARCHER: So... but... it was your friend's idea?

ELIZABETH: Yes.

RESEARCHER: And what did she think of this transition?

ELIZABETH: She told me I should go back to girlie and I told her no because I did not like it.

RESEARCHER: Are you still friends?

ELIZABETH: Yes.

When asked why she would consent to something that she hated doing, she explained that her motivation to engage in the makeover was related to three things. First it was due to the fact that school policies forbid the wearing of her sweatshirt's big oversized hood over her head in class. This policy had created a tension for her that she felt the makeover might reduce.

ELIZABETH: I have tried to go girly and it did not work. I tried to go more skater and it did not work.

RESEARCHER: Did not work how?

ELIZABETH: Like because I could not wear my hood in class so I have to take it down and then I look weird.

RESEARCHER: You felt like you looked weird? But nobody was like bothering you more? Or were they?

ELIZABETH: No.

RESEARCHER: And when you tried to look more girly why did that not work?

ELIZABETH: Because it is just not me. And my friends told me no, it is not me either. So it did not work for me.

RESEARCHER: What would be more girly, like what did you do different?

ELIZABETH: Like I wore a bunch of girl clothes and I wore make-up.

Elizabeth also she explained that her mother took the occasion of their summer move to a new home to throw away most of her skater cloths, leaving her mainly with what she considered girl cloths to wear which had complicated her daily dressing.

RESEARCHER: How did you not look like yourself? How did you look different?

ELIZABETH: Cause like I am more skater. I like wearing my skater cloths and my clothes will be like really baggy.

RESEARCHER: How come you do not do that here?

ELIZABETH: Because my mom threw all my clothes away. They were baggy. I just have to go buy some more.

RESEARCHER: Why did she throw all your clothes away?

ELIZABETH: Because they fall off.

RESEARCHER: So she said you need clothes that fit you better? Where did you get those cloths from?

ELIZABETH: My brother.

RESEARCHER: Okay. So were they hand-me-downs? She said they would not fit you so she threw them out?

ELIZABETH: Like she does not care if they are going off some, but like they had to go like – they have to fit me.

RESEARCHER: So but that is what you want is to go back to that stuff?

ELIZABETH: Yes.

When explaining why her mother had thrown away her cloths she said her mother felt the cloths were too big and did not fit. Her mother said she could wear whatever she wanted as long as it fit. It appeared her mother's definition of female fitting fell more closely in line with that of Elizabeth's classmates and teachers. This was in direct contradiction to Elizabeth's preference for skater clothing which she defined as necessarily baggy and oversized.

And finally, she expressed an interest in pleasing her friend Laura and fostering this new friendship by doing what this new friend asked of her.

RESEARCHER: So you tried that (*dressing girlie*) this year?

ELIZABETH: Yes.

RESEARCHER: Before this other stuff (*the harassment*) was happening? How come you decided to “go girlie”?

ELIZABETH: Because... like.... well my friend told me like she wanted to see what I look like in it and so I did. I was like girlie for a week and then it just...(*Elizabeth fell silent.*)

In reflecting on this gender experiment Elizabeth has very little positive to say. She recalls that her mother, Laura and the other girls, and at least two of her teachers liked the transition and gave her compliments on her hair, face, and clothing. While at the same time, she felt ashamed and embarrassed to be dressing up so “fake” every day and going to school. She says the experiment only lasted a week as that was what she had promised Laura at the start. And the next week she went back to her make-up free skater/boy look. “It was awful. I hated it. It wasn’t me. After a week I said no way I quit.”

This return to her former appearance was not supported by her mother or Laura. Elizabeth expressed that she had to go back to being more like the self she saw as authentic. And her peer group agreed, they too of saw this transition as fake and suggested that the “real” Elizabeth was a skater. And so, the following week she re-donned her remaining “boy” cloths, make-up free face, and previous hair style and went back to trying to quietly fit in while being authentic to her self-image during school time.

I asked Elizabeth to help me understand the line between boy cloths and girlie cloths in relation to this story.

RESEARCHER: What are girl clothes? Because you have clothes on right now and you are on a girl. So they are girl clothes.

ELIZABETH: Well, no these are guy clothes but...

RESEARCHER: How? Because of which department you bought them in?

(Elizabeth nodded and gave me an annoyed stare.)

RESEARCHER: Okay so it's defined by where you buy them in the store?

ELIZABETH: Yes. And there is like more. Like there's (*girl's*) is just more like preppy clothes not skater cloths.

RESEARCHER: Okay, is it by color of the clothing?

ELIZABETH: No.

RESEARCHER: Is it by the cut, like a tighter fitting?

ELIZABETH: Yes and I do not know how to describe it but they are more tighter and I do not know how to say it but...

Attempting to get Elizabeth to inform me about gender appearance was very difficult. Throughout this line of questions, she looked directly at me and gave shrugs, nods, gestures to herself and to male and female students we could see off in the distance. Each time I tried to get her beyond the words girlie, or like a girl, she would stare at me or roll her eyes at my questions. After some lengthy silences I began a new line of questions regarding gender and appearance.

RESEARCHER: Okay, and how about your haircut? *(I gesture to her hair which is cut above her ears and cut very short up the back of her head.)*

ELIZABETH: It was longer but I just cut it two weeks ago?

RESEARCHER: How long was it before?

ELIZABETH: It was like here. *(She gestures blow her shoulders.)*

RESEARCHER: Yes, so what made you decide to cut it?

ELIZABETH: Well my mom's boyfriend told me that I am getting a haircut because I was like all depressed because my friends were not talking to me – so I got a haircut and I like felt better about myself.

RESEARCHER: So it was a good idea?

ELIZABETH: Yes.

RESEARCHER: And with your hair short like that you feel more like yourself?

Like you?

ELIZABETH: Yea, kind of.

RESEARCHER: More like you than when you were dressed in girlie that week, this feels more like...

ELIZABETH: Yes! Way more.

Seventh grade girlhood at Oakwood was marked with what teachers identified as rapid maturing of the female sexualized appearance. Students in the seventh grade class were more likely to characterize “girlhood” as flirty and mean, while also noting the codified hair, clothing, and body standards. Teachers and students alike used the words girlie, feminine, normal and girl like to indicate tighter and more skin revealing clothing, the application of make-up, hair of a particular length (about 6 inches below the shoulder), and a developing interest in markedly heterosexual flirtations and declarations. In this community the typical seventh grade girl was expected to be both physically

sexualized and “boy crazy.” Elizabeth’s style of comfort did not fit the norms for girls in her class, and she found herself most comfortable when she took back on her skater-boy identity and style.

Gender Rejection

He just like calls me a guy because I look like one. So he tells me I am lesbian but I am not. He calls me Trevor and just keeps bugging me.

~ Elizabeth responding to the question,
“Do you like coming to school each day?”

In beginning each student interview I asked students a bit about how they felt about the community at Oakwood, how they felt about school, and if they liked coming to school. The questions were very general and were asked before any discussion of the research topic. Generally the question did little other than relax the student and get her focused on talking about herself and about school life.

However, when I asked one of these getting to know you questions of Elizabeth, “Do you like coming to school each day?” she immediately responded by moving her body into a more upright position and looking me directly in the face and stating:

ELIZABETH: Well there is this one guy (*Jackson*) but the teacher – my block teacher does not care because I keep complaining because he keeps bugging me.

RESEARCHER: This boy is in one of your classes?

ELIZABETH: Yes. He’s in block (*a double period of Language Arts and Social Studies*).

RESEARCHER: So you like going to that class less? How does he bug you?

ELIZABETH: He just like calls me a guy because I look like one. And he tells me I am lesbian but I am not. He calls me Trevor and just keeps bugging me.

While relating this information Elizabeth's body stiffened and she raised her chin from her chest and turned her face up to look directly into my eyes. The intensity of her report during this little, get to know you moment of the interview caught me slightly unprepared and so I began to ask questions to help me understand what she was reporting.

RESEARCHER: And how does your block teacher deal with it?

ELIZABETH: She is not my teacher right now. The student teacher, Mr. Reed, he is the teacher now. He said.... Well he tells everybody that he does not care.

RESEARCHER: He tells everybody that he does not care about what?

ELIZABETH: About our problems with people.

RESEARCHER: He tells everybody what? Can you explain this one more time?

ELIZABETH: Okay so... (Elizabeth fell silent and appeared confused.)

RESEARCHER: You and this kid are having a problem? I mean you are not having a problem, this kid is causing a problem and you complain to the student teacher.

ELIZABETH: Yes, and I told him – yes. I told him and he said he did not care and he would not talk to me about me changing desks.

RESEARCHER: So the student teacher just told you he does not care? And what about the regular block teacher, Ms. Campbell?

ELIZABETH: She is normally out of the room at that time but once she is in there, she is... Well, like everybody is quiet because we do not want to get in

trouble from her but he really doesn't change much. He just keeps doing the same stuff to me as always, but a little quieter.

According to Elizabeth, everyone within her immediate vicinity was aware that Jackson was calling her a lesbian and had renamed her Trevor. She was able to share the names of two additional boys who were doing the same thing and explained that she was in three consecutive classes for a total of two and a half hours a day with these three boys. During these classes they regularly called her a boy, a lesbian, or Trevor, depending upon the situation. She said that while "Trevor" would be shouted out, lesbian was also said aloud and clearly loud enough for everyone sitting around them to hear.

RESEARCHER: Oh okay so you are not just in block with this boy. What else do you have with him?

ELIZABETH: Science and I sit like the table next to him.

RESEARCHER: What does anybody do during that? I mean do other people begin harassing you?

ELIZABETH: No, because like his friends aren't sitting with him but his friends laugh about it.

RESEARCHER: So they do hear?

ELIZABETH: Well, kind of. They do not really know what he is talking about.

RESEARCHER: Do you have friends here who know about it?

ELIZABETH: Yes.

RESEARCHER: What do they do?

ELIZABETH: They just tell him to knock it off and leave me alone basically. He does not do it. I try telling the teachers and they do not do anything about it.

RESEARCHER: So you told your science teacher too? Did you tell her what he has done or what he is saying?

ELIZABETH: She can hear him but she does not do anything about it. She will just sometimes tell him like go out in the hall or something for being noisy and he still does not quit. She gets me in trouble too for talking to him. Like I want to talk to him! She just hears talking in the back and blames us both.

RESEARCHER: So you have told her and – how do you know she can hear him?

ELIZABETH: Because she tells him to stop talking and I am the only one who he talks to because we are the only people in the back of the room.

RESEARCHER: So she can hear him talking to you and she tells him to cut it out? You think she can hear what he is saying?

ELIZABETH: I assume she hears him because she tells him to be quiet.

At this point in the school year Elizabeth was experiencing sexist and gendered public harassment during at least three periods of class per day. She had received the professional message from three different staff people that this was not a teacher's concern.

Though I felt conflicted, I felt compelled to go forward and ask if she had followed the school's procedure of filling out a harassment form. I wanted to know her thoughts on this practice, and yet I feared that asking her suggested that I believed the burden was entirely upon her to continually advocate for fundamental rights in her classroom. Listening to her report and then questioning the moments for clarity gave me the uneasy feeling that I too appeared to be questioning her experiences and in some manner placing responsibility for them squarely upon her shoulders.

In any case, I continued questioning the situation and found that after her complaints were ignored by teachers she reported that she had not taken the next systemic step of filing a “harassment form” with school administrators.

RESEARCHER: Have you written a pink slip about this? (*Oakwood’s harassment reporting form*)

ELIZABETH: No.

RESEARCHER: Why haven’t you?

ELIZABETH: I get punished with him all the time. Plus the teachers don’t care.

RESEARCHER: At this point, I do not have any more questions for you but I do want to know if you would want me to talk to your teachers? Because remember I told you I do not discuss any of this interview unless you tell me it’s okay.

ELIZABETH: If you want to.

RESEARCHER: Can I tell your teacher that Jackson is being a jerk and that she needs to take care of this? I am not going to do this unless you are okay with it.

ELIZABETH: Yes, it is okay with me because he is annoying.

At the close of this interview I asked for her permission to report this ongoing harassment to the teachers involved and the school administration, to which she consented.

Invisible Difference

It just came to me in the middle of the night. I suddenly remembered the week Elizabeth came to school as a girl.

~ Mrs. Campbell remembering and forgetting Elizabeth

In the days following the interview with Elizabeth, her teacher, Mrs. Campbell, was informed about the harassment Elizabeth was experiencing during block class. The assistant principal, Mr. Martin, reported to Mrs. Campbell that Elizabeth was being harassed with homophobic and gendered insults during her class. He told her he would be disciplining the students involved, but would also like her to talk to her student teacher about this, and to begin to monitor the situation.

In the days after Mr. Martin discussed this situation with Mrs. Campbell, she sought me out to tell me a detailed story about an interesting gender transition period in Elizabeth's life. This event stands out to me, as I had no regular hours at the school, and also had no regular location through which one might contact me. I did visit Oakwood three to five days a week in the morning, and I spent a good deal of time with the administrative staff. And so one day when I arrived, the assistant principal told me that Mrs. Campbell had been by on several occasions for several days in a row looking for me. Mr. Martin said she and wanted me to track her down as soon as I arrived.

Moments later when I was at the photocopier preparing some documents, Mrs. Campbell approached me and began recalling in detail, the period in which Elizabeth wore different clothing, make-up, and hairstyle to school for a week. She told me about this period of time in detail although it was nearly three months in the past. She related to me that one week Elizabeth had started, "dressing like a girl and wearing make-up."

I asked her what she recalled about that period, and she said, “It was just really strange. One day she just came in wearing make-up and different clothing, and looking like a girl. I remember I was surprised and I think I told her she looked really good.” She went on to say this shift took place for several days and then one day Elizabeth just came back as “herself” again. Which Mrs. Campbell noted was, “too bad because she was a really cute little girl.”

When I asked Mrs. Campbell why she didn’t tell me about Elizabeth in an earlier interview she had given me about sexual and gendered identities at Oakwood she said she had completely forgotten about Elizabeth during that interview. She explained that this new memory of Elizabeth surprised her as it woke her in the middle of the night: “It just came to me in the middle of the night. I suddenly remembered the week Elizabeth came to school as a girl.”

As we stood by the photocopier talking, I tried to recall my research interview with Mrs. Campbell months earlier. I recalled spending a great deal of time with her discussing in detail the different ways of being a girl among Mrs. Campbell’s students. I could recall no mention of Elizabeth’s gender story from that interview.

As the current conversation continued I asked Mrs. Campbell how student reacted to Elizabeth’s week in feminine drag. She could not recall anyone saying or doing anything during the week of Elizabeth’s transition. “Oh her little friends did seem to like it though. I think one of them was helping her dress or something.” This lack of specificity about reactions was in stark contrast to her detailed memory of Elizabeth’s hair, make-up, and clothing during that week.

As Mrs. Campbell was one of the teachers who had volunteered to interview for this study some months earlier, I then went back to the earlier transcript to seek out any sign of Elizabeth from our earlier conversation. There I found that while discussing the gender performances of different girls in the seventh grade, Elizabeth's gender performance did come to mind for Mrs. Campbell.

During that interview I had asked her to describe different behaviors and styles of girlhood in the seventh grade:

RESEARCHER: How would you describe the different subsets of girls? Could you take some time to describe them by appearance, by behavior...?

MRS. CAMPBELL: Well I have a seventh grade locker bay right outside of my classroom door and that is probably the population I observe the most outside the classroom. Because when I go in the cafeteria it's almost like I have blinders on, I mean I get my food and quickly leave. So thinking about those girls at their lockers, ummm, there is very definitely that group of girls who are on the flirty girls. Out there on display kind of girls who hang out.

Then we got actually one group of gymnasts, athletes types that hang together, soccer gymnast girls that hang out. Um and we've got a couple that go between the groups, like I've got my high ethic girls, ones that never the leave an assignment undone. I mean one girl is going to a web training today and said can I pick my chapters with me to work on there. I said, who are you? (*laughs aloud*) She's kind of part of the athletic group and part of the girls who you know, it's okay to be smart group. The group of seventh grade girls who are not you know - blossoming all over everybody. You know like

just the normal little girls. Um the one's that show me their cherry necklace, you know just simple little girls.

Then, I've got a group of girls that are ummm like the ELL (*English Language Learners*) kids like Korean girls. And one set is a twin set, and they have that language thing that is in common, but they too go between groups.

RESEARCHER: umhmmm (*lengthy silence*)

MRS. CAMPBELL: Can I identify another one?

RESEARCHER: Yes, are there others outside of these groups? (*The silence continued while Mrs. Campbell continued to ponder this question.*)

Throughout the interview Mrs. Campbell required very little prompt to go into lengthy responses about each topic. Here however, she puzzled to think of any other type of girl behaviors and styles present in the seventh grade class. Beyond the cherry necklace girls, the gymnast type athletes, the high ethic smart girls, the blossoming all over girls, and the second language learners she was scanning her memory for any other girl performances she was leaving out of the picture. After some silence she recalled a student from earlier in the year, in a later discussion, she confirmed that the student she was referring to at this point in the interview was Elizabeth Buchanan.

RESEARCHER: Well you probably... well you maybe have some girls that don't fit in with anyone?

MRS. CAMPBELL: That's what I am trying to think about. Well the one that I'm thinking, I am thinking about a girl, I had her at the beginning of the year, and there are some identification problems with her because of the way her

body is growing. I mean there's like a physical medical name for it. And she sort of goes in and out of that group

RESEARCHER: What do you mean by the way her body is growing?

MRS. CAMPBELL: It's not growing, I mean she is growing taller but her body is not maturing yet.

RESEARCHER: Oh so you mean she looks ambiguous. Gender ambiguous?

MRS. CAMPBELL: Yea, but she, I noticed her in the office lately. And we're started doing stuff with our hair and the cloths are starting to be a little more girlie. But she is not in my block anymore. But I see her every once in a while out in the hallway and she is friendly and we wave. But she wouldn't be typically in any of the girl groups. But then I didn't notice any of the groups shutting her out either, it's just her lack of comfort going to them. (Long silence)

As it turned out, this earlier interview with Mrs. Campbell actually took place during the period Elizabeth described as her girlie phase. The teacher approval Elizabeth recalled during that period can be seen in Mrs. Campbell's comments noting the feminizing of her hair and clothing as starting to be a little more girlie.

Once the link was confirmed between this child Mrs. Campbell described with the "identification problem" and Elizabeth I concluded that Mrs. Campbell no longer saw her as her student because Mr. Reed, the student teacher had taken over this group of students for the remainder of the school year. So while Elizabeth and I considered Mrs. Campbell her teacher, Mrs. Campbell no longer considered Elizabeth her student.

Mrs. Campbell's lack of awareness of Elizabeth was similar to that of her other teachers who, during both formal and informal interviews had shown no awareness of any female students who stood out for their uncommon gender performance. This was in contrast to each teacher's ability to quickly point to specific males who did not act or look "like boys."

MRS. CAMPBELL: Actually it's more of the guys that don't belong in any group.

RESEARCHER: So you have in your mind more guys that stick out?

MRS. CAMPBELL: I have more guys that are loners. Guys that just don't fit in with the rest of the guys.

In the days following the harassment investigation, Mr. Reed also approached me to inform me that he had moved Elizabeth to a new assigned seat. I briefly asked him about the reasons he had for her original assigned seat. He quickly explained that Jackson was a particularly difficult boy, always goofing off, flirting with girls, performing for his friends, and causing distractions. He had considered Elizabeth a good match for him as she would not contribute to any of these behaviors. "She was just really quiet and seemed like someone who wouldn't get involved in any of his horsing around," he explained.

In returning to the room to review the seating assignments I could see that Mr. Reed had seated Jackson in the back and in a corner of the class in order to minimize his distracting abilities and then he had seated Elizabeth as the buffer between him and the remainder of the class. In a visual exam of the seating arrangements in Ms. Murphy's science classroom, it was clear that here Jackson had again been placed in a rear corner of the room with Elizabeth seated between him and the remainder of the group.

Both Ms. Murphy and Mr. Reed had determined the best ways to minimize Jackson's social interaction was to isolate him with a quiet and non-flirtatious female with whom each presumed he would not perform. It appeared Elizabeth, as an individual student, was not a consideration in this process; rather it was Elizabeth as a gender neutralizer for what each teacher perceived as Jackson's negative masculine and heterosexual qualities.

Policing Gender

Well, I call her Trevor and I sometimes say why are you always dressed like a guy? Why do you have such hairy arms? And she says I don't know.

~ Student being interviewed about harassing Elizabeth

When he was first brought into the office and questioned about the harassment of Elizabeth, Jackson did not know Elizabeth by name. Mr. Martin was forced to show him a photograph before he connected a name with the situation he had been called in about. When Jackson looked at Elizabeth's class photo he laughed and explained that he had nothing against her, he simply called her names. "Yea, we all call her stuff. We just do stuff to her."

Jackson held a special student status at Oakwood Middle School; he had a lengthy history of harassment and aggression issues and referrals which were documented through the office. The administrative consequences of each of his interactions were complicated by special education student identification, along with administrative interventions with the intent of addressing his behaviors through mentoring and monitoring. The investigation into this harassment complaint came at the heels of an earlier suspension ending in a trial period for Jackson to return to school for half day campus services.

Due to his tenuous enrollment status at the school, at the time of the harassment investigation Jackson was led to believe he would be expelled if he did not fully cooperate in the investigation of the harassment of Elizabeth. And after a few prodding questions he offered a lengthy confession explaining,

“It’s not just me, we all do it. It’s her cloths and her hair. So we just call her Trevor and stuff. It’s no big deal, she never even said she didn’t like it.”

Following this outburst of information, Jackson went on to identify a series of other male students, including a young man named Derrick, who were involved in harassing Elizabeth. At this point he was released for the day and told to report directly to Mr. Martin the following day.

On the second day of this investigation, Mr. Martin opted to interview both Jackson and Derrick at the same time.

MR. MARTIN: Yesterday, when I confronted each of you, you told me you weren’t the only one harassing Elizabeth. You each blamed the other and said a lot of people were involved. But according to Mrs. Campbell although Derrick went along with the comments, Jackson was the one who initiated them. I need to figure out exactly what is going on in your block class. I need to know who else is involved and exactly what is going on.

JACKSON: I’ve heard Derrick call her a boy sometimes.

DERRICK: Lots of people also call her Trevor.

JACKSON: Yea, lots of people do stuff like that. Like call her names and stuff.

DERRICK: And we didn’t do anything. We just called her Trevor.

MR. MARTIN: You didn’t do anything? You didn’t do anything?!

DERRICK: Yea, we didn't do anything.

MR. MARTIN: What's the point of calling her Trevor?

JACKSON: I don't know – I guess it's just calling her a boy's name.

DERRICK: Well Corey calls her Trevor too.

At this point in the group interview both boys began to feed off of one another's ideas of what might be the best tact for defending their actions. Their reliance upon the nickname Trevor to disguise the gendered nature of their teasing was being eroded by the administrator's unwillingness to let the matter drop in a way that was commonly done throughout the building once a conflict was brought under audible control.

Normally when a teacher, administrator, or staff person disrupted a student conflict the students involved would become quiet or offered obtuse information to the staff person. Ultimately staff accepted submissive silence as a resolution and would then drop a discussion.

In this instance Mr. Martin was not following the standard practice around this issue, where Ms. Murphy, Mr. Reed, and Mrs. Campbell had heard the nickname and told them all to be quiet; Mr. Martin was demanding an explanation for the name.

MR. MARTIN: Derrick I want you to be specific about you.

DERRICK: Well, I call her Trevor and I sometimes say why are you always dressed like a guy? Why do you have such hairy arms? And she says I don't know.

MR. MARTIN: What else?

DERRICK: That's pretty much it.

MR. MARTIN: This kind of behavior, whatever curiosity you might have, it's very inappropriate.

DERRICK: I know.

MR. MARTIN: Well if you know and you are doing it, it's a big problem.

During this interview Derrick employed an argument that Elizabeth through her body and clothing was breaking strict gender binary social rules of the community. During the series of exchanges between the boys and the administrator both boys held steadfast to their right to question Elizabeth's body, hair, clothing, and later her relationships with other girls. At each point Mr. Martin offered that these assertions about her body were not within their rights using a general human rights appeal.

Policing Sexual Orientation

Maybe we said stuff that protected others.

~ Student defending his abuse of Elizabeth by claiming she might be a homosexual menace

During the fall term, the school counselor, Ms. Bailey, shared with me that she was, "working on a situation you might be interested in." It seemed that she had been given a confiscated note from Elizabeth to Laura. Laura and Elizabeth's teacher, Ms. Wright, had intercepted the note being passed between the girls during her class and kept it for Mrs. Bailey. The note was friendly and made no romantic claims. It followed a fairly standard friendship affirmation pattern, asking if Laura regarded Elizabeth as a best friend and pledging Elizabeth's friendship to Laura.

After confiscating the note Ms. Bailey had expressed her concerns about the contents or the sender or both by keeping Laura after class to ask her about the nature of

Elizabeth and Laura's relationship. This meeting upset Laura as she, "never got in trouble with teachers or had to stay after class." And when Ms. Bailey, the school counselor, then called in and questioned Laura about the incident Laura explained that she no longer, "knew what to do about Elizabeth and her friendship."

A significant concern for Laura at that time was the reaction of the class when the girls were caught passing notes, as well as her concern about Ms. Wright thinking something less of her as a student. According to Laura, Ms. Wright had held her after class to discuss the note and her relationship with Elizabeth. She had then given Laura the confiscated note but only after walking with Laura to the office to make a photocopy of the note. Ms. Wright had ended their conversation by suggesting to Laura that she would take this concern to the counselor for a discussion.

After Laura and Ms. Bailey briefly discussed the situation Ms. Bailey sought my assistance explaining that she hoped I would direct her action. She explained that although she was the school counselor she had no experience with this "type of situation." I suggested that passing notes and peer relationship problems seemed standard to me, but she insisted that this "type of situation" was different and she did not want to make any accusations that would make matters worse. In addition she did not want to discuss the matter with Laura any further, as she was "already embarrassed enough about the situation." I told her I would address it as a friendship problem between the girls and nothing more because that was what I saw in the confiscated note. Following this conversation, Ms. Bailey did not discuss Elizabeth and Laura with me again.

Although there was silence between myself and the counselor, rumors continued to pass through the seventh grade with students reporting to one another about any note

passed between Elizabeth and Laura. And over time these rumors began to state with authority that these notes were “love” notes and that Elizabeth in fact had a crush on Laura. While Elizabeth was unaware of rumors specific to Laura, she related to me that sometime in late fall or winter the same small contingent of boys had begun to call her a lesbian.

In interviewing these boys with regard to all of the harassment Elizabeth was experiencing, each of them was quick to confirm that they believed she was a lesbian and therefore felt her looking “like a guy” was unacceptable.

DERRICK: I didn’t know she’d take it personally. I didn’t know how she feels.

And some people said she likes Laura. And she wrote poems and songs about her. She showed them to people. People have read them and stuff.

MR. MARTIN: So that gave you permission to go after her?

DERRICK: I didn’t go after her about that stuff. It was just about looking like a guy.

MR. MARTIN: So if a boy looks like a girl you go after them too? That gives you permission?

Long silence

MR. MARTIN: So I want you to think about which rule you violated.

DERRICK *and* JACKSON *together begin guessing at words:* Respect...

Responsible...

It was clear from the interview that neither boy was connecting to any particular rule or ethical code they had broken by mocking and harassing Elizabeth. Both boys’ eyes searched the air as they attempted to name the rule they violated. The schools

harassment policy which named both sexual orientation and gender identity had not been mentioned once throughout the interview, and neither boy seemed able to frame any of their actions as problematic.

As the two stabbed at words in the air the assistant principal interrupted in an attempt to guide their thinking:

MR. MARTIN: Is it safe at school for her?

DERRICK: Maybe we said stuff that protected others.

A simple statement placing the blame upon Elizabeth for being a dangerous homosexual was made by Derrick. The statement was not responded to by the assistant principal. Instead he immediately shifted topics again, and suggested the meeting was at a close.

MR. MARTIN: Derrick, it's almost 3:00 I'm gonna let you go for now and I'm going to have to think about your involvement. You are going to stay clean and you are going to stay clean. You will also do community service to account for this referral for disruption I just got from your P.E. teacher (*the P.E. referral was not related to this event*).

Derrick leaves the interview.

MR. MARTIN: Jackson, you have a referral for community service on my desk too. It's for tardies in Mrs. Murphy's class. You will begin serving them today and we will meet as a team this week to determine your ongoing status here at Oakwood.

And so the meeting ended with an argument that the boys could produce evidence of Elizabeth's sexual deviance. Derrick went so far as to suggest his harassment was a

form of “protection” for others. Mr. Martin repeatedly returned to the schools general behavior system discourse with its three principals; *safety, respect and responsibility*. He framed the situation as one in which Elizabeth felt a general “unsafe” feeling related to the boys attention and told each of the boys to “think about” their actions.

In the days following this intervention, there was no administrative follow-up with Derrick, Elizabeth, or the teachers present during the harassment. In fact the science teacher, Ms. Murphy, was never specifically made aware of the situation. Jackson, however, was expelled from campus as a result of a lengthy series of referrals suggesting that he was not complying with his behavior contract. It could be inferred that Jackson’s expulsion was seen as an adequate response to the harassment as far as the administration was concerned. However, there was no specific acknowledgement to Jackson or to anyone else at his expulsion hearing of Jackson’s sexual harassment toward Elizabeth. The entire harassment complaint and investigation was in effect first silence and then erased with the expulsion of Jackson.

Erasing Elizabeth

You know where Jackson stands at this point. All that we have done with him. And he just doesn’t get it.

~ Mr. Martin and Mrs. Campbell consider the harasser

After Elizabeth filled out a harassment form Mr. Martin interviewed her humanities teacher, Mrs. Campbell, and later the two male students identified as the primary offenders. In their first discussion Mrs. Campbell and Mr. Martin engaged in a lively chat about the primary offender Jackson. It was noted that Jackson was already on a shortened day only attending Oakwood for afternoon courses, all of which included

Elizabeth. It was also noted that he was in an assigned seat next to Elizabeth in all of these classes.

In the case of Mrs. Campbell's class she stated that this assignment was because she believed he would find Elizabeth less distracting than anyone else in the class. She had been seeking a place of social isolation for him and thus had placed him in a corner next to Elizabeth. From the reader's perspective at this point, this may appear to be a willfully hurtful act; placing a student whose non-normative gender performances make her vulnerable next to a child who is regarded as the most aggressive disciplinary problem in the room. However, when viewed through the self reports of Mrs. Campbell, the decision is not surprising. Elizabeth's experience had been all but invisible to this instructor and her student teacher.

The question that needs to be asked is how it is that Elizabeth's subject position—her point of view—repeatedly disappears from view in this educational setting. For interestingly, the science teacher, Ms. Murphy had assigned the same type of seating arrangement for Elizabeth and Jackson. During science class they were seated in the furthest double desk work station in the back of the room. As Elizabeth had reported, she had spent the previous several weeks in an isolated assigned seat next to this student who was only attending Oakwood on an administrative "behavior contract."

During the discussion Mrs. Campbell acknowledged she was aware that Jackson and Elizabeth had gotten in trouble with her student teacher, Mr. Reed, for talking. She said overall, she was under the impression that Jackson was doing okay right now, which is why she hadn't come to the office with any concerns. She stated that she was not aware

that Elizabeth was being harassed, but that she was, “not at all surprised” given the nature of Jackson.

At that point the conversation fell into a combined psychological and intellectual analysis of Jackson. Mr. Martin and Mrs. Campbell came to agreement that this boy was either not intelligent enough or empathetic enough to be capable of changing his behavior. There was no discussion of the other boy identified as a primary harasser, or of Mr. Reed’s interactions with Elizabeth, nor of classroom management practices which contributed to the situation.

Mr. Martin informed Mrs. Campbell upon her confirmation of the general facts that based upon past offenses he intended to suspend Jackson until an alternative educational plan could be arranged for him. Following this conversation Jackson, a white nondescript looking seventh grade student, was brought into the school office for questioning. In considering Jackson’s place in the seventh grade community, his social interactions were markedly violent toward both males and females. The sort of violence he engaged in was beyond the bounds of what was considered playful and this was highlighted by a series of referrals. He had a thick student file of referrals for everything from low level disrespect to complaints of physical altercations.

Jackson was also notably a member of the economically disadvantaged at Oakwood. He was among the students who worked on campus to offset the cost of school meals, a practice known to students to mark their peers as “poor.” His clothing was nondescript and he bore none of the brand markers of affluence known to students at Oakwood. He was only minimally represented by his guardian, who regularly told Mr. Martin she did not know what to do with him. In fact she had previously sought

residential placements for Jackson so as to no longer act as his guardian. His removal from Oakwood therefore posed no concerns and left no lasting mark for either Mr. Martin or for the Oakwood community. It brought about no discussion regarding Elizabeth or gender harassment or homophobia.

To my knowledge Elizabeth completed the seventh grade year in silence, never again reporting harassment, and never again coming to the attention of her teachers. The silence was, by Mr. Reed, interpreted as success. He reported to me that he was happy to say that, “Elizabeth hasn’t complained about anyone else bothering her since you told me to move her away from Jackson.” I asked him if he had made the seating move and he reported that he had. I asked him if he had talked to Elizabeth directly about the sexual harassment. He said that he had not, explaining that his gender prevented him from addressing this issue with her. I disagreed with him on this and suggested perhaps if he had this concern he could talk to female students with his supervising teacher Mrs. Campbell present. He said he would consider this idea.

Finally in reflecting on the gender schooling of Elizabeth I must consider my roles as researcher, confidant, expert, outsider, and informant in the ongoing reinscription of heteronormativity. For Elizabeth only became visible within the school system as a result of my research. She volunteered to be interviewed through my subject recruitment canvassing of a class. And it was only following our interview that her experiences of gender and sexual policing became visible. And throughout this period the faculty involved referred to me as the arbiter of special knowledge regarding this type of harassment and rather than acting upon their own, only acted at my prompting. This reliance upon outside influence and lack of professional ownership of the situation

allowed the staff to bracket off their practices and avoid directly addressing the behaviors or experiences with either Elizabeth or the other students involved.

Most troubling to me is that to Elizabeth, I represented both an expert and a confidant, and in both cases, I like the three teachers involved failed to protect her from ongoing harassment. The majority of the students involved were back in her life within 24 hours of the investigation. These student received no consequence the teachers did nothing to change the heterosexist climate in their rooms, and no one officially acknowledged any particular heteronormative behavior as intolerable. My presence in Elizabeth's life operated as yet another educational silencing of her daily plight. I can only earnestly hope the sharing of her story will force the conversation to move forward and allow for us as educators to deeply consider the ways in which we reinscribe this violent normative discourse.

Part Two

The Case of Elizabeth: A Queer Reading

This is an alternative reading of the story of the thirteen year old girl named Elizabeth. It is a reading that takes up particular tiny moments that framed the gendered and sexed life of a childhood. And while there are infinite influences at play in constructing the life of this child, this reading examines how adolescence for Elizabeth is deeply marked by constant social rebukes over her embodiment of girlhood. The public nature of this reading proves it to be a cautionary tale for those witnessing Elizabeth's struggles. For in this reading, Elizabeth's story explores the conflicts, struggles, triumphs

and humiliations one seventh grade girl faced because she failed to mirror the gender performance of the majority of girls in her class.

Here I will do my best to share the events which highlight her gendered experience of seventh grade. I share these events knowing that the stories are constructed from her memories as well as those of others, selected from among the thousands of minutes of her year, and filtered both by time and that which held personal meaning for each person. Nonetheless, the gender confining text written upon and around her body, present us with a detailed account of both material and ideological demands of heteronormative practices. The explicit and implicit heteronormative engagement of her teachers, school administrators, peers, and parents made life impossibility for Elizabeth. And through the theater of her public story these actions also issued a stern warning to those who would risk gendered deviance the tightly governed heteronormative limitations of girlhood.

But for this analysis I wish to consider the ways in which Elizabeth's perceived gender and subsequent notions about her sexuality operate to dehumanize her within the school context. The question I would ask about Elizabeth's experience is what is the nature of the way in which we might locate the social gendering of her body and the subsequent erasure of her experiences as the gender Object or the pathologizing of her as the homosexual Other? If we can track and better understand the ways in which Elizabeth's perceived gender functions to erase her as a subject within the classroom, we can them begin to think about what faculty professionals would need to address in order to humanize her within the school context.

Before jumping into an analysis of the ways in which heteronormative discourses first fail to recognize Elizabeth's gender as human and then later operate to establish a deviant sexuality category for her I would like to take a moment to explain what I mean when suggesting that these discourses dehumanize Elizabeth. By dehumanizing I would offer that in this case representation, Elizabeth's experiences as a singular human subject are being rendered invisible.

Instead what people respond to are differences that call up a variety of problematically socially constructed identity categories. I would suggest that in fact the teachers, administrators, and students surrounding Elizabeth interpret these arbitrary signifiers to force Elizabeth into constructed characters from the asexual or intersexed caricature named by her teacher, to the lesbian specter named by her peers to the skaterboy gender identity which Elizabeth herself reaches to in seeking some form or social expression for her identity. These caricatures of Elizabeth's identity were products of the limited frameworks for interpreting Elizabeth's experience provided by the heteronormative discourse that pervaded the school. When people respond to these heteronormative tropes of gender and sexuality, Elizabeth's experience as a subject becomes invisible.

This queer reading will trouble the divergent heteronormative gender and sexuality possibilities made available in the Oakwood community for interpreting and socially identifying Elizabeth. Yet it is undeniable that the discourses of gender and of sexuality are always intersecting with an array of other social identity discourses within the Oakwood community. One must consider in reading these events how social class, able bodied, racial, and religious discourses are simultaneously informing Oakwood

community interpretations of both Elizabeth's gender and her sexuality. Even as this array of identity discourses is informing community members in their interactions with Laura and Jackson. This initial case study offers a queer reading through which I begin to trouble the intersections of these identity categories while maintaining a primary focus on the reproduction of heteronormative gender and sexuality possibilities for Elizabeth. In the vignettes of the following chapter I look more deeply at the workings of these discursive intersections in reproducing heteronormative gender and sexuality at Oakwood.

Here I wish to restate that the purpose of this dissertation is not to consider the individual experience or phenomena of erasure, I do not wish to consider Elizabeth's personal experience of invisibility. I am instead interested in highlighting the social distribution of this discursive practice of erasure. In the tradition of critical theory and Foucaultian post-structuralism, this research project is anti-humanist and seeks to move beyond individual notions of a Cartesian subject as the primary causal factor in social processes. To limit the analysis to individual experiences would be to ignore the social phenomena of sexist and homophobic violence here defined as heteronormativity that is so clearly documented in education literature. This dissertation offers to explore the matrices through which heteronormative discourses produce highly limited social categories of gender and sexuality through the violent erasure of difference and policing of socially constructed deviance.

To restate the primary questions of this dissertation:

1. In what ways are specific events and subsequent narratives of heteronormativity related to the ongoing social production of heteronormativity in schools?

2. How do these accounts work to “naturalize” the production of heteronormativity in schools?

In this case then, I will identify and analyze the ways in which heteronormativity operates on the body and the stories of Elizabeth to both erase her subjectivity and to inscribe a particular sexual orientation and or gender identity onto her body. I will then consider the echoing silence following professional engagement with Elizabeth as I move to the second question about the naturalization of heteronormativity which forecloses any professional transformation beyond (re)production of this form of social violence in schools.

In order to unpack the multiple ways in which heteronormativity is operating in this case and serving to erase this entire student, staff, and school experience, I will organize this analysis by considering these two particular ways post structural theory examines the constraints on subjectivities; Othering and Abjection.

Post structural feminists have a long tradition of deconstructing the Othering of subject possibilities. Here my analysis will consider the heteronormative production of sex, gender, and sexuality binary categories; male/female, masculine/feminine, heterosexual/homosexual and the subsequent assigning of arbitrary signifiers to one category co-creating the opposing category through opposition to the signifier and ultimately producing ideal and deviant subjectivities.

Judith Butler’s expands upon Foucault’s analysis of the sexed subject to highlight the abjection of individuals who do not fit within the produced dichotomies of heteronormativity. Butler points to the abjection of the biologic sexed subject who do not present or articulate the discrete and arbitrary visible markers within the male or female

binary. The individual whose gender expression cannot be discursively articulated within the binary bounds of the biologic sex, the person who can be seen as neither female nor male is the abject of gender. And subsequently the sexuality which does not fit within a binary of homosexual or heterosexual becomes the abject sexed being within this constructed binary of sexuality. These borderland bodies experience textual abjection as they are rendered invisible and outside the bounds of language within socially constructed heteronormative discourse.

For this analysis I will first explore the gendered Othering of Elizabeth through which she is made into “Trevor” by her peers. I will then analyze the erasure of Elizabeth as a person and subject through the abjection of her experiences as a student at Oakwood Middle School. From there I will go on in Chapter III to explore the ways in which gender operates as a floating signifier within heteronormative discourse throughout Oakwood Middle School. And finally in Chapter IV I will consider the ways in which heteronormative discourse operates to silence and erase the lives and experiences of students even as teachers and faculty are working to address the “homophobic and sexist” harassment and violence at operation within the walls of Oakwood.

The Gendering and Othering of Elizabeth’s Gender and Sexuality

In 1949 Simone de Beauvoir famously exclaimed, “One is not born a woman, one becomes a woman.” De Beauvoir was referring to the way gender identity is produced through socialization. Her conception of this becoming was longitudinal, a development that unfolded over time and determined not by qualities located within individuals, but by qualities located in the historical, social and cultural context in which the individual finds herself.

Twenty years later, building on Beauvoir and others work, Judith Butler wrote “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender... identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (*Gender Trouble*, p. 25; Routledge, 1990). In this remark Butler also denaturalizes gender identity. She argues that gender does not emerge inevitably from essential characteristics of the individual, but is constituted by actions that take on meaning in a historical and social context.

Butler’s conception of becoming a particular gender includes a longitudinal dimension, one in which an individual subject is shaped by their context and their own response to that context over time. It also, however, includes an accelerated or more microsocial component, in which a person becomes female, male, straight, or gay in particular moments as a consequence of performances that are ascribed meaning through the social discourses in which the person finds him or herself.

In considering the case of Elizabeth, we see multiple ways in which she becomes a girl, a boy, lesbian, transgender, and invisible (in more ways than one) as a consequence of the normative gender discourses in the Oakwood Middle School community. Most frequently, Elizabeth was interpreted by peers and teachers as something other than normatively female in the school context. The heteronormative discourse of gender present at Oakwood, documented in interviews and observations conducted for this project maintained rigid male/female boundaries that could be expressly identified through everything from hair, clothing, activities, associations, interests, dispositions to emerging romantic relationships and sexuality.

Overall then the defining and detailed qualities of femininity or Oakwood girlhood were centered on the characteristics of particular subsets of students identified as

“popular,” as in “the popular girls.” Gender differences were most often classified against the norms surrounding these central female students in each grade. A similar pattern held true for student interviews and observations of discussions surrounding masculinity or boyhood at Oakwood as will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter III.

Elizabeth as a non-sexed being or a medical mystery. The first Oakwood community member to clearly identify Elizabeth to me as someone operating outside of normative gender constructions was her homeroom teacher Mrs. Campbell. Early in the year Mrs. Campbell remarked on Elizabeth’s gender as ambiguous. Campbell went so far as to speculate that there was some particular biological cause for Elizabeth’s appearance and behavior which she saw contrary to her gender expectations for girlhood. Her assessment of Elizabeth as something other than a girl was articulated through medical discourses:

Well the one that I’m thinking, I am thinking about a girl, I had her at the beginning of the year, and there is some identification problems with her because of the way her body is growing. I mean there’s like a physical medical name for it. And she sort of goes in and out of that group (*of girls*).

In this comment Mrs. Campbell does not initially use the noun “girl” to describe Elizabeth within the different cliques of girls in the sixth grade. She instead calls Elizabeth “the one” who moves in and out of a girl clique. Campbell reaches for a medical discourse to categorize Elizabeth’s gender as something that is perhaps natural; however it is also abnormal and problematic. Campbell appears to be reaching for a way to categorize Elizabeth’s non-normative gender based upon visible biological markers without going so far as to question Elizabeth’s biological sex.

Campbell does not appear committed to a medicalized interpretation of Elizabeth’s gender performances, and consequently scans the discursive possibilities

available to her for a deviant or pathologic gender category to place Elizabeth within. As a person and scholar who lives in communities who have robust vocabularies for naming and describing a myriad of gender performances, Campbell's lack of such conceptual vocabularies was striking. It was not just that she lacked the words and ideas to describe Elizabeth's difference. She initially lacked the conceptual framework to even recognize the difference. It took repeated questioning for her to think of this one example of girlhood within her student base who did not fit into any of the "typical girl cliques" she had described in categorizing all of the girls in the sixth grade. In arriving at Elizabeth as an example of a girl who was not within her framework of female subgroups she then struggled to categorize her gender.

This non-sexed gender status for Elizabeth as interpreted by Mrs. Campbell as well as Elizabeth's other teachers will be brought up again in considering the peer harassment Elizabeth faced when her classmates began calling her a male and harassing her during class further into this analysis.

For the purpose of this study, this lack is offered as less a feature of Mrs. Campbell's personal knowledge or perceptiveness than it is a lack within the professional communities of which she is a member. We should ask how it is that Mrs. Campbell finds herself without the conceptual—I would say discursive—resources to recognize the experiences of distress and marginalization of a child with whom she has spent the entire year.

The consequences of this lack of discursive resources are predictable to those who do work in LGBTQ advocacy. Without access to alternative discourses that support a recognition and sympathetic understanding of Elizabeth's gender experience, Campbell

reached for a medical discourse to capture Elizabeth's gender performance. In describing Elizabeth as having a gender "identification problem" with a "medical name" Campbell quickly moved from a discursive void within normative gender for describing Elizabeth's embodiment of girlhood into the discourse of medical pathology to capture her gender.

Because of the lack of discursive representations of gender diversity in Mrs. Campbell's experience, education, or community, Elizabeth's embodiment of girlhood was largely illegible to Mrs. Campbell. This illegibility was highlighted when, for a brief period, Elizabeth chose to perform her gender identity in a more normalized way.

Elizabeth as a "girlie" girl. Throughout this study Elizabeth's perceived gender ambiguity offered members of the community what could be considered a discursive blank slate upon which individuals and groups ascribed a variety of conceptions of gender identity both normative and pathologic. Elizabeth's close friends, family, peers, and teachers all encourage and interpreted particular gender categories onto Elizabeth's embodiment perhaps to serve their own particular social goals or satisfy their own drive for Elizabeth to conform to the limited bounds of girlhood available at Oakwood. And Elizabeth herself could narrate how at different times she enacted different gender performances where some seemed more natural while others felt forced and were according to Elizabeth "just not me."

One community production of Elizabeth as a "girl" can be seen as a concerted effort by her peers early in her enrollment at Oakwood. At that time her friends determined to offer her a makeover through which she would present herself as girlie. As she explained, "My friend (*Laura*) told me she wanted to see what I would look like in it (*girlie attire*). So I was like girlie for a week..." Up to this point in the school year,

Elizabeth had presented herself as what she called a “skaterboy” or a “skater.” She had entered Oakwood as an outsider and had quickly joined the skater community as the one girl who was a skilled skateboarder. It was through this group of boys that Elizabeth met Laura, the sister of one of the other skaterboys.

In responding to this social pressure, Elizabeth herself engaged in the process of producing her gender as a “girlie” girl. In retelling the details of her attempts at becoming girlie Elizabeth reflected upon her abnormal or failed gender performance explaining that she, her friends and her family all thought she should stop “trying to look” like a boy and act more like a “normal” girl. In discussing her gender Elizabeth regularly interrupted her own stories to assert that she did not “try to look” like a boy but rather, “had always been like this (*gesturing to her body*).” And while she generally expressed pleasure in her lifelong gender appearance, she did temporarily decide to take up a performance of “girlie” girl in an attempt to fit in within the Oakwood community.

To consider her transition to being a girlie girl, it is helpful to review in greater detail how Elizabeth represented her style prior to, as well as following, this gender performance shift. In describing her appearance Elizabeth explains, “I am more skater. I like wearing my skater cloths and my cloths will be like really baggy.” Every time I observed Elizabeth, the skater, from any distance throughout my year at Oakwood, I initially interpreted her as a young boy with short hair, oversized clothing, distinct skateboard tennis shoes, and a downcast face and slouched posture. It was only on occasions where I knew or was told that it was Elizabeth I was looking at that I initially read and noted Elizabeth as a girl.

Upon closer observation and reflection there is nothing that biologic essentialists¹⁸ often consider male or female about this student's physical body; for example Elizabeth has no facial hair, no clear breast development, no maturing facial features or Adams apple, it would seem that my gender read of her came directly from Oakwood gender norms for clothing style, accessories, body posture, and body figure. In Oakwood the normalized female body figure or shape was more visibly accessible due to the custom of tighter fitting and more revealing clothing worn by the average female in comparison to the average male.

In contrast, the Elizabeth I regularly saw at Oakwood reflected the "skater" performance Elizabeth named whenever discussing her gender and style. And she was clear to distinguish herself as a "skater" from the "preppy skaterboys" who she considered inauthentic copies of true skaters. As a true skater Elizabeth explained it was necessary for her to wear baggy oversized jeans, skateboarding shoes, and an over sized sweatshirt with a front pocket that can swallow up both of her hands and arms up to her elbows. When possible she also wears her hood on her head and pulled down over her forehead. She wears no makeup and keeps her hair in a simple groomed style. In contrast Elizabeth explains that poser preppy skaters wear "tight" *Hilfiger* (designer) clothing and the wrong shoes and these preppy boys are not at all skilled at skateboarding. Interestingly when discussing both proper skater attire as well as preppy skater attire Elizabeth only considered male peers as measures of proper and improper appearance.

Elizabeth the "real skater," became friends with Laura and a group of what Elizabeth called "preppy girls" over the course of the first few months of school. As this

¹⁸ Male and female genders as the products of biologic sex is the biologic essentialist position on the fundamental construction of gender.

friendship evolved Laura and the other girls proposed to Elizabeth that she try dressing girlie for a week. Elizabeth accepted this challenge for relational reasons which she explained using a variety of justifications including, “it made Laura happy,” “Laura wanted me to try it,” “My mom was bugging me about the way I looked,” and “they all wanted to know what I would look like.”

During the week of her transition to girlie Elizabeth was under Laura’s direction. She wore make-up, styled her hair differently, and wore Laura and other girls from the groups clothing to school. The prescribed application of particular clothing, make-up, and hair styling during this time all resulted in the brief heteronormative “girlie” visibility of Elizabeth to school members including her homeroom teacher who registered this period with the following statement: “It just came to me in the middle of the night. I suddenly remembered the week Elizabeth came to school as a girl.”

When Elizabeth and her peers worked to establish her appearance as feminine according to the local norms and customs, she was suddenly visible and well received by members of the community. For example one of her teachers, Mrs. Campbell, expressed an approval of this transition of her appearance and even months later could recall this brief gender performance by Elizabeth: “It was just really strange. One day she just came in wearing make-up and different clothing, and looking like a girl. I remember I was surprised and I think I told her she looked really good.”

This marking of Elizabeth as a girlie girl was intentionally produced by her classmates as well as by her mother who rid her wardrobe of all of her “ill fitting” clothing in the days before she enrolled at Oakwood. When highlighting her mother’s role in this production of gender, Elizabeth explained that her mother had thrown away

all of her ill fitting skateboarding clothing just before she enrolled at Oakwood. Her mother had expressed to her that she didn't like Elizabeth's preference for her brother's hand me down clothing and opportunistically threw away all of these baggy skater clothes when the family moved into the Oakwood neighborhood.

Her mother's desire for her clothing to be more "appropriate" and form fitting to her body fit well within the gender norms of Oakwood girl clothing. As Elizabeth explained when pressed, "I don't know how to describe them (*girls clothing*) but they are tighter and I don't know how to say it." Here she simply pointed to girls within the area where we were talking about clothing and said, "You know, like those and like that."

When Elizabeth was pressed to describe the difference between her preferred appearance and girlie she regularly shrugged off any detailed descriptions of girlie appearance with a "you know, just normal, girl stuff." Here her words suggested the ubiquitous nature of normative female gender to subsume everything which is constructed as normal rendering it both everywhere and invisible simultaneously.

In her hesitant and or impatient attitude toward questions about describing what the term girlie might encompass, her reluctance suggested that describing girlie was both absurdly obvious and simultaneously denigrating to diverse ways of being a girl.

RESEARCHER: What are girl clothes? Because you have cloths on right now, and you are a girl. So these are girl cloths, right?

ELIZABETH: Well, no these are guy cloths.

RESEARCHER: Why? Because of which department you bought them in?

(*Elizabeth nodded and gave me an annoyed stare.*) Okay so it's defined by where you buy them in the store?

ELIZABETH: Yes. And there is like more (*to it than that*). Like there's (*girl's cloths*) are just more like preppy cloths not skater cloths.

RESEARCHER: Okay is it by the color of the clothing?

ELIZABETH: No?

RESEARCHER: Is it by the cut, like a tighter fitting cut?

ELIZABETH: Yes and I don't know how to describe it but they are more tighter and I don't know how else to say it but girlie.

Even as she was unwilling or unable to articulate what it meant to be girlie, she was clearly intimately aware of the appropriate markers for a girlie status among her peers. During her week as a girlie girl, Elizabeth herself participated in this gendering project to please her friends and can clearly articulate how she became a girl:

RESEARCHER: What would be more girlie, like what did you do different?

ELIZABETH: Like I wore a bunch of girl clothes and I wore make-up.

This gender production of Elizabeth's was registered by many people in the community with several faculty members generally recalling that new sixth grade girl who had come to school dressed like a girl for a little while in the fall.

Elizabeth's recollection of this gender performance was as a time that was uncomfortable and as something she would never do again. In reporting on the week of girlie performance she said that while her mother, her teacher and her friend Laura all approved of Elizabeth as a girlie girl, she found this performance inauthentic and had nothing positive to say about the experiment. "She (*Laura*) told me I should go back to girlie and I told her no because I did not like it."

And so, even as this performance of gender found approval among Elizabeth's peers, family, and educators it did not resonate with her desires for self expression or self gender identification. While discussing this "girlie" period of her schooling Elizabeth is quick to explain that this was, "just not me. And my friends told me no, it's not me either so it did not work for me."

The "me" that Elizabeth saw herself as was far more difficult, if not impossible, to interpret as a "girl" at Oakwood due to the limited gender possibilities within this social context. Where Mrs. Campbell could see a wide range of "girlhoods" at Oakwood, she could not conjure up an imagining of a "girl" space for Elizabeth the skater even when she was encouraged to consider more and more girl performances. In thinking about Elizabeth as her skater persona Ms. Campbell found the discourse of gender left her without a female option and thus she moved to produce a biologically abnormal gender for this child. This moment serves as a stark contrast to her fluid memory of Elizabeth's brief student time "as a girl."

The "girl" Elizabeth was readily interpreted and embraced by parents, teacher, and peers. However, the skater persona which most accurately expressed her identity was rapidly categorized as masculine within the limited heteronormative gender discourse of the community.

Elizabeth as a "guy" or as male. While Elizabeth personally applied the term skater to identify her clothing style and personal appearance another group of students marked some of these same characteristics and traits as male and took to labeling Elizabeth as a man. Here students heeded to notions of gender as a male-female binary¹⁹

¹⁹ This section will use binary terms to discuss the gender identity categories available to the Oakwood community when considering Elizabeth and her classmates. These opposing pairings for gender possibility

in which the characteristics of each gender are exclusive and co-constructing. This reading of Elizabeth as a “guy” was no different than many of my observational interpretation notes on Elizabeth where I marked her as a boy among a group of males congregating in the courtyard.

As I noted in the introduction to Elizabeth, I enacted a particular form of intellectual discursive violence upon Elizabeth’s gender by initially codifying her against both her preference and her assigned gender. In reassigning her gender based upon her embodiment, style, and performances my reading of Elizabeth was no different than that of her teacher or her classmates. However, my internal erroneous assumptions about her gender identity were quite benign in comparison to the masculine gender assigning enacted by her peers. Elizabeth’s normative gendering was far more crudely and literally enacted within the Oakwood community to violently assert the power inherent in a binary gender discourse upon her body and her way of being. As the narrative above illustrates, Elizabeth’s classmates literally renamed her with a male name, Trevor, and began calling her a “guy” or a “man,” as in “Hey Trevor, you’re the man,” at any given opportunity in the social construction of her gender. When subsequently questioned about this gendered harassment of Elizabeth one boy explained: “It’s not just me, we all do it. It’s her cloths and her hair. So we just call her Trevor and stuff. It’s no big deal; she never even said she didn’t like it.”

include *male* and *female*, *boy* and *girl*, and other variations of male and female nouns and pronouns. These terms are used within this analysis as discursively produced subject nodes related to arbitrary signs and symbols within a local context for social meaning (Butler). My use of these terms does not suggest that I am pointing to an essential male or female characteristic, attribute, or feature of a student. Where students within the study are identified as male or female, this is the gender they have been offered within society and it is also the gender they have taken up to claim as appropriate to their identity. Therefore within this section I did not determine that Elizabeth was a girl being called a boy, it was Elizabeth who rejected the marking of her as a male and protested this forced gendering of her identity.

This short explanation for the re-sexing of Elizabeth was offered when three male students were called to task for the daily harassment of Elizabeth which included calling her Trevor, calling her a man, invading her desk area, taking her belongings, knocking her materials on the floor, bumping into her body, and making crude gestures at her during class.

Elizabeth herself normalized the gendered harassment she was facing as resulting from her gender transgressions, “*(This guy Jackson)* just like calls me a guy because I look like one so... And tells me I am lesbian but I am not. He calls me Trevor and just keeps bugging me.”

Due to the highly constricted discursive gender possibilities for males and females at Oakwood, Elizabeth’s skater style was a clear transgression from female norms which was read by her adversaries as male. However Elizabeth made no claim to being a male, and rather identified and was identified as female, therefore the forced renaming of her as Trevor as well as the provocation that she was a man or a guy was related to her fellow Oakwood students noting and mapping her transgression onto the possible subject spaces within the heteronormative frame of possibility.

The practice of negative social interactions and the gendering Elizabeth as both male and as a female gender failure spread among a group of students. In particular three boys, Jackson, Derrick, and Corey enacted gendered and sexual harassment toward Elizabeth over the course of four class periods each day. Both her body and her personal style were highlighted as iterative and a duplicitous copy of the “authentic male” which within the heteronormative frame is the central subject space. These “real” males took to taunting Elizabeth with statements that she was a failed male; she was physically

harassed with what will later be explored as the intent to intimidate her with body brushes, personal belongings knocked from her hands or desk, and tripped by a group of students while they called her Trevor, their symbolic marking of her masculinity.

Within the heteronormative confines of the classroom Elizabeth's adversaries had regular access to her body through ongoing seating assignments. As was noted in the opening narrative, Jackson, Derrick, and Corey all sat within arm's reach of Elizabeth's desk and body. An administrative investigation would disclose that Elizabeth was assigned to sit these harassers for over half of the school day, and this seating assignment had gone on intermittently for over half of the school year. I highlight this systematic access to Elizabeth as it points to the vulnerability she faced as both a gender transgressor (*a girl acting and looking like a boy within the binary*), as well as the vulnerability of her discursive invisibility as a subject within heteronormativity (*a non-sexed being within a totalizing sexed system*).

The limitations of heteronormative discursive possibility for Elizabeth which located her within the counterfeit "guy" category among the boys in her class, left at least three of Elizabeth's teachers reading her not as male but rather as asexual or genderless. Where a grossly limited discourse presented Elizabeth as male to the boys, it presented her as nothing to these teachers. As discussed in the earlier analysis, Mrs. Campbell considered Elizabeth neither male nor female with regard to both gender and sexuality. Elizabeth's science teacher, Ms. Murphy, as well as her student teacher, Mr. Reed, also reported that they had been seating Elizabeth next to the same group of aggressive boys to "calm things (*sexualized performances*) down," between the boys and girls in the class. Ms. Murphy went so far as to categorize Elizabeth as a "boy neutralizer." Murphy

explained, as had Campbell earlier that Elizabeth's lack of or immature sexual development made her the perfect candidate to sit by Jackson. Later Mr. Reed would explain his seating chart by calling Jackson an "oversexed" boy who caused fewer problems when seated in a back corner of the room with Elizabeth assigned the seat, "between him and the girls."

This less than fully sexed subject space for Elizabeth, one in which quite literally was seated between boys and girls, left her invisible to her teachers as a sexed and gendered being who could be targeted by a group of boys. However the boys at Oakwood did not see Elizabeth's gender as invisible, but rather identified particular symbols on her body to mark her as male. As Derrick explained when he was asked to specify exactly what he had been saying to Elizabeth, "I call her Trevor and I sometimes say why are you always dressed like a guy? Why do you have such hairy arms? And she says I don't know."

Jackson then joined in to explain their name calling and male gendering of Elizabeth in the following way:

JACKSON: Yea, lots of people do stuff like that. Like call her names and stuff.

DERRICK: And we didn't do anything. We just called her Trevor.

MR. MARTIN: You didn't do anything? You didn't do anything?!

DERRICK: Yea, we didn't do anything.

MR. MARTIN: What's the point of calling her Trevor?

JACKSON: I don't know – I guess it's just calling her a boy's name.

In calling into question Elizabeth's gender her antagonists noted her clothing, "hairy arms," and general "look" as justification for what they called "joking around" by

stating to her and to her classmates that she was a male. In interviews with each of the boys involved in harassing Elizabeth they used the words “she looks like a guy” over and over when asked to describe the purpose for repeatedly calling her Trevor. While the school administrator, Mr. Martin, was seeking some detailed narrative behind the nickname Trevor the boys each independently and collectively would only offer that Elizabeth looked male to them. In fact each of the three boys claimed to have no knowledge about where this particular male name came from, it just sort of “got used a few times and then stuck.”

The repetition of the non-description “she looks like a guy” is reminiscent to Elizabeth’s own struggle to describe male or female normative gender in any detail when considering her week as a “girlie” girl. There is a suggested obvious understanding of masculinity and femininity which defies description when considering the normalized male or female.

It is only the failed subject who can be described and these descriptions only arise through their failures. Therefore Elizabeth’s hairy arms or clothing are markers of her failure at femininity placing her in opposition to heteronormative female gender and therefore into the all encompassing “like a guy” category.

I think it is important to keep sight of the fact that while these boys took up this limited heteronormative gender discourse to attack difference and enact violence upon Elizabeth their regular access to her body and spirit was the result of the same limited gender discourse. The heteronormative conceptions of boy and girl subjects at Oakwood were equally narrowly defined by education professionals who could neither see nor protect Elizabeth as an individual human student under their care.

Even as the highly constricted production of the boy and a girl identities at Oakwood suggested to the boys involved that Elizabeth was cheating on gender, the professional educators at Oakwood lacked a more sophisticated or expansive interpretation of gender and therefore made brief forays into medical or other discourses to interpret Elizabeth, but for the most part simply interpreted her as a neutralizing object to be placed between Oakwood's miniscule and rigid possibilities for male and female.

In locating Elizabeth between boys and girls, each teacher explained that they used their seating charts to manage behavior in their classroom. Each teacher suggested that Jackson as well as his group of friends were known to be behavior problems for harassing girls. Each teacher also suggested that these boys had the potential to provoke other boys into negative behavior. Therefore, each teacher explained that they had seated Elizabeth between these boys and the other girls as well as the other boys in the class because they felt her presence would reduce these boys' ability to harass or perform for girls. These teachers also claimed that they had concluded that Elizabeth would ignore their antics where as other boys would be drawn in by the behavior.

Although the three teachers did not communicate with one another with concerns or ideas about any of these four students, they each arrived at this gender and sexuality management seating arrangement. The teachers and the administrator all suggested it was a surprising coincidence that Elizabeth was seated by Jackson, the identified "ringleader" of this group, all day long. However, given the confines of the gender discourse at Oakwood, I would assert that the seating chart was the logical outcome of this matrix of heteronormativity discussed in the introduction to this study. The discursive production of Elizabeth as gender neutral or gender non-existent was not coincidental. In fact the

“boy neutralizer” or non-girl subject space which each teacher placed Elizabeth in was a logical outcome of heteronormative gender production within Oakwood. And the location of Elizabeth alongside a presumed heterosexual male to neutralize his affect on others was also a logical outcome of the heteronormative environment at Oakwood.

Yet the social outcome of the same group of boys repeatedly gendering Elizabeth as male was interpreted by all of the educators involved as unforeseen and the ongoing harassment noted as invisible by all three of the teachers who were present during each episode of sexual and gendered harassment.

Therefore the highly constricted and limited discourse available on gender left it unlikely if not impossible for Elizabeth to be interpreted as a girl by either her peers or by her teachers. In fact the limits of the heteronormative gender discourse with its simplified binary oppositions at Oakwood left it highly probable that Elizabeth’s style and embodiment would be interpreted as a duplication of authentic masculinity by her peers.

The heteronormative gender norms and Oakwood, and each teacher’s uncritical and unwitting interpellation into those discourses, essentially resulted in Elizabeth being exposed physically and emotionally to violent heteronormative harassment on a daily basis. Because the consistently reproduced male/female binary made Elizabeth’s embodiment a feminine impossibility she could not for any period of time be interpreted as a girl. And because of the exclusive binary opposition of the “male/female” or “masculine/feminine” signifiers within this discourse it was not possible or preferable to Elizabeth herself for her to be read as a boy. Elizabeth was quite simply not seen as a gendered being and thus she was not read as fully human by the faculty or by her peers.

And the reliance of this same heteronormative binary of gender on male and subsequent masculine superiority and domination suggested to her peers that her embodiment was a threat to the heteronormative order of the community. A threat that students like Jackson responded to with daily verbal and physical sexual and gender harassment that went unseen by the teachers of the community.

Elizabeth as a lesbian. The conflation of patriarchal gender presentation and sexual orientation²⁰ is a consistent feature of heteronormativity (D’Emilio, 1983; Rich, 1994). And while Elizabeth did not appeal to the faculty for assistance when her classmates began calling her a “guy” and later calling her “Trevor,” she did protest and appeal for assistance when these same boys began calling her a “lesbian.” This section of analysis will consider how Elizabeth came to be seen as a lesbian, the floating signifier of sexual orientation transgression, landed upon Elizabeth.

The step from gender identity to sexual orientation is really not a step at all but rather a foregone conclusion when faculty, staff, and students consider male students at Oakwood. For example, when discussing the homophobic harassment of a young boy who was considered effeminate teachers and students alike all noted that they could tell or at least suspected that he was gay years earlier. On another occasion when another gender non-normative male was the subject of concern for grabbing at and touching other boys (*an activity engaged in by well over half of the boys on campus*) students and

²⁰ This section considers the ways in which Elizabeth’s *sexual orientation* was called into question and the times she was marked as a *lesbian*. For the purposes of this project I want to highlight that these terms are to be considered socially constructed identities as opposed to essential identities. A great deal has been written on the historical construction of homosexuality as well as the construction of heterosexuality and sexual orientation. The analysis here explores how heteronormative sexual orientation is co-constructed with gender the gender discourse at Oakwood. Like the aforementioned sections discussing *male* and *female*, *boy* and *girl* gendered possibilities each of these subject spaces or identity categories is to be considered a discursive product and a discursive regime reigning in our unruly bodies.

teachers expressed concern that this boy was in fact homosexual and therefore his touching was sexualized.

Masculinity at Oakwood included, as it does in any heteronormative system, a male centered heterosexuality where males are conceived as possessing and displaying ongoing sexual desire for their female counterparts (Katz, 2009). Femininity conversely operates within heteronormative discourse as the opposing co-constructed elements of a heterosexual identity. In this sexual/gender blended dichotomy the female sex acts as the negative valence to the male in expressing a sexual as well as a gender identity. For example normative boys are to display sexual aggression while normative girls are to display sexual reservation. Conversely then, as seen in the examples above, normative gender is associated with normative sexual orientation.

In the case of Elizabeth, an early moment marking her as lesbian was cast in the fall of the school year when some among the faculty at Oakwood questioned her relationship with Laura. When Elizabeth's health teacher, Ms. Wright held back a confiscated friendship note to question her friend Laura about the girls "relationship" she evoked a concern of impropriety with regard to Elizabeth's interest in Laura. Quite quickly Laura and the school counselor Ms. Bailey were brought into a heteronormative discourse concerning the potential meanings of a friendship note from Elizabeth to Laura. In a nearly coloring book heteronormative gender format, Ms. Wright read the identity performances of Elizabeth and of Laura within her classroom as masculine and feminine and presumed a questionable or potentially sexual desire coming from the masculine Elizabeth toward the feminine Laura.

Ms. Bailey then openly attached herself to this reading, naming the note passing as an unfamiliar “type of situation” and suggesting that I as a researcher on LGBTQ issues may have expertise on how to proceed. My failure to read the note as romantic was

In the many interpretations of Elizabeth brought into consideration under Oakwood community standards, Elizabeth’s self analysis, her classmates, her teachers, and her families, Elizabeth’s embodiment and style fit well within the confines of normative masculinity. Quite simply Elizabeth appeared as masculine and therefore her characteristics could not be read as female. And as masculinity encompassed heterosexual desire, Ms. Wright as well as Ms. Bailey readily questioned Elizabeth’s desires in relation to Laura.

This circular logic of gender embodiment and sexual desire was read by students as well, as was evidenced later in the year when Jackson, Derrick, and Corey marked Elizabeth as a lesbian.

DERRICK: I didn’t know she’d take it personally. I didn’t know how she feels.

And some people said she likes Laura. And she wrote poems and songs about her. She showed them to people. People have read them and stuff.

MR. MARTIN: So that gave you permission to go after her?

DERRICK: I didn’t go after her about that stuff. It was just about looking like a guy.

Here Derrick attempted to explain to the school administrator that not only did Elizabeth look like a guy, but that it was also rumored that she desired a girl. In considering the production of heteronormative femininity then, patriarchal discourses of

gender and sexuality came into play in the development of Elizabeth as a lesbian specter or a “lesbian menace” (Inness, S.A. 1997).

Stories of Elizabeth’s homosexuality were linked back to the earliest period of the school year when Elizabeth and Laura developed a friendship. For example a note from Elizabeth to Laura was intercepted and passed along to the administration in the fall of the school year. In the note Elizabeth asked Laura if there was a problem between the girls and if Laura still liked Elizabeth. This sort of conflict based note writing was extremely common among female students at Oakwood, however Laura’s teacher had read this note and interpreted it as potentially problematic and possibly homoerotic. The school counselor had been given the note to address the “situation” with Laura and with Elizabeth separately.

When the note was shared with me as the expert on gender and sexuality among youth, I asked what precisely indicated that this was anything different from the hundreds of notes passed daily at Oakwood. I was told that Elizabeth was very different from Laura and that Laura had appeared to be uncomfortable when her teacher confiscated the note. Again I suggested that this situation could be read as typical rather than homosexual as students are generally uncomfortable when caught passing notes during class.

However, my expertise were dismissed as they did not fit within the Oakwood frame of understanding as Elizabeth was seen as “very different” by both the teacher and the counselor who each raised an alarm of homosexual concern about this note-passing. In the end the situation produced no conclusive information for any of the parties involved as the counselor was imprecise and evasive in her interviews and both girls were unwilling or unable to discuss the note or their relationship with the counselor. Perhaps

all that this encounter accomplished was to highlighting for both Laura and Elizabeth that their friendship would be read as abnormal.

This ongoing social production of Elizabeth as the sexual transgressor ultimately gave grounds to Derrick's final claim that he and his buddies were "protecting" everyone else by attacking Elizabeth as a lesbian.

MR. MARTIN: Is it safe at school for her?

DERRICK: Maybe we said stuff that protected others.

This final double assertion, that Elizabeth was a lesbian and that as such she was a danger to others, was left unchecked by Mr. Martin who was limited by a discourse that did not provide a response to these claims. The void of language available to address this harassment was supplanted with a technocratic disciplinary language with the key terms offered to name and describe this situation as "disrespect" and "bullying."

Mr. Martin's failure to hear and respond vigorously to this justification for harassment is acutely problematic. One could consider the response Mr. Martin may have produced if Elizabeth's note had been interpreted as expressing desire across a racial identity line rather than one of gender and sexuality norms. Had Derrick interpreted Elizabeth's romantic interest as dangerous by applying a White supremacist discourse and then claimed the right to harass her in order to protect "others" from her racially impure attractions Mr. Martin may have more readily responded with an anti-racist discourse. Yet in this case, Derrick applied that same logic, arguing it was his right and responsibility to protect others from homosexual desires through harassment and violence and Mr. Martin either did not register this claim or did not possess a professional discourse of sexuality and gender to respond to the claim.

It can be certain that the discursive silence surrounding the specific gendered and homophobic harassment of Elizabeth on the administrator's part did not reflect a lack of knowledge about the specifics of the harassment on Mr. Martin's part. Her written complaint specified that Derrick and Jackson had repeatedly called her a lesbian while bumping her desk, body, and belongings. The school administrators silence in relation to this claim along with the student claim that harassing a lesbian "protected others" dramatically illustrate the paucity of professional language available to engage in a discourse on sexuality and gender with adolescents.

Unfortunately Mr. Martin and the earlier counselor and teacher interactions with regard to labeling Elizabeth as a lesbian illustrate an utter void of professional discourses to address homophobic harassment as these professionals were themselves caught up in a heteronormative understanding of gender and sexuality. As Haraway (1987) highlighted each person's knowledge was situated within the discursive, "a contestable text and a power field" (p. 577). Therefore, given that the faculty at Oakwood was not actively engaged in teaching and learning about gender and sexuality, what could be known about gender and sexuality at Oakwood was underwritten or situated within an unquestioned heteronormative discourse. The marking of gender difference as lesbian, the concern that a lesbian attraction required counseling and the disciplinary silence in response to homophobic harassment were all sexual orientation Othering practices from within a heteronormative context.

The Gendering of Elizabeth conclusion. The ongoing discursive production of lesser gender caricatures or heteronormative subject nodes²¹ superimposed upon

²¹ Here I use the term *subject node* to point to alternative subservient gender categories present within the heteronormative discourse. In their deconstruction of the sexed subject both R. W. Connell (1995) and

Elizabeth, from girlie girl, to intersexed, to Trevor, to a lesbian, each interpolated her embodiment and style into the available dichotomous gender discourse. Each social interpretation of Elizabeth highlighted the features of her identity performances which were visibly in different from normative gender and sexuality performances.

The gendering of Elizabeth highlights illustrates the discursive process Butler describes as representing nothing other than the repetition of signifying practices. Where Elizabeth articulated her style with the signifiers socially ascribed to male students, she was marked as a boy, a medical mystery, and a lesbian. And when Elizabeth performed and presented the signifiers socially ascribed to female students, she was seen by her teacher as becoming “a girl.”

In the case of Elizabeth the divergent subject nodes for naming and knowing her gender are each offered as the signifier for social articulations where the prescribed gender markers are both arbitrary and in tension with the underlying power dynamic of the binary. It is within this unimaginative and tightly bound heteronormative framework that Elizabeth can be marked as Trevor by innocently and repeatedly performing a set of practices which locally had been socially attributed to males. This is to say that while the Oakwood community assigning of skater clothing to the male body is arbitrary, the claims by Jackson that Elizabeth is threatening both his patriarchal dividend (Connell, 1995) as well as “others” engender an attachment to and defense of these arbitrary signifiers.

The constricted heteronormative gender discourse available at Oakwood has left little to no affirming language available which could address Elizabeth as an individual

Teresa De Lauretis (1987) are among the scholars who have extensively examined the multiple and conflicting subject nodes which emerge beneath and in relation to hegemonic gender norms within the heteronormative binary.

human subject. Her perceived transgressive embodiment and expression articulated within a strict heteronormative gender binary brought upon her an onslaught of abuse while her attempts at parroting gender norms left her feeling uncomfortable and unsatisfied. Ultimately there was no language at Oakwood available to capture and articulate the subjectivity of Elizabeth and subsequently there was no language available to even perceive let alone narrate her gendered and sexualized victimization at the hands of her peers.

This discursive void will be considered in greater detail in the following section where I will consider both the erasure of Elizabeth's experiences and existence as well as her own abject inability to articulate her identity from within the discursive bounds of heteronormativity.

The Erasure and Abjection of Elizabeth

I now consider the how this case illustrates the heteronormative abjection and erasure of non-normative subjectivities. Here I analyze how the events and experiences of Elizabeth are rendered invisible and illegible to both other Oakwood community members as well as to Elizabeth herself. I elaborate on the point introduced in the above analysis that as a gender transgressive subject Elizabeth is both a highly visible subject as well as an invisible or incoherent subject. And as I began discussing above this combination of both marked visibility as a deviant and discursive invisibility as a human subject place Elizabeth in the preverbal Catch 22 that is highlighted by the consistent national statistics on LGBTQ youth victimization while at school (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; 2008; 2010).

To consider the erasure and invisibility of Elizabeth as a human subject, it is important to recall how gender is made visible within a normative frame. Butler (1993) argues that the gendered body is a performative declaration rather than a constitutive face. That it is the repetitive daily performances which bring into focus the taken for granted gender signifiers. It is through these accepted performances that individual bodies as interpreted as male or female. Therefore one cannot be a gender, one must do a gender, and keep doing it in order to be interpreted or known or even discursively real within a heteronormative frame.

However as can be seen in Elizabeth's case there are alternative performances, "subversive bodily acts," which are also interpolated into the heteronormative matrix (DeLauretis, 1987). These subversive performances are marked as Elizabeth was in the prior analysis as iterative of "real" genders, as well as being interpreted as problematic and pathologic. These interpolations necessarily take into account this divergent text of gender and sexuality through a strict heteronormative lens, thereby the only language available, along with the only practices or performance which are rendered publically visible are those which either articulate heteronormativity or are read against this discourse. The community of Oakwood and the professional educators within this community are symbolically and linguistically stuck within this constricted frame when considering what most school systems consider a fundamental characteristic of students, her gender.

The subjectivity of Elizabeth then becomes visible when she is read as "a girlie girl" and when she is being read as a lesbian two performances of gender she does not claim for herself. She is however socially illegible or invisible for the vast majority of her

sixth grade school year as she composes and repeatedly enacts a relatively original performance that she herself names “skater.”

Finally at the close of this section I will analyze heteronormative abjection in Elizabeth’s description of her attempts to capture and claim a gender as well as her attempts to construct a new identity category for herself that is void of gender altogether. Following that I will take into consideration the invisibility of Elizabeth as a subject and the erasure of her experiences by members of the Oakwood community.

Under erasure: Elizabeth disappears. I would now like to consider the ways in which Elizabeth and the experiences she reports disappear from the consciousness of people around her in the Oakwood community, how Elizabeth’s embodiment of gender and subsequent impressions of her ambiguous sexuality pushed and regularly exceeded the discursive limits of heteronormative intelligibility.

Just as Elizabeth struggled to name herself to possess knowledge of herself in relation to the construction of gender and sexuality, she was regularly illegible to others as a gendered subject. The frequency of her performances could not be heard or seen by teachers and administrators operating from within a highly limited set of gender expectations. And related to this invisibility as a human subject within the community, Elizabeth’s experiences and actions directed at her were interpreted through a heteronormative framework which erased her subject position and experiences altogether.

Here I will also attend to the ways in which Elizabeth’s experiences, her stories of living are erased as they are subsumed within the heteronormative discourse.

Under erasure: Elizabeth remembered and forgotten. To be visible as a gendered subject from within a heteronormative matrix requires individuals enact

particular performances. And feminist theorists have long established a highly gendered society such as ours in the United States has ascribed dichotomous opposing gendered meanings to nearly all social articulations and interactions. Therefore one is interpreted as a male or a female simultaneously to being seen as a human subject.

The question then to ask is how is the non-normative gendered subject seen in the classrooms of Oakwood? And here one answer came in the form of recalling a forgotten student when discussing gender expression with a faculty member at Oakwood. As discussed earlier in this analysis the first important moment to arise during this conversation is when Mrs. Campbell is pushed to describe all of the different “types” of girls she has in her classes.

MRS. CAMPBELL: Can I identify another one?

RESEARCHER: Yes, are there others outside of these groups? (*long silence*)

RESEARCHER: Well you probably... well you maybe have some girls that don't fit in with anyone? (*long silence*)

MRS. CAMPBELL: That's what I am trying to think about. Well the one that I'm thinking, I am thinking about a girl (*Elizabeth*), I had her at the beginning of the year, and there is some identification problems with her because of the way her body is growing. I mean there's like a physical medical name for it. And she sort of goes in and out of that group

As can be seen in this short passage, the daily presence of a gender non-normative child like Elizabeth is easily forgotten by her teacher during a lengthy discussion about girlhood. Elizabeth as a girl and her performance of gender are initially invisible to her teacher and when prodded into memory as a gender possibility the heteronormative

discourse requires Mrs. Campbell establish some pathologic node to place her within. She quickly locates Elizabeth within some form of gender disability and thereby erases her as a fully human possibility once again within our discussion of girlhood.

A second and more dramatic manifestation and erasure of Elizabeth was also introduced during this discussion about Oakwood girls. At this point in the conversation Mrs. Campbell noted that she had recently become increasingly aware of Elizabeth because of the gender performance Elizabeth had enacting during what Elizabeth called her girlie girl experiment:

MRS. CAMPBELL: Yea, but she, I noticed her in the office lately. And we're started doing stuff our hair and the cloths are starting to be a little more girlie. But she is not in my block anymore. But I see her every once in a while out in the hallway and she is friendly and we wave. But she wouldn't be typically in any of the girl groups. But then I didn't notice any of the groups shutting her out either, it's just her comfort going to them. (Long silence)

This newfound awareness and approval of Elizabeth correspond with Elizabeth's self described period of girlie girl adornment. During this period it can be suggested that Elizabeth was seen and known to this teacher.

It is necessary to note that Elizabeth was in fact still assigned to Mrs. Campbell's block at the time of this interview; however Mrs. Campbell had a student teacher who had taken over teaching these class periods. It is also important to note the "girlie girl" experiment was over months prior to this interview. I highlight these facts because they suggest that while Elizabeth was still in Mrs. Campbell's classroom for 90 minutes every day during the period she was no longer visible once she resumed here gender ambiguous

performance. Therefore the statement “I see her every once in a while out in the hallway and she is friendly and we wave,” again suggests that Elizabeth is quickly forgotten by Mrs. Campbell when she is not performing as a girlie girl.

The most illustrative moment in this ongoing remembering and forgetting of Elizabeth took place several months following this discussion. At that time Elizabeth was again brought to the attention of Mrs. Campbell as a result of the gendered and homophobic harassment Elizabeth was enduring in Mrs. Campbell’s classroom. Again Elizabeth had fallen deep into the land of forgotten or invisible subjects which was made clear when Mrs. Campbell sought me out to tell me that while she had been unaware of any harassment or really any classroom interactions directed at Elizabeth. Yet she thought it might be important to discuss how she had “suddenly remembered the week Elizabeth came to school as a girl.” Thus the day to day taunting and physical aggression between Elizabeth and her three harassers all seated within 15 feet of Mrs. Campbell’s desk were not visible, yet this teacher could reproduce a detailed description of an outfit and hairstyle Elizabeth wore four months earlier.

Under erasure: Illegible lives, illegible experiences.

ELIZABETH: Yes, and I told him (*the teacher*) – yes. I told him and he said he did not care and he will not talk to me about me changing desks.

The earlier analysis in this chapter pointed to the classroom access a group of boys had to sexually harass Elizabeth on a daily basis. There I noted that three of Elizabeth’s teachers had used her “gender neutral” body as a physical barrier between what they considered “oversexed” presumed heterosexual boys and the sexually desirable females of the class. Here I wish to consider how Elizabeth’s open resistance, reports,

and complaints of harassment were deflected, denied, and used to implicate her in the ongoing classroom conflict.

Elizabeth repeatedly reported to at least three teachers that she was being harassed by the above named group of boys in her class. She requested a seat change, she verbally protested and reported on name calling, and she involved classmates in verbally “fighting back” against her antagonists. Earlier analysis disclosed that each of the teachers Elizabeth complained to suspected that these boys were harassing female students in the class. In fact all three teachers stated that they had strategically seated these boys because of suspicions that they were sexually harassing their female peers. The obvious question then is why were Elizabeth’s complaints of harassment at the hands of these boys denied, dismissed, and even used against her?

In the case of Mrs. Campbell, as can be seen above, she did not hold herself responsible for classes assigned to her student teacher. Campbell’s saw the class as belonging to her student teacher, Mr. Reed, although she was frequently present in what was referred to as her classroom during the incidents. In addition to the invisibility of abdicating the students of this class to her student teacher, she quite simply did not see Elizabeth during the vast majority of the school year and according to her own statements only became aware of her when Elizabeth performed a camped up form of femininity. Elizabeth’s illegible gender performance left Campbell noting on multiple times that she was really only aware of Elizabeth during one week of the entire school year.

The situation for Mr. Reed and Ms. Murphy however cannot be so readily discharged as each of them was the sole teacher in charge of a classroom. Elizabeth

appealed directly to each of these teachers to address the harassment she was experiencing in their classroom.

RESEARCHER: You and this kid are having a problem? I mean you are not having a problem, this kid is causing a problem and you complain to Mr. Reed.

ELIZABETH: Yes, and I told him – yes. I told him and he said he did not care and he will not talk to me about me changing desks.

In the case of Mr. Reed, this teacher offered up a variety of reasons he had not addressed the hostile and intimidating situation between Elizabeth and her peers. Primarily he offered a patronizing reading of Elizabeth and Jackson as little children who needed to work out their differences. As he explained it, “When I told them I don’t care about your little problems, I thought they were fighting over bumping each other’s chairs and stuff. You know how kids do that sort of thing.” This statement contrasted with his other statements about Jackson being a “trouble maker,” a “ringleader,” and “one big hormone.” What Elizabeth experienced as a hostile, sexist, or gendered interaction between with Jackson was by contrast read by Mr. Reed as “little problems.”

In the contrast between considering Elizabeth and Jackson’s problems petty and childish and considering Jackson a sexual aggressor, Mr. Reed vacillated among the ambiguous notions and politics involved in the social construction of adolescence discussed by Lesko (1996). By locating their tension in childish behavior outside the realm of developing gender and sexuality Mr. Reed erased Elizabeth’s gender claims of aggression and harassment. Further the pervasive presence of “common sense” notions to naturalize heteronormative social behavior, such as, “let them work it out” operate from

within a frame that is oblivious to the power dynamics involved in gender and sexuality constructions clearly at play in this situation.

The premise that Elizabeth as a gender non-normative girl could be the target of sexual harassment and gendered intimidation by Jackson was quite simple not present within the heteronormative conception of gender operating for Mr. Reed. He took in her detailed complaints, “I don’t know something about him calling her Trevor or something,” and giving no consideration to the construction of gender and power within his classroom he assigned the two students mutual accountability for the conflict. Thereby he assigned them to “work it out” for themselves.

Suggesting that this incident was one of mutual conflict and mutual exertion of social power effectively erased the uneven field of play inherent in normative discourses. Elizabeth as a victim or target of aggression was erased and replaced by some genderless notion of Elizabeth as a sparring partner in an even match. After repeatedly asking Mr. Reed for a seat change, Elizabeth began to perceive that he was beginning to mark her as a trouble maker like Jackson and she silenced her requests.

Mr. Reed did not go as far as Ms. Murphy in reinterpreting the situation in a manner which indicted Elizabeth for the abuse she was facing. In this second instance the Ms. Murphy registered this disruption, the hostility, and the “fighting” and began writing referrals for both students, Elizabeth and Jackson. As Elizabeth reported, Ms. Murphy went from public admonitions to the two of them to discipline of both Elizabeth and Jackson for the ongoing verbal and physical scuffles at their work table.

RESEARCHER: So you told your science teacher too? Did you tell her what he has done or what he is saying?

ELIZABETH: She can hear him but she does not do anything about it. She will just sometimes tell him like go out in the hall or something for being noisy and he still does not quit. She gets me in trouble too for talking to him. Like I want to talk to him! She just hears talking in the back and blames us both.

Ms. Murphy explained that she had not been aware of any “harassment issues” between Elizabeth and Jackson; she simply knew that “they were always fighting and it was very disruptive.” She explained that she regularly sent them to the hallway for disrupting class, and noted that she had written repeated office referrals regarding Jackson’s behavior. As with Mr. Reed, Ms. Murphy’s inability to recognize the violence taking place within her own classroom appears to have been associated with her inability to see Elizabeth as a vulnerable human subject within the space. The repeated furniture noise of chairs and tables sliding about, the repeated laughter and raised voices, and the protests from Elizabeth to have her seat changed registered with Ms. Murphy as “childish arguments” resulting in the punishment of sending these students to isolation together.

As in Mr. Reed’s classroom, Elizabeth experienced this silencing and erasure on the part of the teachers as dangerous to her being, and began to work to make the abuse and conflict less and less visible to the teachers. In effect, the power dynamic of teacher to student was grooming Elizabeth to erase and naturalize the violence herself in order to avoid additional discipline directed at her by the school system.

Under Erasure: Elizabeth’s Retreat to Silence

RESEARCHER: Have you written a pink slip about this? (*Oakwood’s harassment reporting form*)

ELIZABETH: No.

RESEARCHER: Why haven't you?

ELIZABETH: I get punished with him all the time. Plus the teachers don't care.

RESEARCHER: Are you willing to write a pink slip now?

ELIZABETH: I guess, maybe, I don't know.

It is useful here to reflect upon Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1975) as I consider how Elizabeth herself became enlisted in erasing and naturalizing the heteronormative harassment she was experiencing daily in the classrooms of Oakwood. When considering how discipline and punishment operate to organize society Foucault turned to an analysis of the Panopticon to highlight how regimes of discipline become internalized by an individual.

The efficiency of power, its constraining force have, in a sense, passed over to the other side—to the side of its surface of application. He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. (p. 197)

In asking Elizabeth to consider reporting her harassment to the school administration her first thought was to the punishments she had faced earlier in her attempts to report this harassment. While there was a publicized school policy about bullying and sexual harassment, and a system for reporting harassment directly to the administration Elizabeth expressed reluctance to acknowledge her experiences.

Upon further exploration of how she had reduced her punishments for participating in these "fights" Elizabeth explained that she found it best to just scoot her chair as far away from Jackson's as possible and "pretend he wasn't talking to me." And so as she was seated next to a boy calling her gendered names, making gendered fun of her body, and suggesting she was a lesbian, Elizabeth attempted to erase the moments by

erasing herself from the context. Elizabeth was retreating from the classroom into her mind, and given the school absence statistics²² for sexual and gender minority youth, she might easily opt to remove her body from the classroom as well in the coming years.

Under erasure: Discursive void between administrative policies and classroom norms. Oakwood school administrators pride themselves on having a positive school climate in which students treat one another with “respect.” In fact as a Positive Behavior Support (PBS)²³ site for the school district, Oakwood has posted behavior standards as well as an elaborate system of rewards and penalties which are regularly monitored by the administration. Among the professional concerns about student behavior at Oakwood, bullying and harassment are considered significant problems which are assumed to require administrative attention.

The “pink slip” or Harassment Incident form is among the systemic tools for addressing school climate and monitoring bullying and harassment. The student handbook contains a two page definition of harassment which holds both legal and common language definitions of harassment as well as a series of examples. Harassment is identified as, “unwanted behavior of a nonverbal, verbal, written, graphic, sexual, or physical nature that is directed at an individual or group on the basis of disability, race, color, gender, national origin, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, marital status, socioeconomic status, cultural background, familial status, physical characteristics or

²² Of the LGBT students surveyed, 32.7% missed a day of school because of feeling unsafe, compared with only 4.5% of a national sample of secondary school students. (2010, GLSEN)

²³ Oakwood participates in a University affiliated comprehensive behavior management system for monitoring and modifying student behaviors. Under the guidelines of the PBS program three dictates, “Be Safe, Be Respectful, and Be Responsible” are posted throughout the building and the administration regularly use these three generic behavior dictates to both reward particular behaviors as well as to address and penalize unwanted student behaviors.

linguistic characteristics of a national origin group”(p. 36). The handbook also notes a series of consequences for harassment.

The Oakwood administration teaches all incoming students the behavior policies, hold respect assemblies for the whole school and they are known to go from classroom to classroom to discuss school behavior problems. This policy context makes it all the more interesting that neither Elizabeth, nor any of the three boys involved in harassing her possessed any language to talk about this behavior as sexual harassment, bullying, homophobia, or bias. In addition, the three teachers who were made aware of the ongoing abuse in their classrooms did not use any of the above terms in considering the situation until these terms were provided by the school administrator.

MR. MARTIN: So I want you to think about which rule you violated.

DERRICK *and* JACKSON *together*: Respect...? Responsible...?

In fact, aside from the school administration, all of these parties rejected the notion that the behavior described above was sexual harassment, a term not clearly identifiable by either the teachers or the students. The term “homophobic” harassment was the only behavior policy related claim any of those involved recognized. And this awareness or knowledge of homophobia as harassment was most likely connected to my research presentations on gender, homophobia, and harassment in all of the classrooms involved.

The discursive gap between student and teacher language and norms surrounding gendered behavior and the disciplinary policies allows these two realities to exist simultaneously without impacting one another. The administration can point to a robust

policy to address bias and a set of mechanisms to document bias and then note the low rate of teacher reports as indicative of a safe and bias free space.

At the same time teachers can operate by applying expansively subjective terms like “respect” and its counterpart “disrespect” in documentation without any possibility of tracking or making social meanings from these general terms. At Oakwood the number one behavior resulting in a referral is “disrespect.” Thus at Oakwood there are parallel lines of discussion about student behavior and culture that do not cross and cannot be readily correlated with the administrative discourse on heteronormative abuses.

And finally students attempt to publically operate from an interpretation of the three PBS terms respect, responsible, and safe while they have little to no discursive means to interpret, discuss, or report on the power regimes at play on their bodies. Therefore harassment forms are few and far between even as the, “unwanted behavior of a nonverbal, verbal, written, graphic, sexual, or physical nature that is directed at an individual or group on the basis of disability, race, color, gender, national origin, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, marital status, socioeconomic status, cultural background, familial status, physical characteristics or linguistic characteristics of a national origin group,” is visibly ongoing throughout the hallways and classrooms of Oakwood.

The presence of the policy and procedures in the absence of an awareness and knowledge base among the teachers and the students effectively erases countless moments of violence all day long.

Under erasure: Elizabeth’s history disappears. During the investigation of harassment directed at Elizabeth, one student in particular, Jackson, had a student file

filled with documentation of earlier behavior problems including peer harassment, violence, and teacher disrespect. In fact when his name was brought forward by Elizabeth, the administration immediately pulled out his very thick student file and noted that he was already on a “shortened schedule”²⁴ based upon earlier incidents.

While there was an immediate interview with Jackson and his peers regarding Elizabeth’s harassment claim, no referral form was written for any of the boys involved during the investigation. As a result of the investigation, two of the three boys were assigned after school community service. This consequence did not require a written referral and when the administrator called each boy’s parents to inform them about the community service he noted that it was the result of repeated disruptions and disrespectful behavior in the classroom. He made note of the number of referrals each boy had and each boy’s location on the disciplinary ladder at Oakwood. This obfuscation of the gendered and sexual harassment of Elizabeth into the general category of disruption and disrespect erased any administrative record of this situation.

In the days following the investigation Jackson was brought to the district student support services to consider his expulsion or alternative educational placement. At the time of this process, the assistant principal brought together a series of referrals and a trail of papers documenting the ongoing behavioral problems Jackson had exhibited at Oakwood. During the disciplinary hearing the administrator made a compelling argument that Oakwood was not the proper placement for a student like Jackson and that there was not adequate supervision for him at Oakwood. There was no documentation regarding the ongoing heteronormative harassment of Elizabeth brought to this meeting.

²⁴ Due to his shortened schedule Jackson was only attending Oakwood for four periods per day. All four class periods he was in class with Elizabeth, and all four periods he was assigned the seat directly adjacent to Elizabeth.

The only written record of this harassment or the investigation of this harassment was in the form of the student complaint form Elizabeth filled out at my request when she disclosed the harassment she was experiencing in her classes. There was no disciplinary form naming this event as “bullying” sexual harassment, homophobic harassment etc. As a school system then, there was no knowledge produced from this series of incidents, it was as if nothing ever happened.

Abjection: The nameless self. The heteronormative matrix at Oakwood provided no discursive language for Elizabeth’s embodiment of a gender given the two limited and mutually exclusive gender constructs available. Elizabeth’s gender was presumed and legally assigned based upon her biologic sex at birth and this presumed sex as the precursor to gender marked her as a “girl” in all records and activities at Oakwood.

And while Elizabeth did not express identifying as a male or a boy, and had on numerous occasions rejected claims by peers that she was a boy or a lesbian, she regularly struggled to express her identity within the limited confines of “girlhood.”

Is it possible to raise the critical question of how such constraints not only produce the domain of intelligible bodies, but produce as well a domain of unthinkable, abject, unlivable bodies? This latter domain is not the opposite of the former, for oppositions are, after all, part of intelligibility; the latter is the excluded and illegible domain that haunts the former domain as the specter of its own impossibility, the very limit to intelligibility, its constitutive outside. (Butler, p. 11)

Where the gender binary was presented as explicitly heterosexual male and female with female operating in opposition to male Elizabeth presented as neither male nor female and thereby fell out of gender possibility. When offered the opportunity to describe herself, Elizabeth openly rejected all available heteronormative gender categories and instead constructed an identity void of gender, the skater identity.

Abjection: Elizabeth as a “skater.” While becoming a heteronormative girlie girl required Elizabeth to engage in deploying specific arbitrary practices and costumes, becoming or deploying the markers for an identity she labeled a “skater” fit effortlessly within her sense of self expression. To put it simply Elizabeth had to work against her desires and comforts to perform normative girlhood while she found ease in becoming a skater. Elizabeth explained what she considered her natural gender presentation in this way: “I wear skater cloths, you know boy cloths. I just always looked like a guy, and it fits because I am a skater, a real skater, not like those preppy skaters who wear girl cloths and all that.”

Elizabeth readily offered this term, skater, to described and define her identity in relation to her peers. In self reflections on her appearance the term skater and the concept of being a skater took up her clothing practices and style of interacting in a language that was otherwise not available within the dichotomous gender binary.

Yet even as Elizabeth took up this identity and attempted to claim it as her own genderless identity term, the existing skater genre to which she was ascribing was highly gendered. For the skater identity at Oakwood was constructed within the bounds of boyhood and masculinity. Skaters at Oakwood were known to be a group of boys who lived within a particular neighborhood and practices and performed skateboarding tricks at the neighborhood skateboard park. And so as Elizabeth took up the styles and mannerisms of a skater and attempted to redesignate the language, she found herself in regular conflict with peers over the meanings of identity performance.

When her classmates read the skater performance as male and called Elizabeth a boy she protested not by claiming to be a female or a girl, but rather by repeatedly

making claims to this skater identity. “They call me that (*Trevor*) because I look like a guy, but that’s just the way I am and I’m not gonna quit being a skater just to make them leave me alone.”

This lack of a discourse as well as Elizabeth’s adoption of an approximate identity illustrate the limitations of the gender binary at offering Elizabeth the means for knowing, labeling and speaking of her experiences of herself in relation to social interactions and gender identity.

Throughout my conversations with Elizabeth she frequently referred to her female classmates as “them” while she referred to her all male skateboard friends as us. She explained regularly that she had been, “you know, like a guy” since she was five years old. Yet at the same time, this student did not identify as a male.

Elizabeth herself juxtaposed her discomfort with the girlie personal with her pleasure in taking actions to present herself as a skater. For example when discussing her new and very short haircut Elizabeth explained:

ELIZABETH: Well, my mom’s boyfriend told me that I am getting a haircut because I was like all depressed because my friends were not talking to me because I was like leaving (*moving and changing schools*) so I got a haircut and I like felt better about myself.

RESEARCHER: So it was a good idea?

ELIZABETH: Yes.

RESEARCHER: And with your hair short like that you fell more like yourself?

Like You?

ELIZABETH: Yea, kind of.

RESEARCHER: I mean better than when you were dressed in girlie, this feels more like...

ELIZABETH: Yes!

Here Elizabeth emphatically asserted that getting a very short haircut boosted her self esteem and helped her feel “better about myself,” in contrast to the girlie attire from the gender experiment her teacher noted as “the week Elizabeth came to school as a girl.”

And so in talking to Elizabeth it was possible to move around gender, to approximate identity through comparisons, to express on some level who she saw herself as and how she enjoyed living. Yet all discussions involved contradictions and negations across the gender binary. A conversation that could be summed up this way, “I am like a guy but I am not a guy. I am a girl but I am not like a girl.” Elizabeth was therefore left in a discursive void unable to articulate legible claims about her life and her experiences.

In considering the discursive experience of abjection Elizabeth should not be seen as the tragic and lost victim of a discourse (Rofes, 2004). While the language and signifiers of heteronormativity refuse this child the means to identify herself within an affirmative gender discourse, she is resilient in the face of this pervasive hostility. Elizabeth articulates a language of her own to claim an affirming identity. And while she cannot articulate herself within the limited binary provided by the Oakwood community she refuses to succumb to physical and psychological pressures and policing to become legible at the cost of her personal happiness or integrity.

The erasure and abjection of Elizabeth conclusion. The number of queer youth who disappear from the public education system each year, the number of queer youth who are chased out, beaten out, and quietly rubbed out is an alarming though frequently

misrepresented statistic within educational discourses. Rather than focusing on the schools themselves as in crisis, queer youth are often identified as individuals “at risk” or vulnerable to “high risk” behaviors (MacIntosh, 2007; Rofes, 2004). It is important to see in the story of a child like Elizabeth, that it is the schools profoundly limited gender and sexuality discourse and violent social practices surrounding this discourse which produce these horrifying statistics, not some pathology on the part of these youth (Bochenek & Brown, 2001; Kosciw et al., 2010).

In considering Elizabeth’s future at Oakwood and beyond, one must wonder, will the school continue to make her gender identity come at such a price that she at some future point will stop attending school altogether? Or will the education system begin to respond to this harassment and violence by teaching an expansive discourse of gender and sexuality? Will a time come when classmates turn to Jackson and Derrick and say, “You can’t say that, that’s sexist/homophobic!” Or even quite simply a time when her teachers might be capable of such a response?

We have seen over the past decades the slow erosion of explicit socio-cultural harassment related to racism and disability on the part of students as the result of direct teaching and professional intervention (Stein, 2002, 2003). Where it was once commonplace for educators themselves to segregate and discriminate against these social categories recent studies find that with the inclusion of these students and a culturally relevant curriculum with regard to this difference, teachers and students are slowly learning to respond to identity policing along these lines. Thus perhaps it is possible that in the future we will have schools, teachers, and students ready to silence gender policing rather than overlook it in silence.

The case of Elizabeth offers us the opportunity to reclaim and deeply consider the evidence of heteronormativity so rapidly erased from within the system. By denaturalizing the binary gender discourse available for composing a self, by highlighting the common sense assumptions of heteronormativity, and questioning constructions of childhood and adolescents it becomes possible to consider how to interrupt this abjection and erasure.

Considering how the theoretical protections offered in a democratic education system are not translated into everyday working knowledge for both teachers and students may offer insight into future practices which will expand teacher and student knowledge of the field of gender and sexuality. And reclaiming the undocumented and ultimately erased acts of bias and violence offers an empirical call to action, a rebuttal to the claim, “We don’t have that problem here.” Considering the abjection and erasure of Elizabeth is to narrate a troubling history of school failure to care for the life of a child, failure to teach, and failure to learn.

The case of Elizabeth here offers a leaping-off point for the considering the heteronormative gendering of students throughout Oakwood. The next chapter moves the focus from Elizabeth to the gendering stories of Angela, Sophia, Cheryl, Spencer, Kendrick, Bobby, Jerrod, Caleb, and Sandra among many others. In these stories we will see the similarities and differences to the gendering experiences of Elizabeth. In these stories we will see lives crushed into ill-fitting molds of gender possibility, children victimized by physical and mental violence as gender and sexuality are marked upon their bodies, and others who step into the violence as aggressors as they respond to and are interpolated into heteronormative gender at Oakwood.

CHAPTER III

THE MAKING OF GENDERED SUBJECTS

Introduction

This chapter will consider a series of vignettes which highlight Foucault's conception of power embedded in the production of gendered subjects within a normative discourse.²⁵ The eight vignettes presented here are each short scenes that focus on moments and incidents in which the production of gender and the violence of heteronormativity were enacted under the unwitting, ambivalent, and sometimes explicitly biased supervision of teachers, school counselors, and school administrators. Each vignette is followed by an initial analysis of the heteronormative gendering of students at Oakwood. Then there is a comprehensive analysis of the institutional participation in this disciplinary process of molding children into heterosexual subjectivities. The chapter closes with an overview of the discursive gender limitations of heteronormativity which present what Thorne (Thorne, 1993; 2004, p. 91) labeled the "static and exaggerated dualism" of gender present in schools. Here I will conclude with a consideration of the heteronormative dichotomy of *boy/girl* and the much more explicitly power labeled *normal/gay* dualisms. These harshly policed and limited subject constructs illustrate the highly constrained realm of gender possibilities that are omnipresent at Oakwood.

²⁵ As referenced in chapter one of this paper, the term power here is concerned with Foucault's definition and application of the term power. According to Foucault (1983) "power relations are rooted deep in the social nexus, not reconstituted 'above' society as a supplementary structure whose radical effacement one could perhaps dream of. In any case, to live in a society is to live in such a way that action upon other actions is possible—and in fact ongoing" (p. 208).

Within this chapter of vignettes normative discourses of race, religion, disability, and social class intersect with the violent subject making of sexuality and gender (Collins, 1999). As there is no monolithic gender or sexuality discourse which exists outside of this interlocking web of social dichotomies and oppressions the analysis will acknowledge and address these intersections of social subject space on a case by case basis with a central focus on the makings of normative and deviant gender and sexuality.

The vignettes are thematically organized in relation to making gender constructs in the following manner; vignettes one through three consider incidents of hailing, marking, claiming and regulating of what Connell (2005) coined hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity,²⁶ vignettes four through six illustrate the discursive marking of what Butler's (1990) calls the Other, and vignettes seven and eight map the school based practices related to heteronormative gender (re)production theorized by Epstein (1998) in the cases of two self identifying queer youth. Each vignette takes as its analytic entry point the marking and making of heteronormative gender possibilities and then examines the role of the educational institution and it's agents in this violent gendering process. This section then is an overall set of illustrations and analysis on the heteronormative schooling of gender and sexuality.

Vignette 1: Muffin Top considers heteronormative discourse productions of the female subject as a beauty object to be evaluated and scrutinized by a public. *Vignette 2:*

²⁶ R. W. Connell's work considers "Hegemonic masculinity" as constructed in relation to other subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women. In his work he explains that hegemonic masculinity contains "openings towards violence, towards misogyny and towards heterosexual attraction." "Emphasized femininity" according to Connell is organized as compliance within Patriarchal gender subordination by accommodating the interests and desires of men.

The Girl Scouts examines the (re)production of the “mean girl”²⁷ and a hailing into this subjectivity. *Vignette 3: The eighth grade boys* examines violent constructions of hegemonic masculinity. *Vignette 4: Kendrick keeps looking at me* considers the hegemonic masculinity as necessarily performative of homophobia. *Vignette 5: “Outing” Bobby* as a joke analyzes the production of a gay male identity to shore up masculinity. *Vignette 6: Gay love notes* explores the public production or marking of a peer with a gay identity as a heteronormative punishment. *Vignette 7: Chasing Caleb* highlights the experience of the self proclaimed Other and the use of the heteronormative Other as a site for masculine assertions of heterosexuality and masculine violence. And finally *Vignette 8: Sandra disappearing* takes into consideration the link between Othering and educational erasure as Sandra a self identified bi-sexual youth discusses skipping school and dropping out.

Here, then, are the eight narrative vignettes on making heteronormative gender with an analysis passage following each account.

Vignette 1: Muffin Top

Muffin Top—The Story

CHAD: She (Angela) is getting what she deserves. She tells everyone I like her when I don't like her.

MR. MARTIN: Does she say she likes you too?

CHAD: No. They all just laugh about it.

²⁷ The popular works of Mary Pipher, Rosalind Wiseman, and Rachel Simmons among others have problematically examined girlhood through an uncritical lens with regard to the social construction of both gender and of adolescence and thereby these works help to reify the “mean girl” subject node. In *Framing girls in girlhood studies: Gender/classifications in contemporary feminist representations*, Valerie Hey (2010) problematizes these under-theorized constructions of girlhood.

~ Chad explaining to the assistant principal why he and his friends publically mock Angela's body and weight by calling her names, passing notes about her, and writing things about her on the dry board during class

The first report. A female student named Rebecca explained to me during an interview that there was a student named Angela in her class who was the object of ongoing gendered weight insults through cryptic references to muffins and muffin tops.

RESEARCHER: Can you think of any example of like how a girl at Oakwood has been picked on about her body being unattractive or rumors about her sex life or things like that? That's kind of what I mean by sexual harassment.

REBECCA: Well the first thing that makes me think of is Angela. Angela's been kind of like bouncing from one group to another because people thought that she was copying people. Then all of a sudden she gets back into the popular group and that made her old friends mad and now people think that she is fat. Now people don't like how she dresses and stuff. I do not know why it is. Some of her old girlfriends are still friends with her but the guys are like teasing her.

RESEARCHER: So is it the guys now? What do they do?

REBECCA: Well, they t.p.ed (*toilet papered*) her house and put muffin tops on her lawn.

RESEARCHER: What do you mean muffin tops, like they ripped the tops off of muffins or something? What does that mean?

REBECCA: Yes they got muffins at the grocery and ripped the tops off. And that means like if you have some kind of fat hang over your jeans that is a muffin top so you know...

Rebecca waited some time for me to indicate that I understood the implications of these actions. I blankly made no response. Her face pulled tight in a frown and she spoke again in a firm loud voice.

REBECCA: Well, they are mean.

RESEARCHER: Yes, that is quite mean.

According to Rebecca, the Muffin Top nickname and body image harassment of Angela started among a group of girls who were angry with Angela for changing peer groups. Those girls began making signs and holding them up for Angela and everyone else to see during a block class. The girls would write “muffin” or “Angela hearts muffins” on a sheet of notebook paper and hold it up or pass it around the room. A young girl named Heather was at the center of the original conflict when Angela rejected Heather’s social clique for another group of girls.

Many of the students I casually talked with from this class had seen muffin top signs during class and assumed the teacher could see these signs as well. The signs were reported to me as everything from notebook pages to scraps of paper with drawings of muffins or signs that said “Angela (hearts) muffins” floating about the room daily and the according to students in the class the teacher, Mrs. Price, simply ignored them. The teacher confirmed that she recalled seeing some sort of silliness about muffins sometimes during class that she ignored.

Chad in action. Following Rebecca’s report and other student rumors and reports about what they thought might be “sexual harassment” in Mrs. Price’s classroom, I asked Mrs. Price if I could observe this group of students and class. I told her I was interested in seeing how students socialized during her class. Mrs. Price welcomed me to observe and

noted that in her opinion the class had “social problems.” She was quick however to categorize these problems as being connected to the students camaraderie. “I don’t mean they are negative, they are just really talkative and social and it is hard to get them to settle down because they are all such good friends.”

Mrs. Price opened up the classroom to me and I was able to observe Angela, Chad and their peers on many occasions throughout the school year. On my first observation following Rebecca’s informative interview I noted Chad’s arrival. Chad was a tall white boy with sandy blond hair and he entered the classroom along with a small number of similarly featured boys. Chad was wearing designer clothing and regularly texting something into his cell phone underneath his desktop. Two boys sitting on either side of him generally appear to be watching him more than the Mrs. Price, who was in front of the group instructing the class on the day’s assignment.

As the teacher took role Chad, the boy at the center of this triad, barked out “muffin” and the classroom erupted into laughter. The young white boys flanking Chad were particularly amused and laugh louder than their classmates. Mrs. Price momentarily paused, but did not look in Chad’s direction. She turned her attention again to the role and finished taking attendance for this class.

Using the dry erase board as a billboard to mock Angela. The following week, during this same class period the students were provided with an open period of time during which they could work or socialize alone or in groups for an unspecified portion of the class time. During my observations I noted that this free work time generally resulted in students scattering throughout the room and engaging in a variety of social

activities unrelated to the course. Mrs. Price frequently worked at her desk or on her computer during this work time.

On the day of this observation the students engaged in a variety of social and non-social activities during this free work time. There were four girls writing something on notebook paper and trading sheets of paper. There were a few girls and boys working or reading silently at isolated desks. Two boys quietly left the room unannounced. Four boys were standing by desks and moving around in the far corner of the room. There was a general buzz of active energy and the sound of many voices speaking in quieter tones throughout the classroom.

One of the many activities allowed during free work time was the use of the dry erase board for social play. Students would write personal notes on the dry erase boards, draw pictures, and sometimes play little games like tic-tac-toe or hangman. During this particular afternoon class period a new message appeared on the dry erase board.

“I (heart) muffins!” was written in red on the dry board with the forged signature of Angela under the statement. In asking students about the note on the board I was told that this board message appeared daily and would sometimes say “Angela (hearts) muffins.” And on some days there would simply be drawings of muffins on the board. According to a variety of students in the class, this practice had gone on for weeks.

In addition to this strange dry board joke which appeared to amuse many students in the classroom, a trio of male students including Chad began to periodically bark out in a coughing sound, “muffin.” This shout of muffin would result in ripples of laughter throughout the room. Also during the class period muffin was quickly shouted during

direct instruction and Mrs. Price appeared briefly to be startled. She looked up from the overhead projector for a moment and then looked back down to continue the lesson.

After the class ended, I approached Mrs. Price about the dry board note. She did not register any knowledge of the emerging pattern of muffin drawings and notes on the blackboard but said that she planned to ban use of the dryboard from that day forward.

Addressing the harassment complaint. Weeks later Angela filled out a harassment form and requested the vice principal intercede in this situation during her class. When the form was reviewed she was called into the office where she explained to Mr. Martin that three boys in Mrs. Price's class were calling her names, sitting by her or around her, poking her with notes if she refused to take them, and writing things about her on the dry board directly in front of her desk.

When asked if she had reported this behavior to her teacher Angela responded, "She can see everything that is happening. I sit right in front of the room and they are writing on the front board."

When Mr. Martin asked why she thought these boys were behaving this way she said, "They just got mad at me because some other people were mad at me and calling me names." She explained that earlier in the term she was in a fight with some of her female classmates and at that time these boys took up the side of the most popular girl in the clique, Heather. She went on to say this girl and she were no longer in a fight, but that the boys, primarily Chad, had intensified the tactics used by Heather and her friends during the fight. She said Chad seldom bothered her alone, but that he would get some boys to sit with him or be walking with a group of boys and then they would all ridicule her. She

said the other boys involved changed depending upon the location, but that Chad was always the central aggressor.

At the end of the discussion she named Chad and two other boys from Mrs. Price's class as regular offenders and this class period as the most problematic time of her day.

That afternoon during Angela's class in Mrs. Price's room Mr. Martin called the three primary male harassers to his office. They arrived as a group and each entered the office and took a seat around a conference table facing the assistant principal.

Three slightly larger than average, designer clothing dressed, white boys sat slouched in chairs looking from each other to the assistant principal. These three young men were classmates, teammates, and neighborhood friends. They noted with consensus that they suspected that this was about Angela and wanted to know why she wasn't here too so they could "get the truth out."

Chad, a muscular blond boy, took the lead upon arrival in the office and was particularly vocal in immediately expressing that Angela was getting precisely what she deserved. He confirmed nearly immediately that he shouted muffin at Angela regularly, that he drew pictures on the board, and that he had passed around notes about Angela.

When Mr. Martin asked him why he was behaving in this manner, his two friends jumped in and the three all began speaking at once; "She deserves it. She started it. You should be asking her not us." "She tells everyone I like her when I don't like her." "She should be the one in here for harassing people not us." "She's just getting what she deserves ask anyone."

As all three continued to speak at once Mr. Martin had to work to regain the interview. With the group silenced, the primary defender Chad explained the situation from his perspective:

“First it was Heather and them, they made up the name cuz they were mad at Angela. But now I guess their friends or whatever. But then she keeps telling people that I like her and stuff.”

Heather, a well known and very popular white female student in this class, was according to all three boys the original instigator of the Muffin notes. When pressed now to explain the meaning behind a muffin as a message Chad said, “it just means she’s fat.” And here again his peers jumped in stating she deserved much worse for what she had done to Chad.

“She told people he likes her and he doesn’t,” was the key charge of harassment, against Angela. Each boy expressed that this past claim on her part merited his ongoing ridicule of her, note passing, dry board pictures, and open verbal attacks in class.

CHAD: I don’t like her and it’s false.

MR. MARTIN: So you hate her and are going to treat her in a hurtful way?

CHAD: She is just getting what she deserves

MR. MARTIN: Now you have crossed the line. This is harassment of a low level.

CHAD: What about her? What about her lying about me?

MR. MARTIN: I will hold her accountable as well.

All three boys were sent back to class as a group and the assistant principal called their parents to report on this harassment. Each call was brief and explained the issues taking place using the words “harassment and bullying.” Parents were told that each boy

would be assigned community service one day after school that week. There was no referral form for the community service; the boys were simply assigned to a list to report to a teacher at the end of the school day.

The following morning the assistant principal arrived to urgent messages from Chad's parents. In returning the call the parent noted a researcher (me) was present during the interview. She complained that this researcher was biased against her son and that he was being unfairly framed as a ring leader. Mr. Martin spent approximately fifteen minutes on the phone with this parent discussing her concerns about her son being seen as the ringleader and her concerns that Angela was not being punished adequately. Mr. Martin assured her that Angela would be held accountable and that Chad was not viewed as a ringleader, just as a boy whose horseplay "got out of hand.'

A follow-up with Angela. Angela was interviewed again later in the day. She was asked about spreading rumors about Chad. Mr. Martin asked her if she had been telling people Chad had a crush on her. He asked her if she had been making fun of Chad as someone who was "out of her league." She denied ever having spread any rumors. No one at Oakwood but Chad claimed any knowledge of Angela spreading these rumors and Mr. Martin told her if she was doing that, it would be "the same sort of harassment he's been doing to you." Again Angela said she didn't talk to anyone about Chad liking her. She said that she hated him and wanted nothing to do with him.

Mr. Martin told her that the boys had been "put on notice" and that if there were any future problems or retaliation she should let the office know. There was no written record of the event aside from the student harassment form written by Angela and there was no later follow up from this investigation. Mr. Martin didn't discuss this situation

with Mrs. Price; however, he welcomed me to talk to her about the investigation and situation. When I reviewed these events with Mrs. Price she said she was glad Mr. Martin had taken care of it because she is too busy teaching to address “these little fights” among her students.

Muffin Top—Analysis

Making subordinate heteronormative femininity and marking bodies under the eyes of the teacher and the administration. Unpacking the gender marking events taking place in Mrs. Price’s room could explore any number of events and encounters even within this selected text. Heteronormative gender is marked and performed in this classroom in everything from the patriarchal objectification of Angela’s body, to the premise of masculine policing her supposed sexual attraction rumors about Chad, to the homosocial performances of misogynistic violence by Chad and his peers. Given the excessive range of possible considerations, this analysis will return to the central problem of this study: How is heteronormativity enacted, addressed, and narrated at Oakwood? And more importantly how do the institutional interactions naturalize this discursive violence?

The analysis of Angela’s harassment in Mrs. Price’s classroom will then focus on five prevalent patterns in considering this phenomena: first, the gendered marking of Elizabeth as a target for misogyny; second, the intersectional gender identity making impact of racial, able-bodied, and social class discourses; third, the discursive void within an implicit heteronormative school setting to identify and articulate the workings of power in violence and abuse; fourth, the professional lack of skill to interpret or address violence against subjects under one’s supervision; and finally, the systemic failure to

articulate a democratic gender standard or track, record, and transmit knowledge of this gendering process that would render it visible and finally the invisible intersections of this gendering with social class and racial silences.

The gendered marking of Angela as a target for misogyny. As Butler (1990) pointed out in *Gender Trouble*, normative identifications are always imperfectly achieved, just as prohibitions are always compromised and precarious. The case of Angela offers a lens into the production of emphasized femininity as well as the ongoing enactment of prohibitions and productions of subordinate femininities within the spectrum of girlhood and against hegemonic masculinity.

Angela is first marked as a target for prohibition by her female peers who target her as an imperfect object of heterosexual desire by suggesting her beauty is compromised by body fat. As one informant explained, “Heather and her friends would write *Angela (hearts) muffins* on a note and pass it around the room. Heather was mad at her for like hanging out with some other people and stuff. So she started calling her Muffin Top and then everyone started doing it.” Here the marking of both emphasized femininity and failed femininity are present in Heather’s suggested control of the discourse and casting out of Angela for having a failed body. Ironically the discourse itself is centered on objectifying and managing the bodies of females to meet a patriarchal beauty standard.

As this case developed however, the marking of Angela as a gendered target for misogyny was readily taken up by a variety of people within Mrs. Price’s classroom. Chad in particular performed a form of hegemonic masculinity when he began publically attacking Angela and marking her as both the subhuman gender subject as well as a failed

heteronormative female. Chad and his peers saw posting signs about Angela's body fat, shouting out a derisive nickname, and harassing her at her desk as justifiable and minimal responses to what they suggested were her gender misdeeds. As each boy stated in one form or another, "she's just getting what she deserves ask anyone."

This collective of performatively heterosexual males accused Angela of sexually humiliating Chad by presenting him as an unwanted suitor. This suggested grievance against his manhood according to the boys involved, and later corroborated by each boys parents justified group policing of Angela's body and of her personal expressions within Mrs. Price's room and throughout the school. As one boy's mother said to the school administrator, "I want to know exactly what you are doing to her for spreading rumors that Chad liked her."

This case then illustrates multiple encounters in the (re)production of a dichotomous heterosexual gender with explicit interpersonal and discursive violence directed at the subordinate figure of this pairing. Angela's gendered and sexualized body is first the gendered target of emphasized femininity and then the target of heteronormative masculinity as other boys and girls publically manipulate her identity to amass social power within Mrs. Price's classroom.

Given the spatial context of these events and the focus of this study the question that follows is how the marking of Angela was allowed to go on for at least a month in the presence of a teacher, peers, and finally school administrators and parents? To address this question my analysis will now shift to consider the institutional role in the marking of Angela as a subordinate femininity.

The intersectional gender identity making impact of racial, social class and ablest discourses. The story of Angela, Heather, Chad and even Mrs. Price illustrates additional normative discourses in operation at Oakwood which remain largely invisible which are given only cursory treatment by the faculty; white privilege, social class elitism, and ablest interpretations of intelligence and moral capacity. These discourses remain largely invisible and unnamed among the faculty at Oakwood because of a series of structural mechanisms which sort students by these identity categories. The academic sorting at Oakwood serves to homogenize the student's within Chad and Angela's cohort so that this class of students generally mirrors the central subjectivity of each of these discourses.

In fact the entire cohort of students under Mrs. Price's supervision has been educationally filtered into what is perceived and presented as advanced coursework in a magnet program called the "Elite Academy." The parental choice involved in committing a child to this program, the teacher referral process for being admitted into the program, and the student performance standards used to remove lesser subjects all effectively have presorted Mrs. Price's students to be more affluent, disproportionately white, and disproportionately exceptionally able thru school testing as gifted or intelligent.²⁸

The faculty at Oakwood frequently made racialized, classed, and ablist, generalizations which referred to the Elite Academy, nicknamed "EA" students' intelligence, trustworthiness, personal drive, moral capacity, and inherent leadership qualities. For example when considering who should manage the ticket money at a fair Ms. Fleming suggested "Just get one of the EA kids to do it. That way we don't have to

²⁸ These characteristics are generalized and measured by student records self identifying race/ethnicity, free and reduced lunch status, student ability test records and student special education accommodations files.

worry about any of it walking away and no one will have to help them with the calculations.” The school’s administrators would sometimes contradict these representations of EA students noting the persistent infighting and “drama” of this cohort, but these observations were generally not taken up by additional staff members.

I cannot offer conclusive evidence of where one normative discourse or another dominated the subject making interactions and events taking place both in Mrs. Price’s classroom and later in Mr. Martin’s office and on the telephone with parents. And I am not suggesting that heteronormativity preceded the power of white privilege or any of the other discourses in constructing Chad’s performance of hegemonic masculinity as “low level harassment” or even justifiable self defense where a Latino, lower income, or intellectually inferior male may have been marked as a deviant for attacking and harassing a girl. Analysis of intersectional dominance and oppression is less concerned with determining which car may have arrived first in this intersection and instead attempts to capture some understanding and produce some knowledge about the resultant wreckage.

Therefore, I will simply begin mapping intersectional identities with this first vignette in relation to the gendering of Heteronormativity. In this case all of the children involved bore the marks of occupying the central subject space of whiteness, middle class, and highly able. The single discourse dividing Angela and Chad and potentially elevating Chad’s behaviors, perceptions, and capacities was that of heteronormative gender. Later vignettes in this chapter will consider events in which racial minority status, poverty, and disability mark students gendering experiences quite differently. At the close of the chapter I will draw some connections across the vignettes in considering

how gender and in particular the role of the school in gender making varies across these other important differences.

Within this case however, I wish to address the invisibility of central subject spaces within the identity discourses available at Oakwood. Faculty and staff did not possess a meaningful way to speak critically about a student's whiteness, middle class, or able body and intellect.

The discursive void within a heteronormative school setting to identify and articulate the workings of power in violence and abuse. Angela's story was initially unearthed through a series of interviews with students in response to a general question about witnessing sexual and gendered harassment at Oakwood. This story, like other stories that were offered in response to this question did not immediately come to mind when students were asked about sexual or gendered harassment at Oakwood. Instead when asked about school based harassment students either identified specifically homophobic discourses or were unable to identify any events related to gender and sexuality at all. Given that this flies in the face of research (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; Lipson, 2001) and practical knowledge of middle school sexual and gendered relations, I as a researcher pursued this line of query with simplistic examples²⁹ which ultimately produced for students a conception of sexual and gendered harassment at school.

The initial inability of students to identify or articulate the discursive violence of the events surrounding the Muffin Top marking of Angela, and the later refusal of

²⁹ The semi-structured interview format can be found in the appendices of this project. To establish a definition of sexual and gendered harassment during the interview process I offered brief accounts of language and incidents I witnessed during my observations at Oakwood. For example, I suggested the events surrounding a student who was the target of frequently used gendered terms like *sissy*, *bitch*, etc. might help us (Researcher and interviewee) to understand and illustrate sexual or gendered harassment at Oakwood.

students, staff, and families to interpret this marking as violent or problematic is illustrative of the knowledge vacuum within a heteronormative matrix related to abuse and violence. In other words the normative gender and sexuality domination and subordination of Others is so pervasive that in the absence of an educational intent to highlight and deconstruct this interpersonal and social violence students have no means to articulate injustice, persecution, and suffering. As Angela explained when asked why she had not brought this up earlier, “What was I supposed to say? They’re making fun of me all the time, everyone can see it, and everybody knows about it. The teacher is right there watching it all, so who was I gonna tell anyway.”

The knowledge production power of the unexamined heteronormativity at Oakwood then prevented both students and faculty from operating with any sort of working construct for sexual harassment or gendered harassment, even as actions that might be categorized beneath terms were identified within the student code of conduct as student violations. Thus, Chad felt comfortable asserting that his laundry list of self acknowledged actions were all appropriate, Rebecca and Angela could neither identify nor articulate these events, Mrs. Price could claim not to see anything but camaraderie in the playfulness in her classroom, and Mr. Martin could merely call these events, “harassment of a low level.”

In contrast if the discourse in question here were one of racial harassment and Angela were being marked and repeatedly and openly attacked using racial epithets rather than being marked as a gendered Muffin Top both students and faculty exhibited knowledge of responses and claims to make against aggressors. The Oakwood community spent considerable professional and student centered time on establishing a

shared knowledge and social value surrounding the individual rights of students with regard to discourses of race and ethnicity. And while I by no means wish to paint a picture of Oakwood as free of racist domination I would assert that both staff and students possessed noteworthy knowledge and language about racism which allowed them to interrupt, address, and report racial incidents that were far superior to any members of the communities' knowledge of gender and sexuality subordination and brutality.

The professional lack of skill to interpret or address violence against subjects under one's supervision. I would suggest that an uncritical application of common sense might drive the reader here to pathologize Mrs. Price and point to her as the individual who set into motion the heteronormative marking of Angela which took place in Price's classroom. This same American cultural desire for individual accountability might lead one to see Mr. Martin's lack of a professional response to this harassment as central to the (re)production of this phenomenon. However, this research seeks to track the heteronormative discursive matrix rather than to suggest that this or that individual is capable of defining or personally producing particular gender norms at Oakwood.

At the same time, it is important to hold both Mrs. Price and Mr. Martin accountable for their lack of professional knowledge of the dynamics of gender and sexuality within the school context. This accountability for operating as uninformed educators is made plain by the readily available educational research and statistics on gender bias in educational experiences and outcomes. The patriarchal inequality and presence of heteronormative violence prevalent within the school context has been tracked and narrated for decades (Lipson, 2001). Yet Mrs. Price repeatedly suggested that

she could not see the gendered harassment of Angela even as it was pointed to in writing on chalkboard in the front of her classroom. And Mr. Martin treated both Angela and her three aggressors as equal participants in the denigrating of her as the ugly girl known as “Muffin Top.”

Mr. Martin did suggest that the behavior going on in this classroom might be what he deemed “low level” harassment. Yet he was an active participant in seeking some justifiable reasons for the boys involved to singularly harass, intimidate, and seek to silence Angela through bodily insults and shaming. As he explained to both the boys and their parents, “I am just trying to understand why the boys did this, and if Angela is to blame for what went on in the classroom, she will be held accountable too.”

Mrs. Price’s silent witnessing of the discursive violence directed at Angela was read by many within the classroom as endorsement of this malicious gendering of Angela as a lower status female. Angela herself noted Price’s silence as condoning the social practices of Heteronormativity even as Price herself noted that she could not see what was happening and thus could not interpret the events taking place within her classroom. Price found herself unaware and unknowledgeable about the very same events many of the students in her class interpreted as regular daily attacks on Angela’s female body and desirability.

Mr. Martin as an administrator possessed access to school wide observations and thus had some awareness of social norming patterns less available to a classroom teacher. Yet he too adopted a patriarchal heteronormative stance in considering the experiences of Angela in contrast to the accounts of Chad and his peers. When Angela brought forward a narrative of heteronormative harassment corroborated by both her aggressors and a

variety of witnesses, Martin allowed the male aggressors to speak as a unified group representing a collective injustice to Chad's manhood. This group was minimally penalized with no record of the infraction in writing and the trio was told at the closure of their single interview that Mr. Martin would hold Angela accountable for her role in causing this situation.

Thus neither professional involved possessed an adequate working knowledge of the gender inequality present in schooling or in society which could have resulted in his or her enforcing the policy which supposedly protected students from sexual or gendered harassment. Subsequently when both the teacher and the administrator were called upon to supervise and address heteronormative violence toward Angela they were either unable to identify the situation or inarticulate in naming and defining institutional boundaries for the students in question. This professional silence and incompetence was repeatedly read by subordinate students as endorsing heteronormative discourses in the classroom and beyond.

The systemic failure to articulate a democratic gender standard or track, record, and transmit knowledge of this gendering process that would render it visible. Finally I would suggest that there is a naturalizing of these gender marking events thru the structural invisibility of everything that happened in Mrs. Prices room during the spring of 2010. At the close of this investigation there was no record to show that Chad or any other student in Mrs. Price's classroom had transgressed any institutional boundaries for public behavior.

While administrative records of events could documented the presence of gender dominance and offered faculty learning to counter the patriarchal devaluing of the female

body related to everything from sexual assault to eating disorders instead there was a silence which preserved institutional ignorance of the highly visible gender domination and subhuman marking of the feminine present in Mrs. Price's classroom.

Vignette 2: The Mean Girls

The Mean Girls—The Story

The most visible clique at Oakwood School. As students entered the Oakwood cafeteria seated at the first table of students they encounter each day were a well known group of eighth grade girls. These girls were school leaders, nominated mentors, teacher's aides, office assistants, and the daughters of regular parent volunteers. Nearly any of the one-hundred and fifty students in the cafeteria could have told me the names of each of these girls, details about who they were friends with and who they were dating, and which table belonged to them in the cafeteria. Of the 34 interviews I conducted during my research every interviewee offered detailed accounts about the relationships, behaviors, and conflicts of this select group of female students. The majority of students and faculty referred to this group of young women as "The Mean Girls." This clique privately referred to themselves jokingly as both "GS" and "the Girl Scouts."

Four of the five Mean Girls present at the table were white, the fifth Asian American. All five girls dressed in skin tight Hollister brand clothing, jeans rolled up around ankles, colorful flip flop shoes, and skin tight shirts. This dress style, including bare feet and flip flops was consistent throughout the winter months of the school year. When spring arrived, in mid-March the dress turned to miniskirts and "disappearing" shorts, these were shorts and skirts known by this term among students because they

would *disappear* when the person wearing them went from a standing to a sitting position.

All five girls' sported long straight hair casually pulled back from their faces, and all five wore distinctive cosmetics in contrast to the majority of girls at Oakwood who wore little or no make-up. The girl scouts moved through the cafeteria in a cluster. All five stood in each line any one of them approached for a purchase. Once they had the items they desired for lunch the five of them walked to their empty table to take a seat.

Lunch for this group of girls was typically bottled water and a bag of chips. Often there was one bag of chips between the five of them. At tables throughout the room you could see trays, lunch bags and boxes, and a variety of meals in front of nearly every child. At the Girl Scout table, the girls sat sideways straddling the benches to talk. None of the girls faced the table as if seated to eat, and there were no trays or lunch bags on the table in front of them. Instead there were simply five bottles of water and sometimes a potato chip bag.

Membership in the Girl Scouts was somewhat fluid and the group generally held at about six core members; there were a total of ten eighth grade girls who moved in and out of this clique over time. Among the ten, Isabella, Emma, Olivia, Sophia, and Emily regularly sat at their chosen lunch table that no one outside of the elite ten approached or occupied. The cafeteria tables were quite large and most of them throughout the room occupied about 24 students leaving this table appearing sparsely occupied in contrasts to the crowds around the room.

As their chosen table was at the entrance to the cafeteria, the Girl Scouts were regularly seated directly in front of the space generally occupied by the cafeteria

monitors. This table was less than ten feet away from the spot faculty would stand in to observe the room. On a series of occasions I asked each different lunch monitor (the principal, assistant principal, school counselor, and hall monitor) if they noticed anything interesting about the lunchroom seating habits of this highly visible group of girls, to which they each responded no. I then would ask if they noticed anything about the girls eating habits and again be told that each staff member had noticed nothing unusual about their eating habits.

A “cyber-bullying” incident among the mean girls. As a researcher I first became aware of the Mean Girls as individuals and as a collective early in the school year due to a MySpace “cyber bullying” incident. During the fall one afternoon the principal was informed that there was a potential fight brewing among a group of eighth grade boys. Arguments escalated during lunch and some of the boys were brought into the office to be questioned about the situation.

The boys involved in this skirmish were some of the top athletes in the school, boys who had historically been part of the schools magnet academic program, boys who were highly visible within the school as socially powerful. These boys were often referred to by their classmates as the jocks, the popular guys, and most often as “The eighth grade boys.”

This final name stands out as there would frequently be references to “The eighth grade boys” saying, wanting, needing, or doing something. As in, “The eighth grade boys need a talking to about how they behave in the gymnasium.” However, when specific student examples were offered of which individuals needed the talking to it would become clear that the reference was in fact to this smaller cohort of boys. For example

students regularly said, “I won’t go in that hallway before school because The Eighth Grade Boys all hang out there.” Teachers would refer to The Eighth Grade Boys needing a talking to about their behavior in front of the building. The administration would say we have a really big problem with The Eighth Grade Boys. In each of these instances the speaker was in fact referring to this subset of the eighth grade male population.

On the day of this skirmish, two boys were brought into the office and seated in different rooms where each told some version of the following story. A very popular eighth grade girl named Olivia had initiated a “slam page”³⁰ on the internet social network MySpace that was directed at a classmate named Sophia. Sophia was another very well known eighth grade girl. These two girls were known to be friends and members of the same social group.

Once in separate rooms each boy asserted that he had felt forced to stop the other from saying things about one or the other girl. Jacob seated with Mr. Martin explained, “He’s can’t get away with calling her a bitch, she’s the one who started all this in the first place.” While through the cinderblock wall in Mr. Clark’s office Ethan was explaining, “If you knew what they were saying about her, it’s just awful. A total bunch of lies and now everyone’s saying it.”

As each boy’s story unfolded, more and more girls’ names were brought forward and it became clear that while these boys were preparing to physically fight at school to defend either Olivia or Sophia’s reputation, a vast network of eighth grade girls as well as more members of The Eighth Grade Boys clique were already deeply engaged in a war of

³⁰ Within the school’s student culture a slam page was an online version of a slam book. Slam books are a phenomena in schools in which students keep a little handmade book of names and information about fellow students they dislike. These books are passed around at school and peers can add insults and information slamming the person named in the slam book.

words over the internet. Within the hour the principal was shown the slam page which he screen captured and printed.

The page itself consisted of an initial statement about Sophia, followed by a series of comments placed beneath this initial posting. The initial posting by Olivia said “Hi, I’m Sophia Kelly and I love Jesus. I think Spanish is the best class ever and I love love love Ms. Schnider. I did sooooo bad on the algebra test, I only got 96%. Oh well, I’m gonna go hang out with my mom. Bye ☺ P.S. I (heart) being a Christian.”

Initially only female classmates within Sophia and Olivia’s clique as well as soccer team friends who attended another local school made comments under the posting with the commenter’s name listed before each comment. Later in the comment thread boys from the Eighth Grade Boys clique joined in on the commenting.

The comment thread began with short responses like “lol” and “so true.” As time passed and the comment thread grew however; these remarks took a stronger turn with comments like “Isn’t she such a bitch” and “what a prude.” The most recent comments focused on the theme of “Who would want to do her anyway.” There was then speculation about who would “do her” as well as regular references to her virginity, “I’d pop that!” etc.

The investigation unfolds. Over the course of the next several days student after student was brought into the office to unpack this internet attack. There was initial resistance on the part of both students and parents to accept the schools role in discussing these online postings. Olivia’s mother was insistent that this internet activity all happened off campus and during non-school hours, therefore the school had no legal right to investigate. Mr. Clark however repeatedly pointed to how the posting had caused a

distraction in school by spurring hostile conflicts within the school space, as well as resulting in a threat of violence in the cafeteria.

A group of ten girls were interviewed during the resulting investigation. Each of the ten girls entered the principal's office in the exact same outfit; skin tight jeans that were ankle length and slightly rolled at the ankles, a pair of brightly colored plastic flip flops, a tight Hollister brand shirt that matched the color of each girls flip flops, long straight hair hanging down about four inches past the shoulder, and highly coordinated eye and facial make-up. Seven of the ten girls were blond and nine of the ten were Caucasian, the tenth being bi-racial Caucasian and Asian.

When I as the researcher pointed out the similarities in style among these girls three different members of the administrative team responded as if this was an obvious and unremarkable reality. "Yes but I guess they all do that," was one response suggesting that either all of the students or at least all of the girls in the eighth grade dressed and presented themselves identically to their friends. This was however an inaccurate statement with relation to the eighth grade class, as among many of the peer groups there were many variations among clothing styles and much less continuity about hair and make-up within a recognized sets of friends.

Interviews broke into two camps during this investigation and it quickly became clear that within this group of students, Sophia, Olivia, and the remainder of the girls and boys involved had an eight year history of operating as a social sub-network or clique within the class. This sub-grouping appears to have historically been structured or supported by magnet academic tracking, neighborhood housing, and community sports teams. The school's role in tracking these students into an elite academic program offered

them daily ongoing contact over the course of their entire educational history.

Interestingly noted by many staff members a tension around the academic tracking of these students began to arise for each cohort of students by around the seventh grade. During this year a contingent of students, primarily boys but also including females would begin to resist the academic work of the magnet program and begin to request leaving the program to move to the “regular classes.” Frequently boys would leave the program by the eighth grade year, while girls would “stick it out” even if they wanted to quit.

I share this information as the interviews quickly revealed an initial point of contention made against Sophia by all of the students involved in posting negative comments about her was related to her continued public desire to do well in class. “It’s just a joke. I mean everyone knows Sophia always gets straight A’s. We were just being random and joking that she would be sad about an A.” Later in the conversation interviewees would note that Sophia wouldn’t go out with any of the boys and that she was always talking about activities with her mother. The religious undertones of this series of issues came up again as a “random joke.”

As each student was interviewed, both boys and girls, the repeatedly referred to this clique of female students as a singular voice rather than addressing people by individual names. For example, during one interview Emily was asked about her own comments on the MySpace page and she said, “We’re just like that, you know random. We don’t mean anything, we just get random and it’s funny. You know, just jokes and stuff, we’re just like that.” During all of the girls interviews the word “random” was ever present while the personal pronoun “I” was nearly absent from the conversation. Only

two individuals were revealed to have any sort of distinct personalities according to the vast majority of the students involved, these were Olivia and Sophia.

Olivia was described repeatedly by boys as “sort of a bitch” and by girls as “sort of the leader of our group.” When interviewed Isabella described herself as the “spokesperson” for the girls group. She was also distinctly different in that she referred directly to her own actions and used the word “I” as often as she used the word “we” to identify events and actions.

Sophia also spoke of her personal role in events and actions. In her experience she reported that she had been aware that Olivia in particular was bothered by many things about her, but that she had been ignoring her rude comments for some time now. What she found upsetting about this situation was that everyone she “thought were my best friends” jumped on her and even got all the guys involved.

Administrative and parental responses to the incident. The investigation ended with the decision to penalize all of the students who were involved in the negative commenting by giving them a suspension and removing them from leadership roles in the school. Parents of all of the students involved were hostile to this decision and continued to fight the administration on the schools legal jurisdiction over internet incidents.

As a negotiated response, the administration team went on to brainstorm with some of these well connected parents about how the school could work with these girls on establishing healthy relationships. A collective decision was made that the administration would work directly with this group of girls during private sessions, and that the details of this plan would not be made know to other students so as to not further

stigmatize these girls as “The Mean Girls” their longstanding nickname among the eighth grade faculty and fellow students.

Girl Scout meetings. The administration team then met with professional consultants who work around “girl’s issues” to develop a curriculum for working with this group of girls on building better relationships. Starting a week later an administrative team met with the core students involved with this incident, a subset of 7 girls, and began a series of activities designed to reflect upon personal actions and relationships.

The girls then were offered a weekly luncheon with the administration to dine and work on their interactions. They were immediately informed of the confidentiality and secrecy of this group and nearly immediately self selected to call the group the “Girl Scouts.” As an observer I became aware of this secret dubbing of the girls group as the “Girl Scouts” the second week of the meetings. Olivia explained to me, “You know, were not supposed to tell anyone about these meetings or who’s in them or anything that happens or anything. So we just say Girl Scouts or GS that way we can keep our confidentiality contract.”

The schools administration dedicated a great deal of time to this project researching curriculum, meeting with consultants, and scheduling meetings with both parents and finally students. Mr. Clark, Mr. Martin, Ms. Bailey, and Ms. Bell all saw this as an important investment in these girls’ behaviors as they were seen by the administration and faculty as leaders and highly visible to younger students. As Ms. Bell explained during one planning meeting, “Little sixth graders are watching these girls and want to be just like them. And they need to know that and take that responsibility seriously.”

After a month of Girl Scout meetings the girls harass Noah, a student. Back in the cafeteria about one month after the disciplinary hearings over the MySpace incident I again observed a faction of the Girl Scouts seated at their standard table near the exit of the cafeteria. The weekly “Girl Scouts” girls’ group meetings had been ongoing for three weeks at this point. On this given day, there was not a meeting so the girls seated themselves at their regular lunch table until open period at which time they moved to the hallway.

On the occasion of this observation, this group of girls took their conversation down the hallway and as they were walking they discovered an eighth grade boy, Noah, sitting by himself on a bench reading a book. Noah did not look up from his reading as they approached and did not look up again as Isabella and Emma seated themselves on either side of him as he continued to read. His body did appear to become more rigid and his hands and book moved slightly closer to his face.

Mr. Martin was monitoring the corridor at the time and Olivia gave a friendly hello to him as the girls continued to talk and surround the boy seated on the bench. A few moments later there was a good amount of laughter coming from the girls at the bench and now Emily and Olivia were on their knees with their hands up making strange yipping noises. Noah still was not looking up from his book and was not visibly responding to the girls’ actions. Mr. Martin did look over at the five girls and boy for a moment and the girls all smiled and waved at him. He nodded and continued to converse with another student who had approached him about something.

Soon all five girls were laughing loudly while two remained seated on each side of Noah with three in front of him kneeling by and perhaps touching his knees. All the

while Noah kept his hands in his lap clutching the book he had been reading. His eyes were affixed on his hands in his lap and his chin was nested against his chest. At no point did he look up at any of the girls, nor did he speak to any of them. His body appeared rigid against the touch of the girls seated beside him on the bench. Noah appeared frozen as a statue against this onslaught of attention. The interaction went on for just under ten minutes at which point the bell rang and the girls attention turned to departing for their next class. All the while Mr. Martin had been within thirty feet of the bench where these students were involved in this activity.

As the group broke up I asked Mr. Martin what he thought these girls were talking about with Noah. He responded that he didn't know but that Noah was "pretty autistic." As he identified Noah to me he decided he would ask one of the girls what their conversation with him had been all about. He called back Olivia who came back up the hallway with Emma.

Mr. Martin then asked Olivia what they had been talking to Noah about and she began to laugh again. "Oh we were just being dogs. It's a game we play with him." Here Emma joined in and said, "Yea, it's just a random joke. He's like our master and we're all his dogs." Olivia chimed in again, "You know I'm just so random." She laughed as Emma reiterated the words "yea just random" to the monitor.

Emma took the point a little further "Noah thinks it's funny you know. You know, we're his bitches." She smiled and had the gleam in her eye of a younger child who has just said, "I didn't swear! I was talking about a beaver dam." Both girls giggled more and waited for more questions.

Mr. Martin looked slightly confused about what else he wanted to ask the girls since I was the one who had asked him what was going on. He stood awkwardly for a moment in silence as the girls smiled at him. Then, momentarily he thanked the girls from coming back to answer his questions and he sent them off to class. Both girls giggled incessantly as they walked away from the interview. As they departed I asked the supervisor to tell me more about Noah and I was told that he has Asperger's Syndrome and that he did not normally socialize during lunch so it was nice to see him interacting with the girls.

The Mean Girls—Analysis

Making *emphasized femininity* through the production of subordinate heteronormative genders and marking bodies under the eyes of the administration. In *Gender and Power* R. W. Connell (1987) considered the array of gender performance possibilities within the constrained field of binary gender discourse and suggested that there are dominant, submerged and marginalized subject nodes or what he called multiple masculinities and femininities at play in the making of gender. And within this field of play dominant femininity simply cannot be hegemonic as it is constructed within the binary as successfully subservient to masculinity. The construct of emphasized femininity explored in the following analysis then is one which accommodates the interests and desires of males and as Connell explains, “central to the maintenance of emphasized femininity is a practice that prevents other models of femininity gaining cultural articulation” (p. 188).

A closer look at the performances of *The Mean Girls* then offers a view of the (re)production of emphasized femininity at Oakwood. Within the constrained field of

recognizable gender possibility at Oakwood, the Mean Girls relatively unified performances of girlhood were notorious among both the student body and the faculty. Copy room conversations might highlight which girl was on the outs within this clique or which girl was matched up with which boy among The Eight Grade Boys, a male social group perceived as the other half of this community. Students in all three grades could name the members of this social group and offer details about what these girls wore, who was “going with” whom, and what sort of “drama” they had heard about the members of this group. As Thorne (1993) noted in *Gender Play* the centrality of this particular homosocial peer group illustrates the uneven power distribution of social status in the construction of recognizable gender possibilities at Oakwood. In other words, The Mean Girls performances were often the gender performances referenced when faculty and students engaged in conversations about femininity and feminine behavior. The likeness of this small community was highlighted as descriptive of femininity rather seeing femininity within the variation of performances among the diverse girls at Oakwood (Thorne, p. 104).

In returning to the themes of this project, the analysis of The Mean Girls and of the professional response to the cyber bullying of Sophia will again focus on five prevalent patterns in making and marking gender at Oakwood: first, the gendered performances of this group of students; second, the intersectional gender identity making impact of racial, able-bodied, and social class discourses; third, the discursive void within an implicit heteronormative school setting to identify and articulate the workings of power in violence and abuse; fourth, the professional lack of expertise in addressing

heteronormative incidents; and finally, the agility of a dichotomous discourse to absorb and reconfigure institutional power to reproduce dominance and subjugation.

The gendered performances of The Mean Girls. Louis Althusser (1989) developed the analytic terms *hailing* and *interpolation* to consider how mass media and societal discourses ideologically call out to individuals to reproduce and represent particular ideas and identities. This section will consider how Olivia, Sophia and their friends took up and resisted particular gender constructs to imprecisely perform and become known as The Mean Girls.³¹ It is important to reiterate here the impossibility of precisely enacting a gendered subject construct, there is no individual one can point to as the hegemonic male or the emphasized feminine female as the boundaries of these subject nodes are fluid and at play at all times. This partiality is significant as it allows for human agency in this identity making project through accommodation, resistance, and reinterpretation (Thorne, 2004).

I point to hailing and interpolation in the social construction of the individual members of The Mean Girls as these girls were actually presented by the Oakwood administration with the film “The Mean Girls” as an educational teaching tactic in the days following the investigation into the cyber bullying of Sophia. And while the girls suggested that they had not seen or heard of the film prior to this screening, they were quickly able to map the characters from the film onto the mean girl pairings and cliques present in every Anne Hathaway teen centered film of the last decade.³² In the final

³¹ A 2004 Hollywood film entitled *The Mean Girls* fictionalized stories from *Queen Bees and Wanna Bees* Rosalind Wiseman’s bestselling book on how female social cliques operate. Wiseman’s writing considers the social performances of so called “Queen Bees” a gendered identity trope which can be traced back through the cannon of patriarchal literature. The current ubiquitous nature of this female identity construct can be seen in the coining of the term “frenemies” to define the friend/enemy relationships among mean girls.

subsection of this analysis I will consider in greater detail the use of this film by the staff to, “teach these girls about female relationships.” Here I simply note a hailing into this ideology and an interpolation both by and upon the girls within this clique.

Consolidating the feminine power available within a heteronormative discourse involves perfecting one’s heterosexual desirability to males and accommodating practices for propping up masculine social performances. Olivia and the collective shared group practices of wearing distinct clothing included skin tight pants and shirts, greater skin exposure through short shorts and low cut shirts, highly visible and stylized make-up application uncommon among the remainder of the female students at Oakwood, and long straight blond hair. The one exception to the long blond hair was Emma the sole person of color within this student community who had black hair worn in the exact same hair style. These styles of bodily adornment were read by peers and faculty as everything from “sexy” to “mature.” And to clarify the heterosexuality of this physical adornment one staff member expressed in reference to Emma’s outfit one day, “She just loves giving boys a stiffy (*erection*).” When I registered surprise at this comment and suggested that Emma may not be thinking about that potential effect one of the female teachers replied, “Oh no, she knows exactly what she’s doing. Watch how she moves, watch who she’s paying attention to. She knows – that’s the point of that skirt.” Therefore both the clothing and the actions of Emma were being read and discussed by the faculty as heterosexual performances to evoke and perhaps manipulate male desire.

I mention this incident related to Emma as indicative of the gendering of this group as an interesting feature of this gender identity was the lack of individuality

³² From *The Princess Diaries* and *Ella Enchanted* to *Bride Wars* Anne Hathaway’s acting career has portrayed her as the guileless victim of a stable supply of mean girls’ portrayals over the past decade.

expressed both about the girls as well as by the girls. Students and staff regularly referred to the group and would only offer individual names at very specific moments like the one above when Emma arrive in the office alone to resolve a dress code violation. The vast majority of the time The Mean Girls moved in pairs at a minimum and spoke using plural pronouns. Of the group members the most typical response to a question about her individual behavior can be seen in Emily, “We’re just like that.” This identification with a collective spilled into everything from clothing choice to sense of humor. Weather it was Emma stood alone and saying, “We just think that’s funny, we’re just random like that” or Olivia cryptically informing Mrs. Fleming that “We need to go to the bathroom together for girl reasons” the individuals involved were deeply invested in a group identity. This collective “we” identity of gender allowed for greater policing of performances which then strengthened the overall construct of the group. *We’re just like that*, and *we’re not like that* are powerful statements in the process of authoring a highly specific gender identity.

Casting Sophia into doubt for breaking from the collective to assert different values and perform differently at Oakwood highlights two final points about the making of Mean Girls. First this “drama” of casting members out illustrates what Connell (1987) pointed to as the ongoing maintenance of emphasized femininity and the drive to prevent other feminine performances from gathering credibility. And second this blackballing game offers a map of the preferred characteristics and performances of emphasized femininity at Oakwood, and second

The cyber bullying event was only one of many public dramas among The Mean Girls as “drama” was a central feature to this group’s social play. Nearly any random

eighth grade student could recount details of at least one public drama or fight performed by the mean girls. As one informant explained, “I used to sort of be a part of that group when we were younger, but then I just had to get different friends. I mean they’re all about drama. To be in their group you have to tell your worst secrets and then later those get used against you. It’s all drama all the time with those girls and everybody knows it.” When I asked what the drama was generally about she said, “Oh you know guys, family secrets, stuff you did you’re really embarrassed about like that.”

The drama of casting out Sophia allowed the community to mark the boundaries of their collective feminine identity by highlighting and critiquing Sophia as too smart, too compliant with adults, too sexually reserved, and too moral or ethical. According first to Olivia and later to a collection of nearly twenty different people posted comments, both male and female, Sophia was simply too inaccessible to the masculine gaze and too competent to necessitate masculine knowledge and power. Her performance was put into check with misogynistic insults directed at her body appearance and veiled and open insults and threats related to her sexuality. Posted comments about her as fat and her as unattractive were interspersed with comments about who was interested in “popping that” or ending her virginity. These second themed comments from boys represented the normalized rape threats of masculine capital building (Quinn, 2002) as they were all about sexually doing something to Sophia rather than with Sophia³³ (Pascoe, 2007). Therefore the subtext of this “drama” could be read as a laundry list of unacceptable feminine characteristics and the penalties for transgressing emphasized femininity.

³³ In *Dude You’re a Fag* author C. J. Pascoe (2007) explores the “getting girls” discourse of compulsive heterosexuality at River High. At Oakwood this same discourse of getting girls was prevalent and will be discussed and analyzed in greater detail in the following vignette of *The Eighth Grade Boys*.

The intersectional gender identity making impact of racial, able-bodied, and social class discourses. This vignette is similar to the first in that the students involved are associated with whiteness, wealth, and exceptionally able bodies. Here as in the Muffin Top situation, all of the students involved were associated with the Elite Academy although many of them had dropped out of this magnet program over the course of their three years of middle school.

In considering the discourses of race, class and ability related to the gendering of Isabella, Emma, Olivia, and Emily it is important to highlight the disciplinary procedures and practices the school administration undertook to address the open attack on Sophia. The intersection of these dominant identities on the Mean Girls bodies had a controlling impact on the administration which could be seen when Mr. Clark responded to Ms. Bailey's initial suggestion of suspensions, "I'm not ready to die on that mountain yet." The faculty involved in addressing and disciplining the girls for harassing Sophia in fact spent a great deal of time considering parent reactions to their actions, and then later spent a great deal of time working directly with parents of the aggressors on providing extra services to these students.

As with the appeasements to Chad and his mother in the Muffin Top case, here Mr. Martin and the administrative staff went to great pains to accommodate Olivia's family, meeting with her mother on several occasions. As later vignettes will highlight, this subservient relationship between the school faculty and particular families correlated tightly with the Elite Academy students, along with non-EA middle class families who participated on the parent council, volunteered hours, etc. The cultural capital of these girls families clearly offered them a greater field of possibilities to enact heteronormative

gender with minimal retribution (Lareau, 1987). In contrast incidence of heteronormative “drama” among a different group of girls from the low income housing apartments regularly resulted in suspensions of these lower class white and Latina girls.

Finally in considering appropriate educational responses to this situation the parents and administration determined that this group of girls were capable and in need of a rational learning experience to adjust their behavior over a punitive experience to curb their social practices. This presumption of the rationality, maturity, and intelligence of the players involved reflected staff perceptions of the academically supported and successful student of the Elite Academy. This same professional presumption of intelligence and ethics, what Licia Carlson (2001) calls *cognitive ablism*, did not operate uniformly across the student body as will be seen in later vignettes. Therefore the decision to provide special learning sessions provided to the Mean Girls was less common among intellectually marked “regular” and “special education” students.

In fact, in considering the institutional practice of cognitive ablism the harassment of Noah, the boy with Asperger’s Syndrome, illustrates a general disregard for the gendered and sexual experiences of a child marked with a disability. Recall how Mr. Martin sought the perspectives of Olivia and Emma in explaining the dog barking surrounding of Noah. And even as these girls marked the discourse as gendered calling themselves Noah’s bitches, Mr. Martin did not question the experiences of a boy surrounded by girls touching him, kneeling in front of his lap and barking at him. He asked Noah nothing about the experience. In fact Mr. Martin unreflectively considered Noah, who he had just noted preferred isolation, lucky to be socializing when he was surrounded by The Mean Girls.

The discursive void within an implicit heteronormative school setting to identify and articulate the workings of heteronormative power in violence and abuse. The uncritical observations of the heteronormative gender performances of Isabella, Emma, Olivia, and Emily by professionals at Oakwood reveal a lack of professional knowledge and skills related to the production of femininity within a heteronormative patriarchal society.³⁴ The invisible authority this community of students held over the cafeteria tables, the lack of awareness of the highly performed weightlessness thru water consumption and not eating captured my attention the first time I stood with the cafeteria monitors as they stood so close to these girls preferred seating. And while students within and outside of this clique all could report with specificity about who was and was not allowed to sit with these girls on any given day, and how these students never ate and spent their assigned lunch time interacting across tables with the Eighth Grade Boys the faculty monitors were unaware of any of the gender performances going on within this clique stationed at the entry to the cafeteria by food lines for every other student to pass and observe.

This professional omission of awareness of gender performances surrounding this clique was only disrupted by speculated knowledge about the sexuality and sexual politics of this group. As noted earlier many members of the faculty considered this group of girls prematurely sexual with Ms. Campbell referring to them as, “way ahead of their time, sexually that is.” Yet with all the rumored assumptions about the sexual activity of these girls, there was no professional discourse about teaching or learning that could go on in relation to the social behavior of these thirteen year old girls. Instead there

³⁴ Lynda Hart calls this social context heteropatriarchy to highlight the interconnected production of gender and sexuality within the patriarchal paradigm. (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997)

were merely parallel heteronormative patriarchal conversation going on among the students and staff separately about The Mean Girls and how they were related to the overall production of femininity at Oakwood. In effect the staff would talk amongst themselves about these girls feminine behavior as *teases*, the Oakwood peers would refer to them as *slutty* or *skanky* and they would refer to themselves *random* and all the while these stilted gender conversations about the most remarked upon females at Oakwood rarely if ever cross in-group boundaries.

This lack of professional awareness or responsibility for the gendered social context at Oakwood and lack of an educational discourse to consider gender, power, and identity perhaps contributed the MySpace defaming of Sophia. The unexamined and naturalized status of this clique was necessarily purchased through misogynistic portrayals of one another and objectifying presentations of desirability. Yet the feminized beauty value of this clique was frequently propped up by faculty regularly complimented members of this group based on appearance and regularly appointed these girls leadership roles and social privilege positions like office aid or teacher aid. The ultimate tracking of in-group misogyny and sexual harassment through the comment thread of a web page perhaps merely made a physical artifact of the temporal verbal and social heteronormative gendering that was carried on moment by moment within this community.

The emptiness of a professional discourse on heteronormativity lay bare during the intervention thru which the faculty attempted to address the violence of the MySpace project. During this time there was a stilted conversation in which the professional educators were rarely able to move beyond concepts of bullying and harassment to

capture the social meaning or power of the gendered and sexual content of the postings. He did initially present both the students and parents with the precise language of the web postings and identified this language as sexist and harassing, yet beyond the shock effect of speaking and hearing profanities in this setting these moments did not delve deeply into the means through which harm had been done to Sophia. Instead these attempts to consider the discourse fell into a public/private debate with students and families claiming privacy rights over the highly public posting.

Lacking the discourse to present a case of gender and sexuality injustice, abuse, and domination, Mr. Clark took to repeatedly portrayed the events in question in a humanistic reverse light: “Olivia, imagine it’s next year and you are a freshman. Now just imagine a bunch of popular cheerleaders or some other really popular clique did this to you. I mean you must realize this could so easily have been done the other way around. So why would you do something like this without thinking how it would feel if it were being done to you?” He made attempt after attempt with each girl and later with each parent to establish some sort of humanist frame while repeatedly failing to mention what the school policy suggested was intolerable sexism in three fourths of the comments posted on the web site.

Finally highlighting a professional inadequacy to recognize or articulate an educational ethic surrounding heteronormative harassment and emphasized femininity, the boy Noah was taken up as a “random” target for the Mean Girls games right in front of and uninterrupted by Mr. Martin. Even as Mr. Martin watched these five girls surround Noah and brush their bodies up against his, Martin did not register an awareness of this group of young ladies competitive concern with issues of heterosexual attractiveness and

desirability. The entire month had been marked by the professional strain of having the administrative staff devoting excessive time and resources to re-educating these girls about gender and relationships. Yet even in the midst of this retraining effort, Mr. Martin lacked any language to perceive or professionally discuss the gendered, heteronormative, or even bully like performances of these girls directed at Noah, the socially isolated boy they surrounded, touched, panted at, and barked at for fun.

The professional lack of expertise in addressing heteronormative incidents. The situation involving Olivia's MySpace posting about Sophia did initially result in punitive consequences for some of the girls involved. This punishment reflected the school code of conduct on gendered bullying and harassment. However, the influential parents of the accused students persisted in demanding that the school reduce punishments and instead provide their children with special educational services to help prevent future events like this from happening again. The elevated access to decision making given to the parents involved was unique given the context of explicit bias and harassment. For example on another occasion where students had crossed the boundaries of bias and harassment related to disability, parents were not consulted with how to better serve the aggressors. In this earlier instance a group of boys was disciplined for using ablest epithets and physically intimidating segregated students with cognitive impairments. This bullying took place outside of the life skills classroom and the punishment was swift, the penalty was severe, and the parent information was brief. In one parent telephone conversation Mr. Martin said, "Bobby was knocking into the disabled students outside of the life skills room and making jokes at their expense. That is never allowed at Oakwood. He will serve a level 3 suspension." This conversation was in stark contrast to the many

telephone calls and parent meetings for this MySpace incident where conversations lacked the same clarity about what “is never allowed at Oakwood” in relation to bias based on gender and sexuality.

In the ongoing discussions following the MySpace investigation the parents and the faculty finally agreed to address “deeper relational problems between the girls,” through special group counseling meetings with the girls. Neither the parents nor the faculty articulated a competence in addressing the sexuality and gender framing of this explosive incident to prepare for this group counseling project. Ultimately the administration team decided to seek consultation from a local non-profit Girl Power organization to assist them in designing a curriculum to re-educate The Mean Girls. This abdication of knowledge and yielding of educational authority to outside professionals is not unprecedented in relation to sexuality and gender as this district generally outsources primary level sex and sexuality education by bringing in presenters from the community. In this instance the faculty looked to Ms. Bell, a consultant to act as the expert on girl problems.

As might be expected the Girl Power non-profit approached gender from an essentialist frame and readily absorbed the heteronormative social practices of The Mean Girls as naturally associated with adolescence and emerging sexuality. Ms. Bell then offered her expertise in preparing content for the girls group meetings held with The Mean Girls following the cyber bullying incident, and then the school administration acted as the facilitators and teachers for these meetings. Between these professionals they developed a psychological counseling forum for “reaching out” to these girls to change their unkind ways and refocus what Ms. Bell and Ms. Bailey referred to as relational

aggression. There was a lack of a critical professional framing of the heteronormative discourses at play within the construction of “meanness” among these girls. This meant that Ms. Bell along with the Oakwood faculty repeatedly presented the Mean Girl trope as a somewhat static and real social identity as noted above in Mr. Clark’s reference to the high school cheerleaders.

The reifying status given to this feminine identity circumvented gender learning that might have considered the girls (re)production of misogyny, a critique of the status and power exchanged in a patriarchal discourse. Primarily through activities and discussions the girls were presented with this argument, “You don’t want to be like *those girls* do you?” And *those girls* were regularly presented as high status, powerful and popular girls in films and anecdotes. The final events narrated in this vignette as well as observations of this clique for the remainder of the school year would suggest that the majority of these girls did in fact continue to want to be like *those girls* and saw this identity as a means to amass social status and social power.

The agility of an unexamined dichotomous discourse to absorb and reconfigure institutional power to reproduce dominance and subjugation. There was a strong commitment on the part of the Oakwood faculty and the Girl Power consultant to help the Mean Girls shift their identities and social practices. In professional conversations the faculty discussed the need to as Ms. Bailey stated, “help these girls see how self defeating their little games are.” Embedded within this commitment was a concern for the impact The Mean Girls public performance had on younger students. As Ms. Bell explained, “Little sixth graders are watching these girls and wanting to be just like them.” Through these professional discussions, the subsequent meetings with parents and finally the

weekly luncheons with the girls from this clique a great deal of institutional focus and power was directed at The Mean Girls.

The Mean Girls increased resources, increased access to top authority figures and reconfigured class schedules for group meetings all bestowed this group with additional institutional social power and prestige at Oakwood. Almost immediately following the first group meeting the girls formed a secret society name, The Girl Scouts, and began making references to GS meetings and telling teachers they needed out of class to discuss GS issues with the administration. Mr. Clark and Ms. Bailey interpreted this interest and engagement as successfully getting the girls to “think about their actions and really change who they are.” Yet, when comparing earlier social performance to the behaviors and styles of the girls during the GS meetings, there was no visible change in clothing, style, association, or narratives of fighting and drama among this peer group. In fact, the collective identity as “we” was simply more reified by the GS meetings and the frequent check-ins between the faculty and these students.

Ultimately the aggressive treatment of Noah which closes out this vignette would suggest that the Mean Girls simply incorporated their newfound institutional power into their performances of heteronormative gender. The “bitches” game this group of girls played on Noah after weeks of GS counseling highlights how institutional power and gendered performances merged to intensify heteronormativity right outside the main office of school authority.

As Mr. Martin reported the non-social boy Noah elected to sit alone at the one bench outside of the office after lunch to read every day. This bench was no more than fifteen feet from a hall monitor's post. When the girls approached Noah then, they were

approaching in front of the schools assistant principal and within view of the office staff. This particular area was named in nearly all of my interviews as one of the safest spots on campus to avoid sexual and gendered harassment. Yet these five performatively heterosexual girls surrounded Noah who at Oakwood was considered a lower status boy due to his disability, took over his body space, made references to being his female dogs and taunted and laughed at him all under the eyes of a school administrator. In fact there was ongoing eye contact between the girls and Mr. Martin and ultimately a conversation in which they explained themselves as playing. As Mr. Martin visibly allowed for this form of play, ignored the experience of Noah, and dismissed the girls his school authority was subsumed by the girls gender power and incorporated into this and future performances at Oakwood.

Vignette 3: The Eighth Grade Boys

The Eighth Grade Boys—The Story

Cheryl was laughing and everything, like it was just a big joke. I know she know it was a joke because you know Marcos, he's always joking around like that so she knew it was a joke. I think just Ramiro and that other little guy didn't get it. Cuz everyone else for sure knew it was a joke.

~Julius explaining the motives behind Marcos holding a knife to a girl's neck

The first report of violence. One Friday morning in May just after the second bell sent everyone to classes, two small Latino boys, Ramiro and Oliver, came into the office to report an act of violence they had witnessed the previous afternoon at a track meet. According to Ramiro, they had been walking with two girls on the school grounds near the track when an eighth grade boy, Marcos, had run up behind them and put one of

the girls, Cheryl, into a headlock. Both Ramiro and Oliver reported Marcos then held a knife to her throat and said, “Hey baby are you DTF?”

As neither the administrator nor I as an observer knew what DTF meant, one of the boys very sheepishly explained the term stood for “Down to Fuck.” They said Cheryl screamed and then laughed a little bit as Marcos held her for a moment and then let her go. They had stepped back as he talked to her for a few minutes. Then Marcos ran back to the group of boys he was walking with and Cheryl told Ramiro how much she hated Marcos and how afraid of him she really was. Ramiro and Oliver had decided this morning that they needed to report what had happened but they wanted to be anonymous because they were both afraid of Marcos.

This short conversation initiated an investigation that would involve interviewing both girls along with six other boys who were witnesses to or participants in the play that occurred during the track meet the day prior. The following account of the event which took place at the track meet was pieced together through a series of interviews with all of the students involved.

A knife at the track meet. Marcos, Trevor, and Julius all jocks and high status boys from the eighth grade class were walking on a path from the track field to a local restaurant between track events. While Trevor identified as white, Marcos was Latino and Julius identified as bi-racial. These three boys were central to The Eighth Grade Boys clique at Oakwood. Julius and Marcos in particular were considered the most powerful and influential boys in this clique even as this clique was seen as the most socially powerful group of boys at Oakwood.

As the events of the track meet unfolded it turned out that another group of grade boys, Spencer, Peter, and Devin were also walking to the restaurant further ahead of Marcos and Julius along the same path. This second trio of males was also part of the large and porous *Eighth Grade Boys* cohort. In considering whom one was referring to when talking about *The Eighth Grade Boys*, Marcos and Julius were always central characters where as boys like Peter, Spencer and Devin gained and lost entry into this group over the school year depending primarily upon the sports season. These second tier Eighth Grade Boys were each of midsized white athletic boys who were participating in the athletic events that day.

As Marcos, Trevor and Julius continued walking along the path behind the track they began to close in on Spencer, Peter, and Devin who were talking together and unaware of their pursuers' presence. As the Julius, Marcos and Trevor came up on this second group of Marcos explains "Julius just went running up there and shanked Peter. And Peter started yelling, *Like dude you just cut me*. Well really he more like stabbed him. But Julius wouldn't get off him, Julius just kept saying *Tag Out? Tag Out?* And Peter kept yelling, *Dude you cut me!* And then finally Peter was like, *Yea! Get off me!* And he tagged out."

Julius, the biggest boy in the eighth grade, according to all accounts, had produced a knife he'd been carrying around for some time and was playing with it as they walked down the path. When he silently ran up behind Peter, the open knife was still swinging from his hand. Julius threw Peter to the ground and put Peter into a headlock shouting "Hey 'mo, you're mine now!" 'Mo was slang word used at Oakwood for homo or homosexual.

Julius then pinned Peter's shoulders to the ground with his knees while holding a knife to the only slightly smaller boy's chest. Spencer and Devin had been surprised by this attack as well, and had stepped back as Julius pinned Peter to the ground. Neither boy went to Peter's aid and, as Marcos and Trevor arrived on the scene, all four boys watched as Julius held Peter to the ground with the knife blade pointed directly at his chest. The tip was against Peter's body. Julius' continued "tag out" calls were a reference to pro-wrestling lingo where the pinned player tags out acknowledging defeat.

When Peter and later Spencer were interviewed each boy would explain that Julius did this pro wrestling move to other boys all the time. Spencer would explain, "Julius shanks guys all the time. I try to stay away from him as much as I can, but you know he's everywhere." Peter agreed but noted that Julius didn't go after everyone, just certain guys and Peter was on that list. Several interviewees confirmed Julius did not pin or shank just anyone, he was known only to shank the guys he considered "pussies" or "homos." Julius, Trevor, and Marcos each confirmed that Julius *shanked* Peter because Peter was considered both a *pussie* and a *homo*.

Moving back to the scene in the park Julius got off of Peter just as his friends Marcos and Trevor registered some boredom and began to walk away. Julius took one last slap at Peter's head and then returned to walking with his friends, while Spencer, Peter, and Devin all shouted at Julius and laughed a bit. These three boys then turned and walked back to the field rather than walking on to the restaurant where they were originally headed.

Back on the dirt path from the track to McDonald's Julius ran up to join Marcos after he had tackled Peter. When Julius caught up to his friend, Marcos immediately took

the knife from Julius's hand and began "playing with it." As the three boys continued walking they came upon a second group of students walking to McDonalds from the track. This group consisted of two eighth grade girls, Lillian, Cheryl, two eighth grade boys Ramiro and Oliver. Lillian and Cheryl were both white athletic popular eighth grade girls and Ramiro and Oliver were both Latino smaller boys in the eighth grade who each spoke English as a second language and were not attached to the sports clique of the dominant eighth grade boys.

Jumping Cheryl at knife point. When Marcos saw Cheryl in this group he, much like his friend Julius, ran up to her from behind and placed her in a headlock. However, rather than throwing her to the ground, Marcos then held the knife across her throat and said either "Are you DFT?" or "How'd the derby go?" Reports on the exact statement made by Marcos varied from witness to witness. Ramiro, Lillian, and Oliver each heard Marcos say, "Are you DTF?" (*Slang for Down to Fuck*) While Julius and Marcos both claimed the statement was, "How'd the derby go?" Cheryl herself couldn't remember what Marcos had said when he "surprised" her.

Cheryl and all the witnesses reported that she had kicked Marcos in the shin as he held her. Later Marcos would explain that the kick was further evidence that the two of them were playing and that, "She kicks me all the time too." When Marcos released Cheryl, Ramiro and Oliver ran up to her and began cursing at Marcos at which point Julius and Peter arrived and the five boys verbally sparred for a few seconds until another large group of students came down the path. The presence of more students broke the tension and Julius, Peter and Marcos walked on to McDonalds while Cheryl, Lillian,

Ramiro, and Oliver turned around and hiked back to the track meet for the remainder of the afternoon.

The investigation is obstructed by both victims and aggressors. Getting to some general consensus on the above described events at the track meet took an entire day of interviewing and re-interviewing all of the students who witnessed or were involved in these incidents. Marcos was quick to confirm his self described game with Cheryl, but denied there was a knife involved.

MR. CLARK: You seem to have the impression that this was a joke.

MARCOS: A lot of people were laughing. Even Cheryl and Lillian were laughing. Everybody was laughing. It was just a joke.

Marcos continued to deny the use of a knife throughout the day and ultimately suggested that he had a fingernail file in his pocket and someone might have thought that was a knife. The entire male group outside of Ramiro and Oliver stuck to that same denial and as the day went on more and more student began reporting they might have seen a fingernail file.

When Peter was first called in and asked about Marcos and Cheryl he reported the following: “It wasn’t a big deal. I mean it was kinda a dumb thing to do. But he wasn’t gonna hurt her or anything. He was just flirting with her and being kinda dumb. I mean I guess it was kinda dangerous and all, but he really wasn’t gonna hurt her or anything, it was just playing.”

Mr. Clark continued searching lockers and back packs and interviewing students who had been seen in the area until Peter’s friend Spencer was called in and unintentionally stated that he thought this investigation was about Julius and Peter.

MR. CLARK: Spencer, I am sure the rumors have filled the hallways by now so why don't you tell us what you know about the track meet yesterday.

SPENCER: Well, I didn't see him get cut or anything so I think Julius just got a little out of hand when he shanked Peter.

MR. CLARK: Shanked?

SPENCER: Oh he didn't really shank him it was just a move. He let him up when he tagged out.

This was the first mention of earlier use of the knife and initiated a second round of interviews of nearly all of the boys involved. Peter had already been called in asked about the knife and had offered no information saying he'd never seen Marcos with a knife, maybe a fingernail file or something but he didn't really know. In the interview he had said nothing about Julius threatening him with the knife. Following Spencer announcement that Julius had used a knife on Peter, Peter was again called to the office. In his second interview he tried to explain why he had omitted any information about the knife or about Julius the first time. "I just didn't think it was important. I mean, that's just the way Julius is. He's been doing this sort of stuff since like third grade."

Mr. Clark told him that his holding back information had really impeded the investigation to which Peter said, "I really didn't see that much of what happened with Marcos and Cheryl and I didn't think there was anything else to investigate when you called me in the last time." Mr. Clark reminded him that he had asked him repeatedly about the knife in the first interview and Peter had said nothing about Julius having a knife. "Now those boys have had all morning to get the word spread and get that knife

hidden or lost. Peter you and I know one of those guys had it on him this morning and we lost the chance to get it and deal with this properly.”

Peter did not register any emotion as Mr. Clark admonished him for not disclosing that Julius had used a knife on him the previous afternoon. He simply said, “When you search him for the knife he’ll know Spencer or I said something. Are you going to call him up here now? I wanna know when you’re planning on searching him.”

As a series of interviews puzzled this set of events together, the principal called Marcos back into the office to explain his actions toward Cheryl that afternoon. When Marcos sat to discuss the incident for a second time, he laughed nervously each time Mr. Clark asked him why he had threatened Cheryl with a knife. “I don’t know, it was just a joke. I was walking along and like playing with this fingernail file and Julius said it looked like a knife so I just got this crazy idea in my head to play a joke on Cheryl.”

And finally Julius explained his perspective on Marcos and Cheryl, “Cheryl was laughing and everything, like it was just a big joke. I know she know it was a joke because you know Marcos, he’s always joking around like that so she knew it was a joke. I think just Ramiro and that other little guy didn’t get it. Cuz everyone else for sure knew it was a joke.” When Mr. Clark confronted Julius with the events between himself and Peter he simply denied the entire event and stuck to that denial. He asked repeatedly who was accusing him and swore he had not done anything to Peter.

Cheryl, in her interviews confirmed that she believed Marcos was joking when he held the knife to her throat. She said that was why she hadn’t reported it. When Mr. Clark asked her if she like this joke she said, “No way, of course not. I hate Marcos. He hits me and kicks me all the time.” When asked why she hadn’t reported the situation she

explained, “It would probably make things worse anyway everyone would say he was joking and I’d look like a…” She didn’t finish this thought.

Searching for the knife. A good deal of time was spent during this investigation looking for the knife used on both Cheryl and Peter. There were a variety of descriptions made of the knife; it was described as everything from a handmade knife to a kitchen paring knife to a metal fingernail file. Various histories were given by different witnesses about where the knife came from as well as who was currently in possession of the knife. There was strong an interest in finding the knife as the length of the blade would be relevant at the discipline hearings. Backpack and locker searches would not produce the knife; they would however incidentally produce a DVD of pornography from Julius’s backpack. The DVD was confiscated and later discussed during his discipline hearing. The knife was never found.

Following a day of interviews both Marcos and Julius were written up for assaulting peers with a weapon. Both boys’ parents were called in to retrieve their sons and to discuss the incidents from the track meet. Julius’s mother was a high status figure in the community and had personal relationships with the two Oakwood administrators. When she met with the school leadership about her son, they discussed together problems Julius had been experiencing at Oakwood and what might be the best alternative placement for him at the present time. Because the offense fit within the districts “zero tolerance” policy with regard to weapons, both boys were suspended pending expulsion hearings. Neither boy returned to the campus for the remainder of the school year. Because both boys were in the eighth grade, neither would return to campus the

following year and a variety of teachers expressed their relief to be done with these young men.

According to Mr. Clark when he told the staff during the last weeks of school about the expulsions of Julius and Marcos he got the following reaction:

MR. CLARK: I mean, that day, we brought the entire faculty together (*to tell them Julius and Marcos had used a knife at a school event*). And you could just feel the tension among the female teachers. We now have a new deal where if a kid ever brings a weapon to school there is an immediate staff meeting right after the investigation or the next day to talk about safety. But boy, when I told those faculty members who the kids were with the knife, the female staff members who had had them in class, you know... I mean, I saw them thinking and I am sure they were thinking, "Well I have always been afraid of that kid" and thinking that that kid could do something to me for three years now. And now to know that those boys both had a weapon on school. They were all real clear with me that things were okay as long as those kids never set back in Oakwood. But if we were going to try to make some argument of free access to public education and this and that, it was going to be a big time safety complaint from the staff and they never did comeback so it never came up, but I could just see it would have been a really big problem.

Following the suspensions of Julius and Marcos a new group of boys would be identified as "out of control" by the school counselor and the eighth grade teaching team. Mrs. Fleming would note that Cameron had risen to the occasion while Ms. Bailey would point to Matt and his friends as taking up the heteronormative slack in terms of sexual

harassment and intimidation. As Mr. Martin explained to me one afternoon, “You never really get rid of the problem. When you suspend someone or expel someone, well someone else just takes on the same role and the whole thing starts all over again.”

The Eighth Grade Boys—Analysis

Managing hegemonic masculinity through the production of subordinate heteronormative genders and marking bodies. There are many interesting lines of analysis that could take place in considering the gendering of divergent members of the The Eighth Grade Boys clique as well as the gendering of the targets of the knife flirtation and violence. In this analysis I will concern myself primarily with the gendering of several students involved related to threats of violence as well as the professional response to the knife incidents. I will again focus on five prevalent patterns in making and marking gender at Oakwood: first, the gendered performances related to this group of students; second, the intersectional gender identity making impact of racial, able-bodied, and social class discourses; third, the discursive void within an implicit heteronormative school setting to identify and articulate the workings of power in violence and abuse; fourth, the professional lack of expertise in addressing heteronormative incidents; and finally, the systemic failure to articulate a democratic gender standard or track, record, and transmit knowledge of this gendering process that would render it visible.

The gendering of Marcos and Julius and the Othering of Cheryl and Peter. The hegemonic masculinity performed by Julius and Marcos represented in Vignette 3 was violently heteronormative. Both boys enacted a violent sexual and gendered domination of lesser subjects to the ongoing shock and amusement of a large group of male peers. Julius’ violent aggression toward Cheryl and his proceeding bravado about demanding

that she be Down to Fuck reflected Beth Quinn's (2002) research on masculine discourses surrounding "girl watching." As Quinn's research noted Julius' heterosexual violence and posturing increased his masculine social status among The Eighth Grade Boys. Neither Julius nor any of his peers reflected knowledge of this violence as threatening to Cheryl who Julius presumed was sexually attracted to his violence and aggression. By repeatedly explaining that he did this to Cheryl all the time, Julius presented his heterosexuality as naturally dominant and violent toward female objects of desire.

The Other body thru which Marcos expressed his heteronormative identity was both similar to and different from the preceding performance by Julius. Marcos directed his sexual and gendered dominance and aggression and the feminize and sexually Othered boy Peter. As discussed in depth in the first chapter of this document Michael Kimmel has done a great deal of research on performative homophobia as a fundamental element of hegemonic masculinity (2003). Marcos' violent attack on Peter and marking of Peter as a homo was again a highly public performance which all the boys related to Marco's ongoing performance of homophobic violence and domination over boys within the group.

In *Dude You're a Fag* sociologist C. J. Pascoe (2007) suggests that while "the fag epithet, when hurled at other boys, may or may not have explicit sexual meanings, but it always has gendered meanings" (p. 82). In the case of Marcos and Peter the gendered meaning was to mark Marcos' masculinity as superior as demonstrated by his physical domination and potentially lethal power. It is no surprise then that Kimmel has repeatedly

linked this performative homophobia or heteronormative performance to school shooters and other forms of extreme social violence.

Cheryl and Peter are socially produced as Others throughout the reenactments and confessions of the knife investigation. In the story telling about this incident Cheryl quickly loses her humanity and becomes the female counterpart to heteronormative masculinity. She is repeatedly presented as the desired object and her body is presumed to be open to male physical advances and male aggression. As one of the witnesses explained, “Marcos was just playing, he would hurt Cheryl. I know she wasn’t really afraid of him. He does that kinda stuff to her all the time.” Cheryl herself also reported that Marcos did “this kinda stuff” to her all the time at school to her repeated protests and complaints. And finally Marcos reported this repeated violence as a game between himself and Cheryl that they both mutually enjoyed. Emma Renold (2002, 2005) and Nan Stein (2005) have both looked at heteronormative discourses in relation to pervasive heterosexist harassment in primary schools. In the case of Cheryl and Marcos the repeated production of her body as the physical zone for Marcos to express his heterosexual desires offers a vivid example of how naturalized sexual harassment can be among the Oakwood students.

Peter momentarily becomes the “fag” to counter and accentuate Julius’ heterosexuality in much the same way Cheryl becomes the sex object to accentuate Marcos’ heterosexuality. The floating specter of homosexuality lands on Peter in the moment in which he is pinned to the ground and repeatedly verbally marked as a “pussie, homo and a ‘mo.’” This subject space proves to be both dangerous and indefensible as Peter notes to all involved that he has been cut even as Julian continues the “playful”

aggression holding the knife to his chest. Peter himself was reserved and unwilling to acknowledge or complain about the attack on his body in this investigation. He expressed both fear of further violence and embarrassment or perhaps shame in this story which presented him as the masculine Other or failure dominated by Julius.

The silencing effect of this personal embarrassment and fear was apparent in both Cheryl and in Peter as they were called in to the office to confirm reports about the attacks made on each of them. Neither student was initially interested in making a complaint. Instead both students initially suggested the aggressors were only teasing, did this sort of thing all the time, and wouldn't really hurt them. Conversely the empowering effect of these incidents on Julius and Marcos could be seen in their full confessions even as they repeatedly restated that they did nothing wrong and that their targets deserved this treatment.

The intersectional gender identity making impact of racial, able-bodied, and social class discourses. Discourses of race/ethnicity, embodiment, and social class each intersected with the heteronormative discourse in these events. While Cheryl and Peter both identified as white while Marcos and Julius both identified as people of color. In addition Julius was repeatedly noted by everyone involved to be the biggest and the strongest boy at Oakwood. Finally Julius held a great deal of social capital as his parent was a well known public figure.

In considering how race and gender identities co-construct one another scholar Patricia Hill Collins advanced a Black Feminist theory of intersectional analysis for considering how the oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality and nation operate as mutually constructing systems of power on the individual in society (2006). In this case

the racial minority status of Marcos and Julius and the racial status of Peter and Cheryl as white students must be considered. A racial discourse regarding gender and sexuality norms clearly impacted student and faculty perceptions of aggression, sexuality, and violence. It could be argued that even as this instance of misogynistic violence was more explicit than the aggressions of the white boy Chad in the Muffin Top narrative, the fundamental behaviors of Chad and Marcos were quite similar and yet the two boys were interpreted quite differently by students and faculty. In the white boy Chad's case Mr. Martin repeatedly sought justifiable reasons for Chad to be on an aggressive misogynistic campaign against Angela. In Marcos case, professional conversations quickly moved from concern about Cheryl's safety to a discourse of criminality. In considering Marcos one teacher stated, "That boy is just minutes away from lock up."

The criminal fear of Julius' and Marcos' masculinity was also reflected in Mr. Clark's observation about teachers fears of these two boys: "I saw them thinking and I am sure they were thinking, *I have always been afraid of that kid and I've been thinking that that kid could do something to me for three years now.*" This statement suggested that both brown boys spent their middle school years among white female teachers who feared them and presumed them to represent a violent and dangerous brown masculinity (Aldama, 2003).

Concern with Julius was increased by his physical stature. Where able bodied athleticism was seen as a mark of superiority in most instances at Oakwood, Julius' height, weight, and strength were regularly noted as dangerous and threatening. While this is most certainly related to his race, the fact that Julius was the biggest and strongest sixth grader, seventh grader, and finally eighth grader at Oakwood was the subject of

ongoing speculation, pathologizing, and fear. Masculinities studies like those of Kimmel and Pascoe note that superior size and physical ability are the marks of hegemonic masculinity. In Julius' body there is a unique intersectional relationship between disabling discourse, gender discourse, and race discourse which pathologizes his otherwise superior masculine physique. In one telling moment Mr. Clark suggested, "Julius never really could have been just a normal guy. He was always the biggest and strongest and the other boys were always testing that. The teachers always feared his size and he could feel that fear. I mean to be so big and to add to that to be bi-racial, he just stood out too much from the start. We really let him down."

Finally in considering the intersection of social class with the gendering taking place in this passage I would like to return to the elite parentage of Julius. In considering his actions toward Peter, his family status was almost immediately introduced into the framing of his boyhood and what could be appropriate interventions to curb his increasingly violent interactions. As Mr. Martin and Mr. Clark discussed the situation they agreed, "Julius' is lucky, he can count on his mom and she'll know how to take this situation in hand." In fact his mother was handed the event to interpret and address outside of the school. "She is going to move him and put him where she can work directly with him. She'll know how to handle him best," explained Mr. Martin. Like the parents of the Mean Girls, Julius' parent was brought in to develop an educational plan for him that removed much of the stigma of expulsion. It also allowed the school faculty to avoid systemically addressing the situation. In contrast, Marcos whose parent was lower income and a native Spanish speaker was informed of his expulsion and brought in for the hearing. In both context social class assumptions were embedded in the process of

silencing an educational discussion about gender, sexuality, and domination taking place at the school. Instead the events could simply be located on these boys' bodies and addressed in the most appropriate way given the social class of each parent.

The discursive void within an implicit heteronormative school setting to identify and articulate the workings of power in violence and abuse. During this investigation of violence the strict enforcement of weapon's policies within this school district allowed for the immediate suspension and ultimate expulsion of Marcos and Julius. The focus on the use of a knife at school was relatively singular and a discussion about the sexual targeting of Cheryl was limited and a conversation about the homophobic targeting of Peter was virtually non-existent. The knife became the focus of danger as if the presence of a knife inevitably led to the attacks on Peter and Cheryl. The authoritarian and pervasive discourse of "zero tolerance"³⁵ related to weapons use permeated all interviews and all professional discussions about the incidents in question.

The lack of a sustained focus on the heteronormative violence within the context of these events was complicated by students and staff inability to consistently recognize many elements of the discursive violence in the first place. Both the students and the staff could be seen vacillating between interpreting heteronormative actions as ignorant jokes and interpreting the same actions as dangerous. What was missing from these interpretations was an ongoing link between interpreting the actions as ill informed jokes and the same actions as dangerous and violent simultaneously. What was missing was a professional language that could articulate that the social power wrapped up in calling

³⁵ Zero Tolerance policies emerged in the late 1990's out of criminology efforts to reduce urban crime through mandated incarceration. It was theorized that these punitive policies would reduce crime rates and clean up cities. Following the infamous school shootings of the late 90's zero tolerance language moved into educational settings as schools set up strict behavior policies resulting in immediate suspensions and swift expulsions.

someone a “homo” or telling someone to “fuck” made these jokes inherently violent, with or without a knife.

Finally the discourse of zero tolerance reigned over this scenario resulting in the swift expulsion of the two knife wielding aggressors. Following these expulsions the assistant principal Mr. Martin explained to me, “You never really get rid of the problem. When you suspend someone or expel someone, well someone else just takes on the same role and the whole thing starts all over again.” In fact the school counselor and several teachers were already identifying the new “bullies” in town when it came to sexual and gendered harassment at Oakwood.

In fact teachers and faculty were already pointing to the next individuals to fall into Marcos and Julius’ vacancy within days of their expulsions. The Oakwood faculty could on some level register the discursive knife, could sense the inevitability of repetition of this “bullying” and violence. Yet without an adequate professional language to talk about the violence that was not the knife, they by their own accounts were left in the very place they started. The administration would be waiting for the next inevitable act of violence and the next expulsion.

The professional lack of expertise in addressing heteronormative incidents. The heteronormative events narrated in the above vignette were slow to surface due to a lack of language and concepts to consider many of the interactions out of the norm. Students did not recognize the interactions as violations of the schools sexuality and gender harassment policy. Conversely the faculty did not elicit heteronormative accounts of the events by asking about the language used or the gender dynamics and other power

dynamics students could readily perceive between the victims and aggressors. One illustration of this was when I intervened into the interview process:

MR. CLARK: Why didn't you tell us about Julius jumping on Peter when we first interviewed you?

MARCOS: That's just Julius. He just does that, it wasn't any big deal and Peter was part of it anyway. They were Friday Night wrestling.

(Here Mr. Clark looked at me and appeared to be waiting for me to say something.)

RESEARCHER: When you say Julius just does that I am wondering, when is the last time he did it to you.

MARCOS: Yeah right! He doesn't do that to me.

RESEARCHER: Well how about to Peter, when was the last time he did it to Peter.

MARCOS: Dunno.

RESEARCHER: Does it happen to Peter more than you.

MARCOS: (laughs) Yea you could say that.

There was silence at this point and I waited for Mr. Clark to continue the interview. He perused a new line of questions about the knife at this point.

The inability to for the educators to elicit and identify an account of the heteronormative domination of Peter left it highly unlikely that they could design an educational response to the social manipulation of masculine power at play in this violent scene. I, as a researcher on sexuality and gender violence, was invited to observe and

participate in all of the interviews and searches because it was noted that, “this situation is right up your alley.”

Yet even as themes of homophobia and heterosexism emerged in student accounts Mr. Clark and the other faculty involved consistently returned the focus of the interviews to questions regarding the size of the knife, the length of the blade, the history of the knife and so forth. Very quickly the interviews became a linguistic hide and seek games about a knife even as heteronormative discourses danced right in front of all of us unchecked and unexamined.

The systemic failure to articulate a democratic gender standard or track, record, and transmit knowledge of this gendering process that would render it visible. The final gendering point I would like to make with concern to this story is that through this investigation an abundance of heteronormative social practices were exposed only to be lost before the story was all over. The violently homophobic story of Peter and Julius was only accidentally unearthed in the investigation into Marcos’ use of a knife against Cheryl. And when this heteronormative knife play was exposed there no sustainable professional focus placed upon the homophobic and sexist elements of these incidents.

There were ongoing recognitions of the sexist nature of the attack on Cheryl as when Ms. Bailey said, “These boys just think they can do anything and get away with it. He thinks he can just grab her like that, and they all do. The girls have all said what pigs these boys are.” Yet even with such a critical reflection on the sexist nature of Marcos’ actions, his referral along with the story told to the faculty and at the district meeting all focused on the use of a knife in an attack at school.

The disciplinary discourse surrounding weapons incidents however was clear and concise. Therefore Mr. Clark quickly adopted a discourse of physical safety and danger and left in silence the witnessed discourses marking of Peter as a homo and of Cheryl as a sex object. Teachers did not spend time considering the social environment which may have produced this level of sexism in Marcos, nor did they have a meeting in which they considered the homophobic social environment which may have resulted in Peter never reporting ongoing attacks by Julius. Instead there was written record of students using a knife at school, a meeting in which teachers discussed how to treat “weapons violations” in the future, and two expulsions over weapons violations.

The heteronormative nature of the event was erased, the violence specifically targeting a sexually desired girl and a boy marked as a “homo” was naturalized, and the (re)production of two heteronormatively masculine brown boys was marked as criminal and dangerous by the faculty at Oakwood.

Vignette 4: Kendrick Keeps Looking at Me

Kendrick Keeps Looking at Me—The Story

Most of the time the teacher does know. It's just that sometimes she is so busy that she doesn't even bother to pay attention.

~ Seventh grade student Kendrick reporting on daily homophobic harassment toward him which today resulted in a physical altercation

Kendrick, a boy apart. The first time I saw Kendrick he was sitting alone in Mrs. Price's classroom in a sea of sound and motion. I had entered the class to make an observation and had seated myself in an inconspicuous corner of the room. Within a few

minutes of my scanning the room I found the teacher at a computer table focused on some particular information on the computer screen. The teacher's workstation itself took up a lengthy portion of the rear part of the room and it was initially difficult for me to visually locate the teacher amid a myriad of objects and activities within this area. Having spotted Mrs. Price I then noticed that a hand full of students were waiting beside her desk for her to finish her computer activity in order to address their concerns.

The different students throughout the room appeared to be doing a variety of social and non-social activities. Two of the female small groups were working on poster paper and appeared to be drawing. No other students were engaged in this type of work. Kendrick caught my eye as he sat alone in a cluster of rows of desks that appear to have been pushed aside and into his desk while he was sitting in it. I could see no foot path into his desk at the present time. Three other boys were standing in a corner perhaps ten feet from where Kendrick was seated.

The boys in this group were standing and leaning on some desks actively talking. There was regular touching, pushing, and desk movement from this group of boys. Three more female students were seated one in front of the other in an intact row of desks. These girls each had school materials on their desks. This trio spoke quietly to one another and did not do anything with the materials on their desks. Near the exit door sat another pair of males. These boys had their materials packed and were actively watching the clock above the exit.

Toward the end of the period Mrs. Price invited me to speak to the class about my research and canvass the group for interview candidates. She quietly whispered that she had a few students in mind for me and she would like to hold onto some interview forms

to give them after I left. I then addressed the class and told them about my research on bullying, harassment, and homophobia. After a little talk, I handed out interview consent forms.

Kendrick seeks out an interview to talk about being bullied. Kendrick immediately volunteered to be an interviewee for this research project. He brought back his parent consent form the next day and we were scheduled for an interview within a week. During our interview he immediately wanted to share his experiences of being harassed by groups of students in the seventh grade magnet classroom.

KENDRICK: My friend Chelsea said I should do this interview to tell you about all stuff I put up with. I mean I have great friends here like her, but there are a lot of people who disrespect me and try to take me down all the time.

RESEARCHER: Do they call you names when they are bothering you? Because if they do call you names, it would be really helpful to me if you would share those with me.

KENDRICK: Well yea. They call me fag, homo, little girl, you know lots of stuff like that. I'm not like that but they say I like boys and things like that.

Kendrick rattled off these names in a matter of fact voice. He reported them to me as if telling the principal. I reminded him what I was doing as a researcher and that I couldn't really punish anyone or get them to stop calling him names. To this he responded, "I know, but teachers really don't get it so I think what you're doing is really important. The teachers just really don't know how bad it is so I want you to write this story and make them see." When I went on to ask him to give me some details about the harassment that takes place in that classroom Kendrick explained further:

KENDRICK: Well a lot of kids tease me. Especially like when they were with their friends. It is mainly like when there is a bunch of popular kids together like in a crowd, 7 or 8 of them. And they are usually trying to sit together like on the seating chart they put their names down all together. They are usually always talking or chatting things stuff like that. I find when they are all together they would usually say stuff. Like someone calls me names or shoves me and I would say, no that is not right. And they always have another kid who will come and be on their side and it would be like two versions against one.

RESEARCHER: So they gang up on you?

KENDRICK: Yes.

RESEARCHER: Kendrick, nobody should be touching you. So when you said –

KENDRICK: Well there is this one kid, Rodrigo, who like sometimes... he is kind of a bully to me. He would basically walk up behind me and started to say, hey look at this and he would do this... (Here Kendrick strikes out toward my face with his fists.)

RESEARCHER: He punches at your face. Does he hit you?

KENDRICK: Not usually. That's when I say, enough doing that and poking me in the back and things like that.

RESEARCHER: Does Rodrigo do this during class?

KENDRICK: Yes, usually. Outside of class I stay away from him. But because we have such a big class he gets away with a lot there. Usually, he does this stuff when the teachers are not looking. Now we got a teacher's assistant who

watches around and stuff and helps her so she is not overly stressed with all the work and stuff that is going around the classroom and you cannot actually look and watch what was happening in class. So that really helps.

During this interview I asked Kendrick to relate to me the level of physical interactions he had with Rodrigo.

RESEARCHER: When you said you tell them enough poking, I was wondering about how much Rodrigo touches you. Does he touch you much?

KENDRICK: Yes, well the two of them do. Let's say, I would walk by, Bruno and then Rodrigo would stick his leg out like that or the other way around. He would trip me or shove me in the hallways or stuff like that.

RESEARCHER: So did you come in here and talk to Mr. Martin about this?

KENDRICK: I have come in here, to talk to Mr. Martin several times.

RESEARCHER: What has been his advice to you?

KENDRICK: Just try to stay away from him, ignore him if he calls me any names, and tell especially if he hits or stuff like that.

A large number of male student discipline referrals at Oakwood were related to baseball caps being taken and passed about in the hallways and in the classrooms. These hat games regularly resulted in fights. Interestingly however, there were very few referrals of this sort coming from the Elite Academy students. Given Kendrick's special knowledge of gendered harassment in EA I shared with him my observation about all the hat fights at Oakwood among boys. I asked him if there was much hat stealing or hat harassment of him or any other game playing like that he could tell me about.

Kendrick immediately gave me a knowing chuckle and said, “No way would anybody take my hat!” Have sat through hours and hours of discipline interviews about hat taunting I was surprised by this response. I asked how he knew that no one would take his hat. Here Kendrick sat back and in an authoritarian tone explained how things work with hats in EA.

KENDRICK: You see Ms. Murphy told us back in sixth grade that if you take somebody’s hat that means you like them. She said it a lot and would bust anyone doing it in front of everyone. It was kinda a big joke.

RESEARCHER: I don’t get it. So you got referrals for hat stealing in sixth grade and now no one steals hats?

KENDRICK: No not referrals. It was more like Ms. Murphy would just say to everyone, *Oh look who Kendrick likes. Isn’t that sweet?* You know, stuff like that.

RESEARCHER: Oh, you mean *likes* in a sort of crush way.

KENDRICK: Yea. So like if you grabbed their hat must you like them. That sort of thing.

RESEARCHER: So you think boys in your class don’t touch each other’s stuff because of this.

KENDRICK: Well people do other things, but hats were a really big deal in sixth grade so yea. I think that’s why. You don’t wanna be busted for grabbing someone’s hat in my class.

Kendrick expressed a great deal of awareness about the ins and outs of boyhood norms within the Elite Academy. He talked about the other boys in his class from a

distance, considering why they did the things they did, and he talked about the choices he made in attempts to be left alone by the other boys in the group. He expressed a great deal of confidence in his friendships and a critical awareness of the judgments placed upon him by hostile peers. “I’m not like them and I know it, I’m smarter, I don’t care about sports, and I’m not into the popular girls they follow around. I wouldn’t be like those idiots if you paid me. My adopted mom taught me to be who I am and that these guys don’t know anything about the real world.” He expressed disdain for the masculine values of those who taunted him rather than insecurity about himself or even a frustration with the Oakwood staff who were present for so much of the harassment. “It’s not the teachers’ fault. They’re too busy teaching us to be worrying about this sort of stuff. They have too many students and too much to do and anyway it’s not really their job as much as the teaching is.”

Mrs. Price’s classroom has “too many things going on.” At the close of this interview Kendrick expressed optimism that the new teacher assistant would change the atmosphere and experiences he was having in Elite Academy. “Mrs. Price has too many kids in there and too many things going on. I think now that there’s an aid to help her out things will get a lot better.”

Kendrick was correct that “too many things were going on” in Mrs. Price’s room. Mr. Clark and Mr. Martin had become aware of a great deal of student behavior referrals coming from her classroom and had assigned an assistant to help with classroom management. However in my observations following the interview it was apparent that Rodrigo and his friend Bruno still regularly seated themselves within proximity of Kendrick and taunted him with dirty looks, physical bumps and brushes, and ongoing

giggling jeers. Kendrick did not appeal to the teacher or aid and neither of them appeared to register the ongoing scuffles and argument between Kendrick and Rodrigo. When these boys did draw the attention of either adult they would admonish them both and threaten them with referrals for making too much noise.

Approximately one month after the above interview with Kendrick he would return to the office to talk about Mrs. Price's class. At this time, Kendrick, Rodrigo, and Bruno were sent down as a group and seated in the assistant principal's office again to discuss why the three of them were disrupting a class party in Mrs. Price's room.

Mr. Martin received a telephone call from Mrs. Price as the three boys walked into his office. When he got off the phone he told Bruno and Rodrigo to take isolated seats in the main office, then he began to question Kendrick. Before Kendrick spoke Mr. Martin told him that Mrs. Price had just called and told him all three boys needed referrals for ruining the class party, spilling food all over the room, and fighting. Mr. Martin then said, "Kendrick, I told you to stay away from Rodrigo. What exactly happened in there?"

Kendrick then reported that he had been attempting to stay away from Rodrigo and when he went to the desks where there was food he had gone to the opposite side to fill his plate. He said at that point Bruno blocked him as Rodrigo ran at him from the opposite direction. When he turned to run from Rodrigo he had flipped over Bruno's body and knocked over the desks with the chips and soda on them. He said Mrs. Price was very angry at all of them and told them to get out and go straight to Mr. Martin's office.

A subsequent interview with Bruno would confirm that he had “blocked” Kendrick as Rodrigo was coming at him from the opposite direction. When Mr. Martin asked Bruno why he blocked Kendrick he said, “I don’t know. It was just funny I guess. We were playing and I guess it got out of hand or something.” Bruno said Rodrigo just liked messing with Kendrick and it was funny so he’d, “just kinda stayed in the way, but I didn’t really attack him or anything you know.” Once Bruno had confirmed that he had tripped Kendrick, Mr. Martin told him he would get a level 3 detention and sent him back to class.

Finally Mr. Martin brought in Rodrigo to interview. In his interview Rodrigo denied ever attempting to tackle or attack Kendrick. He instead said Kendrick bugged him because he was looking at Rodrigo during class. “He’s always lookin’ at me and starin’ at me. I hate it. He shouldn’t be lookin’ at me like that.” Mr. Martin brought Kendrick and Rodrigo together and told Rodrigo to deny that he had tried to tackle Kendrick to his face. Rodrigo denied the events as Kendrick said, “You know what you did, you always know what you do to me.”

The impasse between the boys was left in silence and Mr. Martin told Kendrick to return to class and told Rodrigo he was suspended for the rest of the day and would have a level three suspension for the following day. Rodrigo protested to which Mr. Martin said, “I have eye witnesses that you tackled Kendrick and that you have been harassing him in class. You will stay away from him and if I hear about any retaliation we will be considering a longer suspension and other consequences.”

Rodrigo then went to the suspension desk and his parents were called to be informed that he had been “bullying” another student and had attacked this student in

class. Rodrigo had a significant student file of other school violations and Mr. Martin told his mother if Rodrigo didn't change his behavior they would need to consider whether Oakwood was the right school for Rodrigo.

Kendrick returned to class and did not report additional harassment at the hands of classmates. He was not asked if the situation changed and his experiences were not checked on after this disciplinary meeting.

Kendrick Keeps Looking At Me—Analysis

Making subordinate masculinities and marking bodies under the eyes of the teacher and the administration. In returning to the themes of this project, the analysis of the gendering Kendrick, Rodrigo and Bruno and of the professional response to the classroom incidents will again focus on five prevalent patterns in making and marking gender at Oakwood: first, I will consider the gender performances of this group of students; second, the intersectional gender identity making impact of racial, able-bodied, and social class discourses; third, the discursive void within an implicit heteronormative school setting to identify and articulate the workings of power in violence and abuse; fourth, the professional lack of expertise in addressing heteronormative incidents; and finally, the agility of a dichotomous discourse to absorb and reconfigure institutional power to reproduce dominance and subjugation.

Having covered a great deal of this analysis over the course of the first three vignettes, the analysis here will make brief references to earlier theorizing and simply focus on key moments to highlight these selected themes in the performances of these three boys and the responses of the institution.

The gendered performances of Kendrick, Rodrigo, and Bruno. This vignette like the previous knife incident exposes the social interactions marking the Other as a worthless if not hated object and as the space for articulating hegemonic masculinity. This vignette offers a view of moments of co-constructing central and marginal masculinities among the Oakwood boys. In Mrs. Price's classroom, as on the track field, Rodrigo and Bruno enact a particular homophobic violence which marks their gender as heterosexual, as controlling the physical and ideological space, and as physically and perhaps essentially violent.

In looking at the daily public performances of domination in Mrs. Price's classroom then, Rodrigo and Kendrick illustrate the need to daily perform heteronormative dominance in order to access and enact masculine power. As Kimmel explains:

Masculinity must be proved, and no sooner is it proved that it is again questioned and must be proved again – constant, relentless, unachievable, and ultimately the quest for proof becomes so meaningless that it takes on the characteristics, as Weber said, of a sport. (2006, p. 82)

The interactions between Rodrigo and Kendrick also illustrate yet another iteration of the homophobic and gendered harassment explored in the violent gendering experiences in the first case presented for this project that of Elizabeth Buchanan. Both Kendrick and Elizabeth found the classroom to be the most problematic location at Oakwood for peers' performances of domination and oppression. It is important to note that this geographic vulnerability for violent gendering took place under the supervision of two different teachers, Mrs. Price and Mrs. Campbell. And that this sort of heteronormative bullying was reported by other marginalized students under the supervision of other teachers in other classrooms. In addition the geographic hostility in

these classrooms is consistent with repeated GLSEN school safety surveys. Year after year national surveys indicate that homophobic harassment goes unchecked by the vast majority of teachers and that three of every four heteronormative non-conforming students is harassed daily at school (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006).

In the story of Kendrick then we see the production of Rodrigo as the authentic or superior male through the violation and humiliation of Kendrick. Butler's (1990) theory of performativity helps to illustrate that between Kendrick and Rodrigo there is no principal masculinity, no essential boy, both boys are performing within a constrained field of possibilities. The power embedded in the heteronormative field of play bestows higher status on the performances of Rodrigo yet the amassing of this status is illusory and temporary. Just as the marking of Kendrick must be repeated through daily violations to mark him as queer or Other. It is in the confined spaces where these discourses go unchecked and unexamined that this drama can be re-enacted day after day to maintain particular identities.

The intersectional gender identity making impact of racial, able-bodied, and social class discourses. The translucent veils of race, ability, and social class discourses lay over the heteronormative discourse in the gendering of the boys in this vignette as in the previous cases. Once again this setting is within the Elite Academy, a school with a school program noted earlier as serving a disproportionately whiter, exceptionally able, upper class clientele at Oakwood. As noted earlier, students within this program are overwhelmingly interpreted by faculty as superior to the average Oakwood student on a variety of academic and social fronts.

In this case, Rodrigo and Bruno were both ethnically Latino while Kendrick identified as white. In considering how race and ethnicity may have played out differently in the production and policing of masculinity in this case we can look back at Chad's interactions with the administration following the Muffin Top investigation. Chad too, was brought to account for his aggressions as member of the Elite Academy, however he identified as white. While that case revolved administratively around Chad's justifications for harassing Angela, in this case Mr. Martin offered no forum for Rodrigo to justify his treatment of Kendrick. Instead in this instance Rodrigo was marked as a deviant and restricted from further interactions with Kendrick. As CJ Pasco noted in her study students of color were not "given free reign" in their performances of gender and sexuality at River High (p. 48). She noted that on occasions where social class and ability among boys were parallel race stratified River High boys performances of and policing of masculinity. At Oakwood race would again and again intersect with the policing of masculine and feminine dominance. The intersections of social class and ability with gender production here are less pronounced in the given data though ever present in the lived experiences of these students.

The discursive void within an implicit heteronormative school setting to identify and articulate the workings of power in violence and abuse. At a faculty meeting I was once asked by an Oakwood teacher, "How are we supposed to see this sort of *underground* homophobia and harassment? I just don't know what I'm looking for." She stressed the word *underground* with some annoyance in her voice. Within moments another teacher added to this question explaining, "I just don't see or hear homophobic statements outside of calling kids fag or gay. I mean I can *see* boys pushing around or

insulting girls and I can say something to that. But I don't know what I'm looking for here." This self ascribed nativity about Heteronormativity came up in many teacher conversations where teachers asked me to help them see what they were missing among the students.

Kendrick's case illustrates a leak in this presentation of the faculty as unwitting witnesses to heteronormative dominance. In fact, in this case there is evidence of the conscious systemic heteronormative practices of the educators at Oakwood. As Kendrick himself explained, faculty regularly manipulated gender norms to manage public play among the students of Oakwood. Recall his explanation that students in the Elite Academy don't steal hats because that would be seen as a gay flirtation. And recall that this particular production of gayness as hat stealing was authored by his first teacher at Oakwood, Ms. Murphy.

Ms. Murphy's behavior management scheme invested in heteronormative domination in that she suggested that baseball hat stealing was indicative of a homosexual crush. On another occasion Mr. Martin curbed heterosexual harassment on one occasion by suggesting that the perhaps the aggressor was actually flirting with another boy. Mr. Bench was notorious for using the construction of gender to motivate and shame students in the physical education arena. All across Oakwood, teachers applied a working knowledge of heteronormativity to the management of the "boys" and "girls" of the community. Yet even as the faculty successfully manipulated these discourses they continued to operate unconscious of the violence and abuse embedded within their own professional practices.

Given the oblivious interpretations of their own educational practices it is unsurprising that there is a lack of a professional discourse to register and respond to student heteronormativity. Unfortunately the claim, “I don’t know what I’m looking for” reveals an underlying truth at Oakwood. Before a teacher can interpret what is happening between Rodrigo and Kendrick, what is happening to Elizabeth, what The Mean Girls are doing in the cafeteria, they must first be aware of their personal investments in heteronormative discourse. The professional investments identified in these vignettes are simplistic and incremental whereas the structural investments in heteronormativity framing the overall field of education are vast and overwhelming (Blount & Anahita, 2004; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Lugg, 2003; Thorne, 2004).

The professional lack of expertise in addressing heteronormative incidents.

Rodrigo’s physical altercations and skirmishes with Kendrick were known by the faculty according to Mr. Martin, Mrs. Price, and Kendrick himself. Like Elizabeth, Kendrick initially complained to Mrs. Price about Rodrigo. Mrs. Price responded to him with professional complaints. According to Kendrick Mrs. Price explained to him, “there are too many students in this class, I need an aid to see what’s going on, I am too busy with the new curriculum they assigned me.” I too pointed out to her after several class observations that Rodrigo was physically and verbally harassing Kendrick. She gave me the same responses with the added caveat, “It’s not like I didn’t know about this. That’s why I wanted Kendrick to do your interview. He’s the one I was talking about the first time you came in and asked for interview volunteers. I thought maybe you could help him.”

Kendrick also took his concerns and complaints to Mr. Martin who told him to stay away from Rodrigo and to “stop looking at him.” This second command particularly impacted Kendrick who reported on the day that he was tackled, “I wasn’t looking at him. I swear I never looked at him at all.” Mr. Martin did tell Rodrigo to let him know in the future, “if things got out of hand.” Yet the day he gave Kendrick these instructions, the boy was reporting to him that Rodrigo had dumped him out of his chair and “tripped over him” deliberately stepping on him as he lay on the floor. The boundaries of “out of hand” were then somewhat unclear to Kendrick who did not report another incident to Mr. Martin until the day he Rodrigo and Bruno were sent to the office.

Mrs. Price and Mr. Martin’s inability to address the daily harassment of Kendrick had an effect on the production of both dominant and marginalized masculinity within Mrs. Price’s classroom. Each day that Rodrigo’s actions were openly observed and unchecked necessitated another day of these same actions on his part. Simply being Rodrigo or any other dominant male in this room came to require homophobic harassment to articulate taking up the institutional power left vacant by the silent teacher. In addition, Mrs. Price’s reading of Kendrick as the student in need of counseling maintained a presumption that marginalized masculinities somehow initiate violence. Mary Louise Rasmussen’s (2006) work *Becoming Subjects* closely analyzed this subject production of students like Kendrick, students in the margins, as controlling and causing heteronormativity. Mrs. Price’s desire to treat Kendrick as the problem being rather than addressing the unhealthy environment exhibited this professional tendency and the manner in which it simply reproduces the heteronormative environment.

Mr. Martin's initial professional advice to self manage a heteronormative classroom, along with the direction to "stop looking at" or stop causing abuse, silenced Kendrick for some time, although the boy did not appear to internalize these instructions. As professional educators neither Mr. Martin, nor Mrs. Price considered addressing Rodrigo's behavior until the final altercation identified in this story.

The systemic failure to articulate a democratic gender standard or track, record, and transmit knowledge of this gendering process that would render it visible. Rodrigo, like his predecessors in these cases, was cited in writing with "bullying" Kendrick. The gendered and homophobic nature of his violations against Kendrick was not put into the documentation nor was it formally addressed to Mrs. Price or the other Oakwood faculty. Kendrick was not informed that Rodrigo was violating his rights according to the district harassment and bias policy. The institutional knowledge reproduced in this case was generic and would not render these repetitive events of violence visible as the predictable pattern of Heteronormativity they were in Mrs. Price's classroom.

Oakwood faculty and administration prided themselves on working as a team to address widespread and persistent behavior problems in the school. As Mr. Martin explained, "We have an advanced system for tracking behavior problems at Oakwood. With it we can look at violations, target a specific behavior or a specific location in the school, and modify what is happening between our students." On another occasion Mr. Clark told me about a PBS³⁶ initiative targeting running in the courtyard. "We saw a persistent pattern of kids running through the courtyard and people were getting hurt and

³⁶ PBS is the Positive Behavioral Support system referenced in greater detail earlier in this chapter. Student behavior discussions at Oakwood frequently drifted into professional PBS terms and jargon.

it was chaotic. So we worked as a team with faculty assigned to the courtyard every day writing citations. We saw a complete change within two days.”

Given the intellectual and professional investment of the Oakwood administration in this social behavior modification system I suggested the faculty examine the “bullying” patterns at Oakwood. Yet in considering the options at Oakwood for maintaining records disciplinary issues Mr. Martin found, to his surprise, that simply tracking numbers of referrals for bias and harassment was not particularly informative in relation to Kendrick’s experiences. While behavior violations were recorded and tracked through an electronic data system with fields for detailed information, there was no field to indicate what the term harassment stood for on a referral. Therefore when student harassment incidents were centered on issues of race it was called harassment, when there were incidents about ethnicity and citizenship these too were called harassment, and when the word “fag” was central it was also called bullying or harassment. In fact a great deal of these incidents also were marked as fighting, and entered into the system as fights or weapons violations.

The hand written referral did have a blank space for a written narrative. Mr. Martin noted that he could add a textual note there that this harassment was homophobic in nature to make a record of that fact. I then asked if there would be a means then of pulling up data from the text field to see all of the homophobic instances at Oakwood. He explained that the written content was not entered into the database; it was simply placed in the student’s file. I asked him how often he made such notes, and what the purpose of these student files was.

MR. MARTIN: I usually just jot short notes for myself so I'll know what I'm dealing with next time around. If there's racist language or homophobic language used I usually write that down.

RESEARCHER: So do you have a guess how many times that has happened this year?

MR. MARTIN: This year, well I'd hate to guess but I'm thinking there are two or three situations that come to mind that were all about someone being gay. And race, I don't know, I deal with it a lot but I really don't know.

RESEARCHER: So when you use PBS to target behaviors or look at patterns could you pull up these fighting and harassment patterns and look at them perhaps by gender or by location to see if the teachers had any ideas about what is happening at Oakwood.

MR. MARTIN: I guess we could but we don't really do reports like that very often. The computer system is complicated and only one person does the data entry and knows how to do the reports.

RESEARCHER: So when do you mainly use the computer system and the reports and written referrals.

MR. MARTIN: Oh, I always pull up a full report for expulsion hearings.

RESEARCHER: A full report?

MR. MARTIN: A student report

Here, then, in the midst of educational systems and practices for gathering data to disclose and address unwanted social interactions, there was no means to actually gather data on even the few incidents Mr. Martin identified as heteronormative. Further, the

social tracking system had in effect become simply another tool in assigning individual authorship and accountability to enacting pervasive normative discourses. In other words, PBS and the referral system were used as elaborate means to provide overwhelming evidence that students like Rodrigo, Marcos, and Jackson were individually criminal by Oakwood standards. These systems and practices were not a means through which one could track the heteronormative patterns of violence enacted by all three boys. Therefore the only knowledge produced through these practices was one of pathologizing particular individuals while avoiding tracking or accruing any knowledge of the social environments in which their daily harassment persisted day after day.

Vignette 5: “Outing” Bobby

“Outing” Bobby—The Story

Rumors that Timothy Is gay. Early on in the school year a story circulated among the Oakwood faculty about an eighth grade boy named Timothy who was rumored to be coming to terms with his sexuality. As the story was pass along at the photocopier and in the corridors of Oakwood, it was whispered that Timothy had made a confessional video of himself over the summer and had posted it to YouTube. In the video he had talked about his sexuality and announced that he was “coming out of the closet.” No one on faculty reported seeing the video; rather some teachers and the counselor were told about the alleged video by informant classmates who were worried about Timothy. Because of the nature of my research both teachers and faculty members told me rumors they had heard about Timothy, but when I asked if they had spoken to either Timothy or his parents the answer was consistently no. And then one day a faculty

member, Ms. Bailey came to me to share that his mother had come to her for resources and she didn't know what to offer her.

Ms. Bailey told me how neither she nor his mother was sure Timothy knew what he was doing or if he was gay. "I mean, he's young and experimenting. And I'm sure he didn't know what would happen when he posted that video." Ms. Bailey asked me if I could get her some resources on LGBTQ youth and families that she could give his mother if it ever came up again. I went directly to the bookstore and bought her some books written for parents and I got her educational materials for herself as well. When I delivered the purchases the next day, she explained that she "didn't want to push anything on his mother or suggest that I think he's gay." So for the present time she planned to wait and see what came of the situation and hold on to the resources until she needed them.

A former teacher of Timothy's, Ms. Brown, heard the rumors about the YouTube video and dropped in to Mr. Martin's office to reminisce about how mercilessly Timothy had been targeted for bullying in the sixth and seventh grade. Since this rumor has sprung up about the *coming out video* she had been thinking back on how his Timothy's sister had always come to his defense in seventh grade, and how perhaps that had only made matters worse. She wondered if having such a strong sister might have caused some of his confusion. As time went on few other teachers began to openly speculate about Timothy's sexual orientation.

Timothy's history as a victim of bullying. Timothy was a very friendly boy with a mop of reddish hair and rosy pink cheeks. He was a successful student in the Elite Academy and by the seventh grade he stood out among the boys for his continued

academic investment as his male peers were beginning to reject school success. In the spring of the seventh grade Timothy had been at the center of a series of bullying incidents in which he was the target. Teachers and administrators recounted stories of a group of boys that was always at odds with Timothy. On one notorious occasion his EA class was taking a state exam online. According to Ms. Brown and Mr. Martin, things between Timothy and his peers had come to a head the previous spring during statewide testing. As the two recalled, Timothy was suspended during the state test for shutting down the internet in the middle of the exam.

My field notes from that time indicated that there was a conflict between Timothy and three of the other boys in the class during a state test. On that day the EA students were seated in rows in a computer lab and the teacher had limited visual contact with all of them. According to all accounts three boys Cameron, Jacob, and Ethan took Timothy's binder, a daily activity, and were passing it around the room under the tables. At the same time they were taunting him by calling him "little sister" and "little girl" and suggesting that he get his big sister to save him. Ms. Brown was unaware of any of this activity and explained that she was, "really busy and focused on getting each students test up and running." At one point the binder was passed under the table near Timothy and he crawled under his table top to grab it. Here accounts differ, either he accidentally pulled apart the Ethernet connection while crawling under the table or he intentionally disabled the internet out of frustration and spite. With the internet disabled, Ms. Brown got involved in the dispute and sent all four boys to the office with referrals. Ultimately Timothy was "held accountable" for shutting down the internet and suspended for one day.

A new year and Timothy makes a fresh start by “outing” a classmate named Bobby. Now in his eighth grade year at Oakwood, Timothy was still struggling socially and the YouTube rumor simply served as a reminder. But as time passed and the day to day excitement of middle school persisted, ultimately the faculty forgot about the rumors surrounding Timothy. As fall went on, Timothy’s name dropped from faculty discussions until in late November. And here when Timothy’s name came back to the fore there were once again concerns about sexuality. However this time it seemed Timothy had used the internet in order to “come out” for someone else. Mr. Clark was called by a parent to complain that Timothy had posted a YouTube video to “out” his former best friend Joey. As the principal explained the event to me:

MR. CLARK: You remember about that rumor where that boy Timothy had sort of tried to come out as being gay in a YouTube video. It seems like when he realized how his friends were going to react to that, he then made a really slanderous, awful YouTube video about sort of the lowest kid in the class in terms of status Bobby Baker. So he had taken on all that abuse. He became the brunt of all of this harassment and then he did it to another kid. And of course that kid stopped coming to school, and now since I’ve been interviewing and working with these parents, this name calling and harassment and exclusion had gone on with the boys and the girls in the EA all the way back to kindergarten.

Bobby, the subject of Timothy’s video, was among the physically smallest and least distinct boys in Timothy’s EA cohort. Since the earliest grades Joey and Timothy had been best friends as the boys were enrolled in this magnet program together

following kindergarten. At the end of sixth grade there followed a predicted gendered exodus of several boys from the Elite Academy. This gender shift in the program began with several boys convincing their parents they didn't want to be in the advanced program any more. Ms. Brown explained this trend with this theory, "In middle school boys become more and more focused on sports and preparing to compete for high school sports positions and it is just no longer cool for a boy to spend so much time on school work and good grades."

Boyhood in the Elite Academy. By seventh grade the boys remaining within this magnet program were dividing into two distinct academic camps, those who did school work and got good grades, and those who clearly and visibly did not. As Ms. Fleming noted, "Cameron was the perfect example of the kind of boy who's still in the EA because his mother's won't let him drop out. He refuses to do homework and disrupt class all the time. He just passes classes and I would love to move him out if Mr. Martin would let me."

By the eighth grade year, Bobby and Timothy were two of the very few academically willing boys left in their section of the Elite Academy. As one of the teacher in the program, Mr. Green explained, "We have a problem keeping boys challenged in this program. I think it really has to do with homework and sports commitments. If they want to play in high school sports they are really spending a lot of time doing sports outside of school and they just don't have the time for the work load." Mr. Green did acknowledge that most of the girls in the EA also belong to athletic teams, he explained, "Girls see things differently. They are willing to do the work and stay on the team."

In any case, in the winter of his eighth grade year it appeared Timothy wished to join the latter group of anti-academic boys. His teachers noted that he had stopped doing homework and Ms. Fleming described him as a changed boy who was disruptive and disrespectful in class. “He is much more popular now, I admit. He seems to be surrounded by friends like never before.”

In the days following the accusation that Timothy made a video about Bobby, Mr. Clark gained access to the video. Mrs. Baker’s (Bobby’s mother) account of the video did not do it justice according to Mr. Clark. “This was really cruel. He mocked Bobby’s voice, he laced his comments with details about who Bobby was interested in and how he acted during class. It was like he was trying to be a comedian but with the darkest of humor.”

Timothy’s confession. When Mr. Clark brought Timothy in to question him about the video the boy immediately acknowledged that he had done exactly what he had been accused of doing. “Yea, I made that video about Joey and posted it onto YouTube. But I didn’t do it on a school computer so I don’t know why I’m in the office about it.” Given the quick confession, Mr. Clark spent the majority of the time in this interview trying to get Timothy to acknowledge there was something wrong with making the video, but Timothy stuck to his “just a joke” response throughout the twenty minute conversation.

Following the interview Mr. Clark registered a deep concern about Timothy’s lack of admission that there was anything wrong with his actions.

MR. CLARK: What was really disturbing to me was that he (Timothy) just didn’t seem to care that he was caught. He was like, “*Yea I did it. It was just a joke*”

and it was really funny.” He refused to acknowledge that his actions were homophobic and kept saying, *“It was just a joke, everyone knew it was a joke.”* He said Bobby should have known it was a joke and it was his own fault for overreacting so now people think something.

RESEARCHER: Did you ask Timothy about the earlier rumors that he was the target of homophobic harassment.

MR. CLARK: I did and I was hoping that would get him thinking about how badly he’d felt. But when I brought that up he just laughed and said, *“People say that kind of stuff all the time. I know it’s just a joke, everybody knows it’s a joke.”* And the thing is, I couldn’t really figure out what else to say. People had said that kind of stuff about him all the time. It was true, but so bizarre to me that he wouldn’t see it as hurtful or at all wrong to do.

As Timothy offered a confession Mr. Clark saw little reason to interview all of Joey’s classmates which he felt might further humiliate the boy. Timothy was disciplined and Bobby returned to school and to that class the following week. The boys remained in the same class and saw each other daily for the remainder of the school year. There was no further intentional contact between the school faculty and either boy’s parents or either boy following the suspension. Some staff members engaged in small conversations and gossip about this YouTube incident, but there was no formal announcement to staff and no professional conversation among the teachers about the details surrounding this cyber bullying incident.

“Outing” Bobby—Analysis

Making subordinate masculinities and marking bodies and institutional responses. The story of Timothy and Bobby follows on the heels of the analysis of the heteronormative Othering of Kendrick in Mrs. Price’s classroom. The Othering events in this vignette however took place in Mrs. Fleming and Mrs. Brown’s classrooms. In follow up discussions all three of these teachers revealed to me that they were unaware of any of these situations aside from the limited awareness they each had of the social tensions within their own classrooms.

This story again highlights the unchecked heteronormative discourse among Oakwood students and the moments in which it persists under the supervision and authority of faculty as well as those moments in which heteronormativity intersects with disciplinary discourses.

Here the analysis of Timothy and Bobby and of the professional response to the YouTube incidents will again focus on five prevalent patterns in making and marking gender at Oakwood: first, the Othering of Timothy and Bobby; second, the intersectional gender identity making impact of racial, able-bodied, and social class discourses; third, the discursive void within an implicit heteronormative school setting to identify and articulate the workings of power in violence and abuse; and fourth, the professional lack of expertise in addressing heteronormative incidents, and a systemic failure to articulate a democratic gender standard or track, record, and transmit knowledge of this gendering process that would render it visible.

Having covered a great deal of this analysis over the course of the earlier vignettes, the analysis here will make brief references to earlier theorizing and simply

focus on key moments to highlight these selected themes in the performances of these three boys and the responses of the institution.

The gendered performances and Othering of Timothy and Bobby. This vignette offers a window into the link between the patriarchal gender discourse of the “sissy” marking of failed masculinity and the heteronormative gay baiting “fag discourse” of this same gender failure as tightly related gendering practices of Othering and reproducing hegemonic masculinity.

Barry Thorne (1993) mapped the array of “sissy” discourses in her observations of children at school.

When applied to boys, “sissy” conveys not only immaturity but also gender and sexual deviance. Kids use the term and its loose array of synonyms (girl, fag, faggot, wimp, and sometimes nerd) to label boys who seem effeminate in dress and mannerisms, who avoid or perform poorly at sports, and/or who frequently play with girls. (p. 116)

In the case of Timothy, his relationship with his sister was considered dubious by both his peers as well as members of the faculty. Mrs. Brown actually suggested that his relationship with his sister was perhaps causing his conflicts with male students in her class. Timothy was marked by Cameron and other boys as a female during the time he was posting an online video about his sexual orientation. Students who reported this video to the faculty were concerned because the content appeared related to increased harassment of Timothy during the fall of 2008.

Although Timothy did not report being harassed as gay, during the disciplinary meetings regarding his attack on Bobby, Timothy’s mother made repeated claims that he too had been the ongoing target of anti-gay humor and harassment. C. J. Pasco’s (2007)

research mapped the fluidity of what she called “fag discourse” in gendering the boys at River High.

Becoming a fag has as much to do with failing at the masculine task of competence, heterosexual prowess, and strength or in any way revealing weakness or femininity as it does with a sexual identity. This fluidity of the fag identity is what makes the specter of the fag such a powerful disciplinary mechanism. It is fluid enough that boys police their behaviors out of fear of having the fag identity permanently adhere and definite enough so that boys recognize a fag behavior and strive to avoid it. (p. 54)

Timothy was not only marked as a sissy and a fag by Cameron and other dominant boys in the EA, but he then took up these same discourses to remake himself as a “normal” boy by marking Bobby as the fag. The performative gendering of Timothy moved him from one end to the other along the spectrum of heteronormative masculinity. The boy once marked as the Other became the boy marking and dominating a *homo*. Reports of Timothy’s newfound popularity and of Bobby’s humiliation and refusal to attend school highlight what Pasco noted as the fluidity of the fag specter. The performance of mockery, violation and repulsion of another “sissy” Bobby, bought Timothy the masculine credibility he desired to assume the mantle of dominant gender culture.

The intersectional gender identity making impact of racial, able-bodied, and social class discourses. Here the intersectional analysis will be curtailed as this fifth vignette represents a repetition of the systemic patterns of privileging dominant social performances among Elite Academy students. Timothy, Cameron, Bobby, and the other students involved in these gendering vignettes are identified as white, middle class, gifted students. In normalizing the heteronormative “horseplay” of Cameron in the ongoing harassment of Timothy, we see another moment in which white masculinities are

presumed to define the appropriate boundaries of masculine aggression and policing.

Cultural theorist David Savran (1998) notes in his work, *Taking it like a Man*, how white masculinity is constructed as the site for producing violence and for absorbing violence.

The harassment of Timothy by Cameron then is invisible in the computer lab incident as Cameron is quite simply being a boy and Timothy is expected to absorb this harassment to be read as a normal boy as well. Later Timothy simply reproduces this same dance of violence in relation to Bobby at which point he finds it impossible to comprehend or agree with Mr. Clark's assessment that there is anything socially or morally wrong with his playful attack on Bobby.

As in earlier stories among EA students, a variety of parents were brought into the conversations about boyhood and harassment in this case. These mothers were linked through social class circles of the Elite Academy and the eight year history of actively participating in the educational program meant that they and their children "did school" as opposed to lower social class students and families who more often had school "done to them" (Lareau, 2003). This ability to navigate and manage the schools systems surly intersected with productions of dominant and marginalized masculinities within the management of these incidents at Oakwood.

The discursive void within an implicit heteronormative school setting to identify and articulate the workings of power in violence and abuse. A variety of moments within this narrative point to the missing discourse among educators to identify and interrupt heteronormative domination within their classrooms and within the broader school setting. In the case of the marking of Timothy as a deviant, there were a number of witnesses who noted all of the gendered harassment Timothy faced in his seventh grade

year. Yet when Mrs. Brown and other EA teachers were asked about the sexist and gendered dominating behavior of Cameron and other boys within their programs, they each fell into a loosely theorized developmental discourse related to gender, adolescence, and social activities. Mrs. Brown's interpretation could be categorized as "boys will be boys" essentialism which offered explanatory power over the heteronormative harassment, "They're not bad kids, you have to understand it's just a game to them and Timothy just keeps playing into it."

In fact Mrs. Brown, Mr. Green, and Mr. Martin all operated from theories of boyhood and adolescence framed within a context of sports, athleticism, and competition (Messner, 2002c). Mr. Green explained the "horseplay" of boyhood in this way, "They are hitting puberty, they are getting all these new urges and surges of testosterone, they just have so much going on physically. They are just bound to bounce off one another. I think that's why sports matter so much at this point. Sports can be the deciding factor because they fit so well with where these boys are at."

Nancy Leskos (2001) genealogy of the cultural construction of adolescence explored the "re-masculinizing" of adolescence through sports and competition (Messner, 2002c). Like Savran, Lesko notes the use of sports and competition to map masculinity marking boyhood as the domination of masculinity on weak Others, where "real" boys can take it as well as dish it out (p. 162). This discourse of essentialist male development of course masks the variation among boys as noted earlier in Thorne's work. This educational ideology about boyhood naturalizes particular masculine performances considering the workings of power and violence natural outcomes of adolescence rather than socially produced products of privileging physical domination and competition.

The professional lack of expertise in addressing heteronormative incidents. The two moments I will review here are the suspension of Timothy for unplugging the internet, and Timothy's second suspension for cyber bullying Bobby. I point to these moments not to consider the penalties or the degree of severity of the penalties, but rather to highlight the student actions that were policed and those that were ignored and thereby sanctioned.

On the first occasion the disciplinary emphasis of the educators was placed on determining who was physically responsible for the computer shutdown. As in the earlier knife incident, this investigation focused on material objects and obtaining evidence and proof of mischief. As with the zero tolerance criminology discourse of the knife incident which overtook any exploration or analysis of the sexual and gendered harassment, during the interviews following the computer lab shut down Mr. Martin focused the discussion on the elements of this moment that marked a clear violation of a concise school policy. Once again a technocratic discourse of policy, property, and discipline subsumed the conversations between Mr. Martin and students as well as Mr. Martin and Mrs. Brown. "Shutting down the computer lab during a state test automatically failed every student in the class. This was not the appropriate way to deal with your problems with Cameron. Now every one of your classmates has a failed state test grade on his record. You didn't think. You had no right. It was disrespectful and irresponsible."

Even as the harassment details of preceding events in the lab along with the confirmed history of heteronormative harassment were trickling into the interviews, Mr. Martin and Mrs. Brown maintained a focus on the secondary violation. At the close of this highly public battle between Timothy and his tormentors the school placed sanctions

on Timothy; the target of the harassment, Mrs. Brown was left to continue loosely supervising her classroom, and Cameron and his peers presumed their practices of leveraging male power were normal and necessary in this classroom.

Over the course of the next several months, Timothy modified his performance of masculinity to fall in line with the actions of the Cameron's of the Elite Academy. As noted earlier in this analysis achieving this new status required a vulnerable body onto which Timothy could articulate his heterosexual and physical dominance. In marking Bobby as the Other Timothy temporarily achieved the gender status of hegemonic masculinity. In this turning of the tables for Timothy, Bobby, and their peers a moment opened into the workings of gender, sexuality, and power. For a short period of time everyone, students, parents, and faculty were talking about the violence of heteronormativity while at the same time the lack of a professional language to critically examine power and difference moved this conversations again and again to reproduce the binary of straight over gay and masculine over feminine.

Marking Bobby as gay was repeatedly unintentionally suggested to be a cruel and dehumanizing activity by the faculty involved in this situation. The gay identity then was marked as inherently flawed, tragic, and undesirable. As Mr. Clark said to Timothy, "You of all people should know how much damage is done when everyone starts spreading rumors that someone is gay." Mr. Clark voiced what Eric Rofes' (Rofes, 2004) called the *Martyr-Target-Victim* narrative of the gay subject. This heteronormative discourse of school bullying presents the queer subject, particularly the male queer subject as inherently and tragically flawed in contrast to the heterosexual being (Rasmussen, 2006).

This pathologizing discourse of a gay subject overtook all of the professional conversations that directly addressed the sexual orientation politics of the YouTube incident. As opposed to focusing on the actions as inappropriate domination or attack, the faculty at this point in time considered and damning experience of being marked as gay in assigning discipline. In the case of Timothy this was an ironic twist in the discourse given the lack of consideration that was given to his experiences of marginalization in the earlier computer lab incident.

The systemic failure to articulate a democratic gender standard or track, record, and transmit knowledge of this gendering process that would render it visible. As in each earlier vignette there was a minimal and vague institutional history of sexual and gender marginalization established as a result of the events which took place surrounding the gendering of Timothy. Word of mouth and rumors among faculty transmitted some awareness of the YouTube video along with speculation about how earlier “bullying” may have provoked this performance on the part of Timothy. As Ms. Bailey suggested, “It just seems like he took so much abuse and then turned around and did it to someone else. It’s really sad.”

Sad or reproductive, Timothy did “take” the heteronormative abuse of his community and then reproduce that same abuse on another peer. And the faculty failed to go beyond a basic reading of this give and take abuse. The teachers and administrators closest to these events remained committed to protecting students from being marked as gay, rather than destabilizing the presumptive power of heterosexuality. Teachers outside of these events remained largely unaware of these happenings and gained no insights

either from the management of this series of conflicts or from comparing the events in this class to the events taking place in their own classrooms.

When on various occasions I discussed comparing events from different classrooms with Mrs. Fleming, Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Campbell, Mrs. Price, and Mr. Green each teacher expressed unfamiliarity with the situations from other classrooms. “Oh, I never heard anything about that,” was Mrs. Campbell’s response when I suggested that in many ways Elizabeth and Timothy had similar experiences of gender harassment. At each moment I attempted to make connections or note patterns related to the gendering practices at Oakwood, teachers responded with this unfamiliarity as well as little interest in pursuing knowledge of student experiences outside of their jurisdiction. As Mrs. Price put it, “I can’t even keep track of all the fights and dramas among my own students. I don’t really have time to be thinking about what’s going on in Mr. Green’s classroom.” This willful professional barrier against information complemented the administrative authoritarian propriety over the same information which was generally framed as “protecting student confidentiality.” Therefore, the faculty successfully avoided collaborative knowledge of heteronormative violence taking place throughout the school.

Vignette 6: Forged Gay Love Notes

Forged Gay Love Notes—The Story

There were really two major incidents of homophobia that I was aware of this year. The both involved the Elite Academy kids. The first you probably remember was around that YouTube video Timothy made. And the second time around, the first indication I had that there was a problem was when a parent came forward at the end of a parent meeting and let me know that her son Teddy have been given a note in class that was reported to be... like gay insults.

~Mr. Clark recalls an incident involving forged gay love notes

Jerrod and Teddy sitting in a tree. This is the story about a game which involved passing notes in class. Note passing, particularly crush note passing is a timeless element of middle school. Having notes leaked, or discovered, or read aloud by a teacher, as well as discovering a hurtful or embarrassing note were common events at Oakwood. What made this event different was that the crushes, the secret messages were supposedly between two boys who were best friends.

This situation was brought to the principal's attention in mid-spring. Julia Jones, the very upset mother of Jerrod Jones arrived at the school one day to ask Mr. Clark what he planned to do about the vicious note passing game that was going on in her son's class. According to Mrs. Jones, Jerrod was given a note that was allegedly written by his best friend Teddy Thompson. The note claimed Teddy and Jerrod were dating and pledged Teddy's love to Jerrod.

She informed Mr. Clark that she and Jerrod had already spoken with Teddy and his mother and discovered that Teddy had been given similar notes from Jerrod. In subsequent telephone conversation with a few other mothers from the class they discovered that this game marking Teddy and Jerrod as a gay couple had been going on for some time.

Mrs. Jones told Mr. Clark he would be hearing from other parents within the day and that they all wanted to know what kind of supervision could be going on at Oakwood that would allow such chaos and character attacks to take place. Once again this peer conflict had arisen within the Elite Academy where the students and families had been tracked together over the boys' entire school careers. Because of the long history among

the families of this program, concerns as well as rumors among the parents generally traveled much faster than among the remainder of the Oakwood community.

Over the course of the next few days a variety of parents met with Mr. Clark and others among the administration to discuss the events taking place in Jerrod and Teddy's class. According to the parents who came forward, a small group of seventh grade boys had begun a note passing campaign in which Jerrod and Teddy were portrayed as a gay couple. A student named Samuel was presented as the "ringleader" in this campaign to queer the boys. Mrs. Jones, among others claimed that at this point in time nearly all the students in the class were teasing the boys and acting as if they were a couple. All of the parents who came to school or called to discuss these events with Mr. Clark had been contacted by Mrs. Jones. These parents spoke of concern about the culture of the class and offered individual accounts of a seven year history of bullying and harassment in the arenas of school, sports, and Boy Scouts among the boys in this class.

Interpretations of the rumor. After a series of discussions with parents the boys Mr. Clark saw as at center of this campaign, Jerrod and Teddy, were called in to discuss the topic. Both boys were white, smaller than average sized, and non-descript in appearance. The boys spoke to with Mr. Clark together and both took a more mature tone than was generally noted in their peers. Each boy confirmed to Mr. Clark that notes had been passed about them being gay. Teddy reported that this "ridiculous game" had been going on for a few weeks, but that he hadn't thought it was worth reporting until Mrs. Jones convinced him he needed to do so in order to protect other kids.

Mr. Clark recalled interviewing the two boys at the center of this controversy:

We followed up on all the parent complaints by interviewing the two boys who had the notes written about them and they were pretty comfortable talking about

it, and that part went well. I thought in that context we were clear in terms of acknowledging what have been done to them was wrong. And they were correct to report it and what they said which I thought was really good, was, “well, it is not as if we mind being called gays, it’s just that we aren’t gay.” I was glad to hear that to these two kids it did not matter. But of course that was not the issue. I remember them saying, “We are fine, we are strong, but if these guys are doing it to other kids it needs to be stopped.” Whether they really felt that or not they sort of understood that this conduct was bad even if they did not feel that upset by it.

Jerrod and Teddy were in agreement that these events were trivial and that thought the whole thing was senseless, and didn’t really bother them. Jerrod explained, “We’re strong, we’re smart, we know nobody’s going to believe it anyway. We really don’t care about these stupid lies.” But Jerrod’s mom had insisted that it was the boys’ responsibility to tell the school principal in order to protect weaker kids who might “not be able to handle” this sort of ridicule. The boys confirmed that they believed Samuel was the root of these activities, but noted that most of the kids in the class were involved in the jokes.

Jerrod and Teddy’s self assessment of their heterosexual credentials was however different from that of their peers. When Mr. Clark interviewed other students from the class to investigate the production of this rumor a large number of students both believed and admitted to repeating the rumors that these boys were in fact gay or at a minimum “acted gay.”

MR. CLARK: When this investigation started I dug and dug and dug, what I found out was that the victims who had originally come forward to complain to me are in a mid-range sort of social status group. They are non-traditional boys in interest and voice and stuff like that. They must have done at least a couple of things that for whatever reason made people willing to call them gay and see them as being different.

The perpetrators of that particular harassment are really lower status in the Academic Elite program, more working class, and Christian boys. They, these less popular boys, who perpetrated this on the other two have apparently been the butt of jokes and derogatory comments by everyone else who in the AE who are higher status, progressive, nondenominational kind of folks all along. It seems everyone agrees that these boys have been made fun of for their religious practices for years.

Samuel's revenge for past religious harassment. The persecuted Christian among the class who had supposedly exposed Jerrod and Teddy as homosexuals was a boy named Samuel. Samuel, like Teddy in the last case discussed, was somewhat of an unexpected player when it came to dominating classmates at Oakwood. Samuel was a small, bookish, white boy with little athletic standing. Samuel and his group of friends were not particularly popular boys at Oakwood within or outside of the Elite Academy. Mr. Green among others registered surprise that Samuel would be believed or could generate such a pervasive rumor within the class as he was "kind of invisible" in class discussions and class activities. When Samuel was called in to discuss the situation he explained that the notes were written to bring these two boys "back down to size" in the eyes of the other kids.

Mr. Clark recalled difficulty getting those who had created the rumors to acknowledge their actions:

MR. CLARK: The next level of that was interviewing the perpetrators (*including Samuel*) and the witnesses to find out when it happened and confirm that the boys' original story was true. Now that took some time. Because some of the

perpetrators were not willing to give up the information right away and we had to get witnesses and put kids in different rooms. It took a little time to get all of the kids to come forward with the truth.

During the latter interviews Samuel denied events for as long as possible and then spent a good deal of time listing off Jerrod and Teddy's offenses toward him and his friends, particularly offensive to Samuel was their disrespect for his Christian faith and practices. He said Jerrod and Teddy, as well as other class members had harassed him far more than anything he had done to them. And he explained his actions, the love notes, were obviously a joke because everyone knew that the boys weren't really in a relationship. He emphasized that he wouldn't care if they were gay, but if they were he wouldn't have made the joke. He repeatedly suggested that this joke was funny because they weren't gay. Mr. Clark later reflected on the marginal positions of Samuel's peer group:

MR. CLARK: During interviews these boys (*Samuel and his friends*) they listed incident after incident where they had been targeted by other people in the class. And then when I spoke to their parents they also wanted to talk all about this long history of EA kids making fun of their boys for believing that evolution did not happen and for their parents not allowing them to come to Sex Ed classes and things like that. So for years, according to their parents, these boys had been kind of pointed at and made fun of in the Elite Academy.

The crowd looks on. At the time of these events there were a small pool of seventh grade AE parents and teachers checking in with the principal daily from a variety of vantage points, there were those claiming Samuel and his friends and family were

“homophobes,” and those claiming Jerrod and Teddy’s crowd were “liberals.” And then of course there was that much larger portion of the class who were simply watching these events unfold, speculating on the sexuality of Jerrod and Teddy, and only marginally including Samuel and his friends into the social context of the class.

MR. CLARK: So what we had here have were two lower status groups of boys who had gone after each other while this other kind of donut around them, the rest of the class kind of reveled in all of this homophobic harassment at some level. Because there were all these other kids that clearly know what is going on and from everything I could tell had helped – maybe they even helped prompt it, so– and really I am still more worried about the donut.

I’ve had to spend so much time dealing with the two groups but there are 35 other kids who really created that condition and there are their parents who created that condition and then everything just blew up.

Finally with Samuel’s group clearly identified as being at the center of this plot to defame these two boys by painting them as gay lovers the administration opted to discipline these boys for spreading a malicious rumor. And at this point, Samuel’s parents, as well as the parents of the other boys involved in the note writing arrived at the school together to oppose any sort of discipline as a result of this situation.

Discipline? As the principal recalls, “Then there were more individual meetings, this time with the parents of other kids involved in the note passing who said, things like, *I remember things like this going on in middle school. I know my kid should not have been a part of that but the boys who got notes written about them are a couple of jerks.*

They sort of had it coming. I mean I had several parents tell me they really didn't think this was a very big deal and that they thought I was getting carried away with this topic.”

This small group of parents rejected the notion that the actions of their sons might be disciplined for being part of the overall homophobic note passing game. Mr. Clark and his staff were given stories of harassment and exclusion of EA students from second and third grade slumber parties and soccer teams. Claims of homophobic bias were countered with claims of Christian religious bias and tempers were flaring.

After a series of parent meetings and an inability to find any clear consensus on a path out of this situation, the administration decided to hold a parent meeting with the entire Elite Academy parent body to discuss what Mr. Clark now considered a pervasive problem with “bullying and social exclusion” in the Elite Academy. After all, although the parents, students, and other teachers were not generally aware, the administration had addressed a large number of bullying, exclusion, and harassment events within the Elite Academy over the course of the year. And with parents across the board suggesting their child had been a previous target of this harassment, Mr. Clark thought the time was right for a group discussion.

Many parents attended the evening meeting and discussed what was presented as “the national problem of bullying” as well as listening to the principal give an account of the specific problem of exclusion, harassment and bullying within the Elite Academy. The specific homophobic situation among the group of boys was not discussed in front of the group at the meeting. Instead the general topic of bullying was brought forth and many additional claims of wrongdoing among the parents of the academy were named

and claimed. After the meeting some parents stayed to individually discuss the current situation.

The following week Mr. Clark was satisfied that the parent meeting opened new channels of communication among the parents of the Elite Academy. “It felt like for the first time they were able to tell one another what it was like to be singled out and excluded from events all the way back to third grade.” At the same time he regretted that it was not possible, for confidentiality reasons, to fully address the current hostilities within the student community. Therefore at this point the gendered dynamic between Samuel, Jerrod, and Teddy was tabled. Mr. Clark suggested that for the next year he would work with the Elite Academy teachers on developing skills at addressing and preventing bullying. In the end the gay love note episode was not openly discussed again by students, parents, and staff for the remainder of the school year. At the one year follow up to this study Mr. Clark reported to me that the plan for summer planning meetings among the teachers and a fall professional agenda to address bullying had not come to fruition.

Forged Gay Love Notes—Analysis

Making subordinate masculinities and marking bodies and institutional responses. In returning to the themes of this project, the analysis of the gay love notes and of the professional response to the love notes will again focus on five prevalent patterns in making and marking gender at Oakwood: first, the gendered performances of the students involved; second, the intersectional gender identity making impact of racial, able-bodied, social class, and religious discourses; third, the discursive void within an implicit heteronormative school setting to identify and articulate the workings of power

in violence and abuse; fourth, the professional lack of expertise in addressing heteronormative incidents; and finally, the systemic failure to articulate a democratic gender standard or track, record, and transmit knowledge of this gendering process that would render it visible.

The gendered performances of Jerrod, Teddy, and Samuel. The group production of Jerrod and Teddy as gay in this case is yet another account of the fluidity of the fag identity. Elizabeth, Peter, Kendrick, Bobby, and now Jerrod and Teddy were all the subjects of repeated heteronormative marking as the sexual and gendered Other. The performances upon these students bodies and the stories generated and passed along about these students rendered them “real” heteronormative Others regardless of their individual desires or identities. The individual sexual or gendered desires of all of the subjects Othered up to this point in the chapter have been irrelevant to the marking of these bodies as the heteronormative Other. I point to the discursive reality these students as the Other subject as there is an emerging pattern in bullying literature and educational policy discussions to point to the bullying of “real” LGBTQ youth as well as of “perceived” LGBTQ youth (Vavrus).³⁷

In this case in fact, there was a great deal of discussion about whether or not Jerrod and Teddy were “really” gay. In the previous case it was also considered quite significant to the faculty of Oakwood that Bobby was not “really” gay and a great deal of time and attention was dedicated to speculating on whether Timothy was “really” gay. This categorizing of the real versus the perceived gay youth misses the social context of the heteronormative production of the Other. Within the normative discourse rampant at

³⁷ For example the current bill before the federal congress H.R. 2262 Safe Schools Improvement Act defines “bullying” to include “conduct that is based on a student’s *actual or perceived race, color, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or religion.*” (*emphasis mine*)

Oakwood this production of the Other is about manipulating and managing social power and prestige.

Whether one is hailed and interpolated into a subject space, as I have argued the Mean Girls and the Eighth grade boys were, or one resists and rejects the Other subject space, as did Elizabeth, Cheryl, Peter, Kendrick, Bobby, Jerrod and Teddy the public reading, the public meaning of this subject space remains the same. All of these students are marked at Oakwood as the other to service the gendering of those who marked them as such. The final two vignettes of this chapter will explore the experiences of two Oakwood students who are both marked as, as well as claim the Other identity for themselves.

I do not wish to argue here that there is no discernable difference between a student who is perceived to be LGBTQ and a student who experiences and identifies with queer desires; I am rather attempting to highlight the inherently violent social reality of discursive Othering as publically producing a single social subject, the fag. As Eve Sedgwick (1990) noted, the fixation on noting whether homosexuality is actual or perceived is centered on the difference

... between seeing homo/heterosexual definition on the one hand as an issue of active importance primarily for a small, distinct, relatively fixed homosexual minority ... [and] seeing it on the other hand as an issue of continuing, determinative importance in the lives of people across the spectrum of sexualities. (p. 1)

In the text of the above vignettes students were produced as homosexual in the second context without regard for the first, yet as the final two vignettes will reveal, their experiences of marginalization, abuse, and violence as the Other were not categorically different from those who Sedgwick identifies as the “homosexual minority” at

Oakwood. And I would suggest the professional attempts to mark them as “not really” or merely “perceived” homosexuals only aide in constructing the very binary which results in abuse in the first place.

The intersectional gender identity making impact of racial, able-bodied, social class, and religious discourses. This episode once again highlights the pattern of privileging Elite Academy parents and students in the disciplinary procedures at Oakwood. Having already discusses this pattern in several of the previous cases I will simply highlight that all of the students involved in this case were interpreted as white, middle class, and exceptionally cognitively able. In considering and addressing their performances of gender their centrality within these other normative discourses perhaps influenced professional decisions and interpretations of their actions and outcomes. Importantly this case illustrates the intersection of religion and gender identity. In considering these heteronormative performances religious discourse took a prominent place in the discourse of the parents of Samuel and some of his peers.

Samuel and his parents repeatedly claimed he had been the victim of religious bias at the hands of Jerrod and Teddy as well as at the hands of “the whole class.” They also noted that this anti-Christian bias had been associated with his sexuality when he was ridiculed for missing the sex education classes for religious reasons. Samuel himself suggested that his personal religious persecution was more severe than the sexual orientation harassment he was directing at Jerrod and Teddy. This linking revealed a flaw in his overall claim that the gay notes were simply a “joke” rather than a punitive retaliation.

In this case the Mr. Clark and other members of the faculty struggled with and were overtaken by the Christian appropriation of liberal civil rights discourse in discussions of power, privilege, and domination between the students of the Elite Academy. In the early 90's James Davidson Hunter (1992) placed the U.S. "culture wars" in a historical context. He historically tracked the co-opting of the civil rights discourse by the U.S. Christian "religious right" which was swiftly evolving during that era. Warren Blumenfeld (2009) has more recently historicized the "subtle and not-so subtle promotion of Christianity in public schooling and in the larger United States society" (p. xiv).

Principal Clark and the faculty were unable to navigate the confluence of the schools minority protections discourse and claims of oppression coming from unexamined position of religious privilege. This moment was not unlike the times in which educational claims are made that boys are the victims of oppression under title IX or whites are the victims of racism due to affirmative action. The lack of a sophisticated analysis of subject spaces in relation to religious identity and social and material power left arguments of religious oppression unanswered and thereby validated by the school administration.

The discursive void within an implicit heteronormative school setting to identify and articulate the workings of power in violence and abuse. The individual parent meetings and the Elite Academy program meeting repeatedly diffused the heteronormative events which took place through the passing of gay love notes into generalized discussions about bullying and exclusion. The events which took place were compared to a third grade scenario in which certain boys were invited to join a soccer

team while others were excluded. They were evaluated against the self selected exclusion of certain boys from sex education classes. And compared repeatedly to the “normal” ridicule and bullying “we all dealt with” when we were kids.

Mr. Martin and the Oakwood staff struggled to highlight the gendered elements of this harassment in individual meetings but were rebuffed by parents and students. The pervasive educational and developmental discourse of bullying ultimately cloaked any professional analysis or intervention into the heteronormative power and violence of this gender making.

As Nan Stein (2002) concluded in her review of bullying research, “The connection between bullying and sexual harassment in schools is of critical importance-it is one that educators need to make explicit and public by deliberately discussing these subjects in age appropriate ways with children “(p. 425). This case was marked by the inability of the faculty to pursue a discussion about the unequal power of heterosexual and homosexual identities and performances among the students, the inability to highlight and clearly articulate the schools harassment policy with regard to sexual orientation and gender identity.

The professional lack of expertise in addressing heteronormative incidents. This scale of student participation in the queering of Jerrod and Teddy resulted in engaging a large number of parents of the Elite Academy in conversations about homophobia and bullying. Two key missing professional practices were revealed as a result of this cascading conversation. First, when Mr. Clark attempted to enlist the support of key teachers in discussing homophobia and harassment with parents, he found that the teachers felt incompetent and fearful of engaging in this conversation. Even as the school,

district, and state education policies all explicitly stated that harassment based on gender and sexual orientation would be addressed teachers reported that they didn't know how to talk to parents about homophobia. In addition some teachers were unaware of the district policy. As Mrs. Fleming explained to me, "Wow, I just don't know what to say when religion gets brought into this stuff (*anti-gay bias among students and parents*) at all. I mean, am I going to say their religion is wrong or something? I don't think so."

As an added complication to teachers experiences of ignorance, the teachers of the EA had neither a personal nor a collective view of the pervasive heteronormative bias within their classrooms. In other words teachers at Oakwood could not articulate why the school had an anti-bias policy specifically about sex and gender identity in the first place. While Mr. Clark and Mr. Martin could readily compare the events of Jerrod and Teddy to other heteronormative incidents throughout the year, the classroom teachers were only minimally aware of some or none of these events.

A teacher might know about a conflict within his room, but did not have the knowledge to connect or compare it to a similar conflict in another classroom. In fact, the Oakwood behavior management system so heavily relied on the administrative staff to address behavior and social problems through the referral system that teachers were often entirely unaware of the details related to violent conflicts that were taking place within their own classrooms. As Mrs. Schmeting explained to me, "I assumed Mr. Martin would find out what was going on and take care of it. I trust him to get to the bottom of these things and I certainly don't have time for that when I'm working with 25 other students."

This professional practice of isolating and privatizing the social violence taking place in classrooms is similar to the individualistic criminology discourse in the larger

society as a whole. And through this practice of isolating and privatizing teachers remained uninformed and generally unable to recognize heteronormativity let alone speak about it with students or families.

The systemic failure to articulate a democratic gender standard or track, record, and transmit knowledge of this gendering process that would render it visible. The events discussed in this vignette temporarily brought about a larger professional discussion about homophobia and bullying at Oakwood. This was partially because buzzing rumors about the homophobic harassment of Jerrod and Teddy occurred not long after stories about the YouTube video outing Bobby had died down among the faculty. Although most Oakwood teachers were not privy to details about these incidents, they were intrigued and an idea began to germinate about working as a professional community to address this problem at Oakwood.

Two teachers and a counselor approached Mr. Clark and volunteered to bring together learning about this topic, form a study group over the summer, and offer professional development the following year. This was a promising moment in the development of a response to heteronormativity at Oakwood. I volunteered to join these teachers in this project. Mr. Clark approved the idea; however, it never got off the ground. One of the teachers involved did do personal reading and reflection, but the group did not bring together new knowledge and did not present a review of the problems at Oakwood or a review on the problem of Heteronormativity to the faculty the following year. I was invited to present my findings on heteronormative violence at Oakwood at one faculty meeting. I have no evidence to evaluate an increased professional awareness of heteronormativity resulting from this 20 minute presentation.

Vignette 7: Chasing Caleb

Chasing Caleb—The Story

Well I was walking home one day just before Halloween with my friend and the three of them (Julius, Marcos, and Cameron) who didn't like me very much came over to me and started calling me a faggot and one of them had a skateboard in his hand. I just started running down the middle of the street as fast as I could.

~ Caleb in an interview talking about threats of violence
he has faced around school

Caleb and Sandra, the gay poster children of Oakwood. At Oakwood there were repeated claims among students and staff that there was no homophobia among the students of the school. Students regularly said the ever present use of the words “gay” and “fag” weren't homophobic because they “didn't mean it like that.”

In a presentation on my research for one class a discussion ensued to educate me about just how un-homophobic Oakwood was, “*Real homophobia* is when you're like hating on someone because they're gay. We're just saying it (*that's sooo gay*) like you know, like not about gay people, you know just for like when something is stupid or something.” And as fool proof evidence that the school was past homophobia, students and teachers would point to the tiny group of “out” gay students and suggest that they could only be out because the school was not homophobic. As one student in the class explained to me:

We don't really have that (*homophobia*) here. I mean Caleb and Sandra and those guys even have a GSA and everything. Like, we were the only middle school in town with a GSA. Usually they're only at high schools. And I heard the principal goes to the meetings and stuff and they had protests and things. We're just more real about things here than at a school like Pine Forest (*a neighboring middle school*). Oakwood's more like, accepting and stuff you know.

I was not surprised to hear these two names dropped into the middle of a class discussion. I was also not surprised that the teacher didn't react and remained silent for the entire discussion. During my observations at Oakwood I never witnessed a teacher engage in an open class discussion about homophobia or heterosexism with a group of students. Yet it concerned me to have these two students, who were not in the room, referenced as examples of tolerance. I asked the class to keep the conversation and references to those present and to only speak for themselves rather than presuming someone else's comfort from that point forward in the talk.

Yet it wasn't possible to avoid hearing the names of Caleb and Sarah on a fairly regular basis when people at Oakwood heard about my research project. Caleb and Sarah were literally the two sexual minority identified students among the 500 plus students at Oakwood. These two students were seen as "out" queer youth and offered as living proof that the student body and staff were open and accepting to LGBTQ students at Oakwood. Some students also used their self proclaimed friendship with either Caleb or Sarah as evidence of their individual credibility as being "accepting and stuff."

Both Caleb and Sarah were individually made aware of my research project by members of the Oakwood faculty. I did not seek out either of these students as I did not wish to contribute to the rumors circulating about their sexuality, I did however make myself available to them by presenting information to classes they attended on multiple occasions.

Caleb was the first of the two to elect to contact me. Both students contacted me by writing private notes and attaching them to the research consent forms I brought to their respective classes. Having heard a great deal about the wonderful unfettered non-

homophobic lives each of them lived at Oakwood, I looked forward to hearing from each of them about what it was like to be “out” in an open environment at such a young age.

Caleb reports on his life and why he is leaving Oakwood. Caleb was a slightly built dark haired and dark eyed young man. He generally sat alone reading during open blocks of time and I seldom saw him speaking to anyone but faculty. He began publically approaching me daily about a week prior to his scheduled interview to check in. He’d say hello to me in the cafeteria, remind me of our plan to meet, or just casually ask me how I was doing. I note this because he hadn’t spoken to me at any point for the two months prior to my confirming an interview date and time with him.

Caleb was an eighth grade boy who had attended Oakwood for all of his middle school years. He met with me in the fall of his eighth grade year during his last week attending school at Oakwood. The first thing he told me during the interview was that he was moving away from the community that Friday. He was moving to another region of the country, moving to a much bigger city, leaving his father and step mother’s home to move in with his mother and his older brother. He began our interview by saying, “I know you’ve heard about me, everyone talks about me. I just wanted to let you know the real story before I leave.” As he spoke, he leaned into the table and looked me directly in the eye.

I was not surprised by his news of moving as Mr. Martin, Ms. Bailey, and Mrs. Campbell had all at one time or another recommended that I interview Caleb before he moved. Each of these Oakwood faculty members was just sure Caleb could tell me lots about being a gay student at Oakwood, and each of them knew he was moving and pressed me to interview him before he left. So when he began the interview by

announcing “the real story” his impending move with some intensity I responded by asking him to tell me about his move, was it a good thing? Or was it a problem that he was moving so far away? What had brought on such a big change at this time of the school year? Caleb’s response:

I’m moving back with my brother. And it’s a really good thing. He knows everything about me and everything I’ve been going through here and he told me if I could just hang on and make it there, things will be a lot different.

In time he explained to me that the things that needed to change were all related to his coming out as gay at Oakwood the year prior. As he explained it, “Things were a lot different around here last year. We had a GSA (*Gay Straight Alliance*), there were some really strong eighth graders in it and there were a lot of people involved. I guess the student protests (*about a state marriage amendment*) made being gay or “gay friendly” kinda cool for a while. It was just really different for a while there.”

The short-lived glory of the GSA and the ongoing backlash. Caleb’s story of the GSA and the brief period of anti-homophobia activism was similar to many other versions of the events of the year prior. The principal had championed the idea of a GSA to a couple of eighth grade students with strong leadership skills. These students had initial momentum in building a club during the fall election as a controversial political campaign against gay marriage was demonizing LGBTQ families.

The first meetings of the GSA had as many as 40 students in attendance. However, by winter the state’s constitutional amendment to define marriage as strictly heterosexual was passed, the students were bored, and the club was slowly disbanding. By spring term there was merely a hand full of students remaining in the GSA. All of the remaining members had publically identified as LGBTQ while all of the “straight allies”

from earlier in the year no longer attended the meetings. The majority of the remaining GSA members were eighth graders and they left Oakwood at the end of the year to move on to the high school. This left behind Caleb and Sandra as the two most visible seventh graders who had activity participated in the GSA as queer youth. When they returned for their eighth grade year, the conditions on the ground were gravely changed as far as each of them was concerned.

Caleb explained to me that when school began this year he quickly discovered that he had no friends whatsoever when he was at school at Oakwood. He said he had a couple of friends from school that lived in the neighborhood, but at school none of them would talk to him, sit by him, or have anything to do with him. I had seen him on many occasions sitting alone in the cafeteria with a book, or lingering in the library during the lunch break, I could not recall an occasion where I had seen him in conversation with another student. I asked about other GSA people from the previous year and he explained that they just avoided each other this year. “I was really more friends with the eighth graders than anyone else in the GSA and mostly this year people just try to not talk about being in that club or stuff like that.” Getting back to the “real story” of his move I asked what his brother knew about his life and how that helped.

CALEB: He knows about what goes on here. He knows how I’m treated and he just says that’s just the way it is there. You gotta come here where people don’t care.

RESEARCHER: So when you say how you’re treated that makes me wonder what people here are doing to you.

CALEB: Well it's not like people don't know, I mean I'm the faggot. Everybody takes shots at me. That's just what a day is here. But like Mike (brother) says, it's not like that in a bigger city. I just gotta get out of this small town red neck hole and get a real life.

RESEARCHER: When you say all that I wonder if you are safe.

CALEB: Oh I'm safe. I never go home the same way twice, I'm not in the halls during passing period. I skip at the end of the day to get outa here early and I usually just come to school late in the morning. I know how to be safe if that's what you mean.

Julius, Cameron, and Marcos harass and threaten Caleb. I hadn't expected this statement about Caleb's travels to and from school in response to this question. I asked him to explain to me what he meant by saying he never went home the same way twice. He offered the following story to explain this strategy:

CALEB: Well here's the thing. I was just walking home one day just before Halloween with my friend and the three of them (*Julius, Cameron, and Marcos*) who didn't like me very much came over to me and started calling me a faggot and one of them had a skateboard in his hand. And we started running until we saw a person we knew in the neighborhood that deals with that kind of stuff. This guy who was my friends' therapist just happened to drive by. He was in his car and he got out and told them to back off because he knew where they lived and he knew their parents and he would tell them if they ever tried to hurt me.

As you may recall from earlier reading, Cameron and Julius were among the biggest male students at Oakwood. Cameron was a white boy with sandy blond hair and a muscular frame who stood nearly 6 feet tall. Julius, a Latino boy was about the same height but carried perhaps 50 more pounds on his frame and so he looked more like a football linebacker than his friend Cameron. Both boys had a lead on their peers in terms of size for the past three years which has been a tremendous advantage in the sports arena where the two excel and were known as school stars. Marcos, the third boy noted above had a more average physical stature but was well known because he was seen as street smart and had a bad boy reputation that many Oakwood students registered fearing and admiring.

At this point Caleb explained that the friend they ran into was a 30 year old man who was driving home with two other adult men in his car. When the three men saw Caleb and his friend being chased by these bigger boys they stopped their car and got out to address the situation. Marcos, Julius, and Cameron all cursed at the men, one of whom began calling the police. At that point the three boys turned around and ran off in the opposite direction.

RESEARCHER: So did you feel that your physical safety was in danger while they were following you?

CALEB: Yes because they had made fun of me and harassed me in school before.

RESEARCHER: So as they were following you, you thought that they might jump you?

CALEB: Yes.

RESEARCHER: And I remember you said one of them had a skateboard?

CALEB: Yes.

RESEARCHER: What made you remember that and bring that up?

CALEB: Well I have seen – I have read stories and seen TV shows where people used weapons like skateboards, baseball bats, and just stuff like that to hurt people.

RESEARCHER: Yes, so you were scared of it. Of getting hit with it?

CALEB: Yes.

Caleb said he'd had a lot of run-ins with these three boys. He said they regularly chased him, harassed him, and grabbed him in the hallways at school. He said they had a variety of names for him and disgusting comments about his sexual orientation he preferred not to repeat. During my many interviews at Oakwood many students offered stories of being chased, jumped, threatened, and physically intimidated by this group of young men and their peers. Some of these incidents were formally reported, while most were not due to either a resignation that the problem was inevitable or a fear of retaliation.

During the final weeks of the school year two of the three boys Caleb identified were disciplined for using a knife to threaten both a young girl and a young boy on campus during an after-school event. The knife incident was chronicled earlier in this chapter I simply highlight it again here to point to Caleb's reasonable fear for his safety as these young men chased him down the street. While I had a hard time picturing a skateboard as a weapon, it was the primary thing Caleb focused on as he ran away from his aggressors.

No help and a plan to escape Oakwood. After sharing this story about being chased and threaten walking to and from school Caleb told me there was no one on the faculty at Oakwood that he talked to about the problems he had with students. I asked him if he'd reported the Halloween incident to the school. He explained that he had to because the police were involved. IN fact when he arrived at school the next day the police were already with Mr. Martin discussing the situation. As he recalled Mr. Martin and the police officer had called in the three boys and warned them to stay away from Caleb. This had done nothing to reduce their harassment and now, a month later having changed all of his traveling patterns and strategized when to cut class or arrive late, he had decided to move to another city and leave them and this school far behind.

Considering the homelessness rate among LGBTQ identified youth I was both relieved and concerned about his story of moving in with another family member (Bochenek & Brown, 2001). I later had Mr. Martin confirm the move and contact Caleb's mother to discuss transferring his student records. This was not standard protocol for Oakwood and would not have normally happened once Caleb's father signed off on the enrollment withdrawal form.

As Caleb discussed leaving Oakwood because it was such an unfriendly and dangerous school for him I asked him how his father felt about the situation. It was then that he explained that he couldn't tell his dad about all his problems because he wasn't "out" to him and he was pretty sure he'd "beat the crap out of me if he finds out. He and his wife are super Christian so I know they'll kick me out if they find out anyway." He was relying on phone calls and emails to his twenty year old brother to guide him through these difficult times. He was out to this brother and able to tell him about the things that

were happening at school and at home. “My dad just knows I’m not happy here and I really want to live with my mom. He knows my grades have gotten really bad and that I am missing a lot of school. His wife thinks my leaving is the best idea so they have helped me make my plans to go.”

Caleb ended the interview by telling me that he wanted the teachers at Oakwood to know about what he’d been through and why he was leaving. He felt teachers shouldn’t say they were accepting unless they were really ready to take a stand. “It’s not like going to one rally or something like that made my life any easier here. Ever since the eighth graders left and there were just two of us left I’ve been afraid. And I can’t think of any teacher who ever asked me what was going on. I mean what was really going on or like if things were okay or anything. I just feel them looking right past me. “

Later in the year I was invited to speak to the faculty about the pervasive homophobia and heterosexism at Oakwood and I anonymously presented some of Caleb’s experiences and statements to the staff. There was registered surprise and discomfort at hearing about this, “kind of thing happening at Oakwood.” A small group of teachers stayed after the meeting to discuss how they could be better resources to students like Caleb. Primarily they wanted me to identify Caleb and other students I quoted so they could get them help. As Mrs. Campbell explained after the meeting, “I understand you have to keep confidentiality, but I just don’t know what I can do for someone like that if I don’t know who they are.” As you may recall Mrs. Campbell was one of the faculty members who had originally recommended I interview Caleb because she knew he would have insights on being “out” at Oakwood.

Chasing Caleb—Analysis

The self as Other and the range of possible heteronormative meanings and markings for this subjectivity. In returning to the themes of this project, the analysis of Caleb as the Other and of the vacillation between the high visibility and invisibility he experienced among the faculty will again focus on five prevalent patterns in making and marking gender at Oakwood: first, the gendered performances related to the Othering of Caleb; second, the intersectional gender identity making impact of racial, able-bodied, and social class discourses; third, the discursive void within an implicit heteronormative school setting to identify and articulate the workings of power in violence and abuse; fourth, the professional lack of expertise in addressing heteronormative incidents; and finally, the systemic failure to articulate a democratic gender standard or track, record, and transmit knowledge of this gendering process that would render it visible.

At the close of this chapter I will also consider research issues related to discussing heteronormative violence with students who both self identify and are publically identified as the targets of this abuse. Here I primarily want to consider how Caleb, and in the next vignette Sandra, both are presented as and also personally become these Othered subjects.

The gendered performances related to the Othering of Caleb. The first three vignettes of this chapter considered the hailing and interpolation of subjects into hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity (Althusser, 1989). In considering now the story of Caleb I again return to this analysis of individuals claiming a particular identity or subject node for themselves, what Rasmussen (2006) considered in her text on becoming sexualize subjects in secondary schooling. Rasmussen explored the difference

between identities and subjectivities arguing that “the processes of identification are not synonymous with processes of subjectivization” (p. 71). In other words the process of Caleb claiming and knowing himself as gay was not synonymous with his being socially constructed at the Other at Oakwood. This distinction here is noted as both processes are fundamental to the production of heteronormative discourse; sexual selves are conceived within not prior to the historically specific regulatory discourse on sexuality (p. 73).

Caleb publically identified as gay during a period in which his sexual orientation was conceived locally as publically tolerable and entitled to some visible presence. The establishment of a GSA at Oakwood presented the possibility that LGBTQ youth could be seen as existing while simultaneously being marginalized to contained spaces and inherently in need of allies. Caleb publically came out as gay during a GSA meeting and later identified himself as gay to peers and teachers. In the GSA he found the opportunity to articulate his personal desires and identification with a social subjectivity.

Unfortunately the counter narrative of anti-homophobia was short lived at Oakwood and the dominant reading of the Other as subhuman quickly marked Caleb as a target for Heteronormativity. Given the inherently marginal place of a GSA within the community it is not surprising that the safety could turn to vulnerability so rapidly. This is not to suggest that GSA’s are harmful as research indicates they increase the safety of LGBTQ youth (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006), rather to note that these “safe spaces” reproduce heteronormative Othering discourses related to sexual minority youth (Rasmussen, 2004).

The swirl of idealized liberal democratic discourse and homophobic discourse which undergirded the Othering of Caleb suggests the individual who is Othered is rendered nearly entirely invisible even as their body is marked and manipulated to serve

these discourses. For example Mrs. Campbell spoke of herself as an advocate for LGBTQ youth and registered shock and concern about any LGBTQ student living in fear at Oakwood. “I would never tolerate it if I knew a student was being harassed in the ways you just described.” Yet Mrs. Campbell failed to recognize heteronormative vignettes which had occurred within her classroom, under her supervision, and reported to her by the students experiencing the harassment. Both Caleb and Elizabeth of Chapter II were harassed about their sexuality and gender while in Mrs. Campbell’s classroom and both reported her either ignoring or “not caring” about the harassment. Mrs. Campbell, like many other self identified liberal faculty members then used the bodies of LGBTQ youth to espouse a certain politic while simultaneously missing and thereby reinscribing the abuse these students experienced at the hands of normative discourses. At the opposite political extreme Marcos, Julius and Cameron all readily used Caleb’s body to elevate their masculinity, their patriarchal power, and heterosexual desires. These actions too produced Caleb as the Other, marked for dominance and violence.

Caleb, like Elizabeth in Chapter II, did not represent himself as tragically interpolated into the Othering discourses surrounding his sexual identity. In his self identification he expressed confidence in his sexuality and in his social status. As he spoke of leaving Oakwood he pathologized Oakwood as a community rather than himself as the Other. The presence of a counter discourse to heteronormativity on the part of his older brother resonated with his internal identification potentially allowing him to conceive of himself outside of the frame of Oakwood and on some idealized level outside of the frame of Heteronormativity.

The intersectional gender identity making impact of racial, able-bodied, and social class discourses. Caleb as noted briefly in the text above had access to the dominant positions of each of these intersectional identity discourses. As a white middle class member of the Elite Academy he was in many ways simply less surveyed by the panopticon of normative discourses. His early departure from Oakwood prevented the faculty from becoming alerted to his poor academic performance, and it is possible that his participation in the Elite Academy rendered that performance less visible initially. I suggest this because the Elite Academy work assignments as well as grading standards and practices were observably different than those of the “regular” courses at Oakwood.

Highly able EA students were presumed to be able to track their own assignments, decide for themselves if they “wanted to pass or fail” and be given less “busy work” to accumulate credit points toward assigning a grade. As noted earlier the faculty interpreted masculinity within the EA in ways which normalized these highly intelligent boys doing poorly at school. Therefore it is possible that Caleb’s unexpected turn for the worse in school performance as a boy may have been more visible outside of this elite program. This is reminiscent of Timothy’s unnoted academic decline in the AE program in the months preceding his YouTube attack on Bobby.

The discursive void within an implicit heteronormative school setting to identify and articulate the workings of power in violence and abuse. The story of the rise and fall of the Oakwood GSA was repeated by many members of the faculty as well as by many youth on campus. While the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN) champions GSA’s for increasing school safety they offer key advice on the structural supports necessary for a GSA to function. Two fundamental necessities for a GSA to

function are the presence and support of a faculty adviser and the presence of a diverse student body where diversity includes sexual orientation diversity (GLSEN, 2009). These two key elements take into account the power imbalance sexual minority students experience in maintaining a public presence at school as well as in the greater society. Faculty representation as well as the presence of “straight” non-queer students increases the social capital of the organization.

Unfortunately at Oakwood, the principal could only offer minimal institutional support to the GSA and the faculty advisor who was assigned the GSA took a back seat to supporting this student organization. Mr. Zinn volunteered to be the GSA advisor before the school year started, but within weeks of the first GSA events he was either not present or grading papers at his desk whenever the GSA met in his classroom. This lack of professional leadership or educational support was compounded as students began to lose interest in the club. Soon there were only students remaining in the GSA who identified as sexual minorities and Mr. Zinn was expressing that they would need to find a new advisor because his classroom was no longer available. In observing this decline, I discussed with Mr. Clark the lack of educational leadership the GSA was experiencing to which he explained, “Clubs are for kids who want to be part of them. It’s a club and I’d like to see it here, but if the kids don’t want it, it just won’t last.”

This interpretation of a GSA as a club overlooks the immense power imbalance between LGBTQ youth and the remainder of the community. Ironically the name of the GSA itself, an “alliance,” suggests the necessity for power brokering to help gay students. Yet in the end this “safe space” mechanism relied upon the very targets of

heteronormativity to self-advocate and produce for themselves a safe space within the institution.

Ironically in the year following the rise and fall of the GSA many faculty members noted the failure of the GSA as evidence of the ineptitude of the LGBTQ youth at Oakwood and the ill-conceived politics of the principal. As one teacher retold the tale of the GSA she concluded, “I mean, what we were thinking having a GSA in middle school in the first place. These kids aren’t old enough for this kind of thing. I don’t think I could have handled it in sixth grade to be talking about homosexuality; I didn’t even want to talk about my sexuality. Of course they got in way over their heads. Mr. Clark just really hung them out to dry. That sort of club may be appropriate at the high schools, but not here. Well I’m just glad no one got hurt, that’s all.” The story of the floundering of the GSA and the later professional discourses blaming the students themselves for this foundering utterly lack an awareness of the power and abuse fundamental to the heteronormative discourse operating at Oakwood. And in this ignorance faculty members regularly reproduced this power dynamic as they shared their interpretations of the story.

The professional lack of expertise in addressing heteronormative incidents.

Caleb’s memorable run in with Julius, Marcos, and Cameron as well as the subsequent police and administrative interventions point again to institutional practice of privatizing heteronormative violence. This individualizing and privatizing is an act which simultaneously acknowledges heteronormative practices as well as pushing a critical reflection of heteronormativity back underground. Instead we have moments in which individuals, in this case Julius, Marcos, and Cameron are threatened by the authoritarian discourses of educators as well as police that they are now under surveillance. A

surveillance that is utterly porous as Caleb reports on his continued harassment from these three boys. And Mr. Martin himself acknowledged and worried over the ineffective nature of this method for addressing bullying, bias, and harassment; “I try to threaten them and really put fear into them that if they retaliate there will be worse consequences. But really, I know it’ll probably get worse for the kid who tells on someone. I just wish kids like Caleb and Kendrick didn’t attract so much attention all the time. I can’t protect them everywhere and a kid like Julius is probably going to find them sometime.”

This statement reflects acknowledgement that the violence is pervasive and then problematically locates it on the bodies of the victims of this social violence. This naturalizing of heteronormativity even while attempting to punish heteronormativity frames the professional practices in addressing the students and the staff at Oakwood. Earlier analysis noted this privatizing of discursive violence in the expulsions of Jackson presented the heteronormative discourse as if it were located merely on him as the person committing the most flagrant violation. And while I by no means wish to excuse individuals engaged in interpersonal violence, suggesting that Jackson, or in this case Julius, Marcos and Cameron are the singular problem Caleb faces in attending Oakwood ignores a myriad of heteronormative practices in place and girded by students, parents and faculty on a daily basis.

As Gail Mason (2002) explained in her work studying the production of homophobic violence there is both a corporeal as well as a discursive context to this form of public violence. To locate this form of violence strictly on the bodies and in the minds of those involved and then to privately address the individuals involved ignores the

context thru which this form of violence is enacted on a daily basis upon the bodies of youth like Caleb.

Heteronormativity as an ideology was not produced by Julius, Marcos, and Cameron it simply offered them a particular identity status and power as their lives intersected with Caleb's life. Conversely Caleb as a self identified gay youth gave voice to the remainder of Mason's argument where she noted this violence constitutes both the norm and the Other sexual identities (p. 3). In considering the gender and sexual identity formation of each of the boys present in this vignette, this enacted heteronormative violence becomes an integral element of their sexual and gender performances. When Caleb says, "A guy like me (*who is Out as gay*) just can't make it in a town like this or a school like Oakwood," he is presuming through his departure that violence toward gay youth is inevitable.

The systemic failure to articulate a democratic gender standard or track, record, and transmit knowledge of this gendering process that would render it visible. While the faculty at Oakwood was aware of Caleb as one to the GSA students who was open about his homosexuality, he did not report faculty members as being open to him as a minority youth. In fact in our conversation about faulty supports, Caleb registered a great deal of surprise that the faculty knew that he was gay.

RESEARCHER: Since people on staff know about your sexuality, couldn't you just tell a teacher when you are being harassed?

CALEB: I'm not out to any of my teachers! I don't think any of them know I'm gay. My parents don't even know ... (*long silence*) So if I said something it'd be such a mess at him.

(Caleb got a pained look on his face and closed his eyes)

That just can't happen.

RESEARCHER: Who are you Out to at Oakwood?

CALEB: Well, it was just the GSA group, but then really quickly that got spread around to everyone. So I guess everyone in the eighth grade. But there weren't any teachers that were part of all that. It was just us until it fell apart.

In the case of Caleb we see a student who identifies as the student who is being targeted or harassed as a direct result of his gender and sexual orientation in direct violation of the schools code of conduct, yet he does not see the school faculty as available to advocate for his student rights. He has not been taught a language to express this marginalization or to advocate for himself. In addition the staff has not created learning opportunities or even safety opportunities through which he could discuss or disclose his victimization. Therefore the stated democratic access to the school presented in the student handbook does not in fact exist either discursively or materially in the lives of students like Caleb.

Following this interview and Caleb's departure from Oakwood, I returned to Mr. Martin to discuss the Halloween incident which he primarily recalled because of the police involvement. I asked him if Caleb had made him aware or if he had asked Caleb about this situation in relation to Caleb's "out" status at school. Mr. Martin said Caleb said nothing about that, just that they were chasing him and threatening to jump him and that it hadn't occurred to him to ask about that. In the course of this discussion it was later disclosed that there was no written record of this event, only Mr. Martin's personal verbal knowledge confirmed Caleb's story. Much later in the year when Julius would

wield a knife in a homophobic attack on Peter this earlier incident would not be referenced in relation to the incident.

Vignette 8: Sandra Disappears

Sandra Disappears—The Story

Sandra, the bi-sexual legend of Oakwood. Sandra was an eighth grade girl who, like Caleb, was somewhat legendary at Oakwood. She came up by name in every interview I conducted during my research. Sandra was also referred to in many of the casual conversations about LGBTQ and gender issues I was involved in while at the school. When asking students and staff about different styles of girlhood all of them eventually named Sandra as having a style of girlhood all her own. Many of them then would immediately link her unique girl style to her sexual orientation as she was rumored to be the “bi” (bi-sexual) girl in the school. For example, in an interview with Mrs. Brown when I asked about other types of girlhood besides her referenced “boy crazy girls,” “school girls,” and “girl jocks,” her response was:

MRS. BROWN: Well there is someone like Sandra, but she doesn't really fit any category at all does she. You know I think Mr. Clark really made a mistake last year by having that GSA (*gay straight alliance club*). These kids are too young in middle school to handle things like that and I think it really pushed her outside of the rest of the kids comfort zone. But really she is so much more mature than the other kids anyway; I guess maybe she does know she's bi at such a young age. But I don't think children can handle that type of information do you?

Among the other eighth graders Sandra was seen as quite popular and as someone who was friends with everyone in every group while belonging to none. During another interview I asked an eighth grade girl named Heather about the pervasive use of the word “fag” at Oakwood. She had been talking about how there was really no homophobia at Oakwood. I pushed the issue a little further and told her about a “fag” and “homo” word observation count I had done on a recent day during open gym. She responded to this by referencing Sandra:

HEATHER: With if there was homophobia how could we have someone like Sandra here? I mean really us girls (*the self proclaimed popular clique*) are all friends with her and so are the guys. I mean back in elementary she was in our group but then she just got into other stuff and you know we’re not really that much together any more. But she’s still friends with all of us still. And she’s friends with the Goth people, and the soccer girls too. Like really, she is just friends with everyone. So that shows me how this school isn’t really homophobic at all because she was in that GSA last year and told everyone she’s bi and everything and you couldn’t have something like that at any other school around.

This was the general consensus among Oakwood peers and faculty in relation to Sandra. She was “bi” and she was “out” and she was popular and happy at Oakwood. While many students at Oakwood sought out my attention during my observations, Sandra and Caleb both generally did not speak to me when we were present in public locations like the cafeteria or the courtyard. In considering myself within the research setting, both of these students highlighted for me the myriad of power discourses at play

within my project and the risks involved for any student or staff member who chose to interact with me during my year at Oakwood.

A growing record of truancy. Late in the year Sandra privately sought out an interview with me. Spring was in full bloom with summer just around the corner when Sandra left me a note asking for an interview. She had not spoken to me since the year prior when I observed one of the GSA meetings so I looked forward to talking to this young woman and began to attempt to schedule her interview. After five days of repeatedly sending office call slips to her classes only to find that she was absent, I asked the school's administration about her attendance record. Five days of absences in a row was not terribly common at Oakwood. It was even less common within the Elite Academy, which was once again the program Sandra was located within at Oakwood.

I quickly discovered that Sandra missed school for at least part of the day every day of the week. Her absences were always noted, but excused so it took a little tracking to discover the pattern. No one else in contact with her, teachers or administrator, was aware of this pattern, though it had been going on for the past two months. I informed Mr. Martin of my concern over her absences and he immediately left a message on her home answering machine. Two days later Sandra reappeared at school and I was able to call her into the office for an interview. Mr. Martin was unavailable to speak to her about her class absences which were all excused by her mother and to my knowledge the issue was not discussed again at the administrative level.

Sandra speaks about her unhappy life at Oakwood. When Sandra arrived for her interview, she was wearing a solid black long sleeved t-shirt, black jeans, and black Converse tennis shoes. She had a light completion and as we began our discussion

identified herself as bi-racial “Asian and White.” It took little time in the interview to get to the question at hand:

RESEARCHER: So, can you tell me how long have you been absent because I have been trying to interview you for a week now?

SANDRA: Oh I was just taking a break from school.

RESEARCHER: Have you been sick?

SANDRA: Oh I’ve just been gone the last couple of days but I do not know. The eighth grade is kind of hard.

RESEARCHER: So you are just staying home?

SANDRA: Yes, there’s just been a lot of pressure.

RESEARCHER: Do your parents know you are home?

SANDRA: Yes.

Sandra sat slumped in her chair and didn’t make eye contact with me as she explained her absences from school. She told me how much she hated being at Oakwood and that she always arrived late for first period and only pass through the halls while everyone else was in class.

RESEARCHER: So where are the places that you’re trying to avoid going in school? Where are the places you do not like to go?

SANDRA: In the school? I do not want to go in the cafeteria. I do not want to go in the gym. I do not want to go in locker rooms. I do not want to go anywhere in the hall. I do not like to go in the eighth grade locker bay – I guess that is about it.

Her response mapped nearly every public space within the building. And given her earlier explanation that she used lateness to avoid being in the halls during passing periods, it appeared that she was navigating the avoidance of any interaction with students outside of a classroom. I asked her to give me a better understanding of why she felt uncomfortable in much of the school which led to the following discussion:

SANDRA: What are the reasons I do not like to be in those areas? Because everything is so personal, because like people will like stare at you and you can tell they are talking about you because they point at you and make faces and whisper and laugh. And that is just not a really good feeling for people, for me. And then the locker room is probably the worst place because – not only for me but for other people too because... *(long silence)*

RESEARCHER: Lots of problems happen there?

SANDRA: Yes because people are so judging and yes it is really bad. People will avoid me and make a big deal about me not “seeing” them change out.

(Sandra put a strong emphasis on the word seeing)

RESEARCHER: How often do you have to do that?

SANDRA: Every day.

RESEARCHER: Is that why you are not coming to school right now?

SANDRA: Not really. Well I guess it kind of is a part of it because I really just do not like gym at all. I really think that if they are going to have a gym class, like I don't know. I think there should not be a gym class, that people should just try to get exercise by themselves, you know, because gym is a place

where people know that they can like judge you because you are putting out your own personal stuff. Like they will... (*Sandra fell quiet*)

RESEARCHER: Judge your how?

SANDRA: Well just everything. So gym is bad.

RESEARCHER: Do you have to change clothes? Is that part of the locker room too?

SANDRA: Yes.

RESEARCHER: Is the locker room supervised?

SANDRA: No. And I choose the lockers at the very back of it because no one goes back there. And they mostly leave me be. So it makes it a little better.

Is Sandra “out”? Can you go back “in” at Oakwood? A strange dance took over this interview as Sandra would initiate discussion about either homophobic treatment or about her perceived sexuality but not carry them to any conclusive point. Here noting that the other girls were afraid of her gaze she initiated a moment of being identified as a sexual Other, but when I pursued it she backed away.

RESEARCHER: So what do you think this is about, why the weirdness in the locker room? Did something happen there?

SANDRA: It's just talk. It's just being petty and hateful. That's really all they do is talk and try to tear you down.

RESEARCHER: But why about changing out?

SANDRA: Oh they just judge your personal stuff... I don't really want to talk about it.

RESEARCHER: But you know it's not okay to harass someone about their sexuality right?

SANDRA: Yea. It's not like harassment; it's more like whispers and dirty looks and laughing. You know like stuff you can't just say, like *She called me a name or something*. It's different.

Not wishing to push Sandra to make any identity claim or experience claim she was uncomfortable making, I simply repeatedly made value statements about harassing LGBTQ youth and gender non-conforming youth. And each time I would assert that homophobic or heterosexist remarks were not acceptable, Sandra would respond by either minimizing the events she was discussing or explaining that an event could not be captured in adequate words to report to the faculty.

Sandra, as a member of the EA strongly identified with the Mean Girls discussed in the earlier vignette. She started first grade with this clique of girls and their families and now eight years later was looking forward to going to a different high school than the majority of her classmates. She explained that in seven weeks, when school ended, she planned to attend Arts High School (AHS) as opposed to Varsity High School (VHS). She explained that all her old friends from the grade above her had gone off to AHS this year and that next year she would join them there in ninth grade. She said most of the EA were off to VHS in the fall and she hoped to never see them again.

Money and gender power according to Sandra. I was curious about her decision to go to the Arts High School given that Varsity High offered a continuation of the magnet program she attended at Oakwood. I asked how she had made this choice to switch high schools and she explained the economics of the Elite Academy group to me.

SANDRA: See, I'm not like poor or anything, but I'm not like most of the EA kids. Like I don't live in this neighborhood or anything. My parents have to drive me here for school or I take the bus or something. We live over by AHS. They just wanted me in the EA program so back in first grade they put me in the program, but it always meant we drove to the school. Anyway, VHS is the closer high school for all these rich kids so they just automatically think it's best and all go there. I've always wanted to go to AHS cuz they have way better classes and I want to be part of their Elite Academy program.

RESEARCHER: So do you wish you weren't part of EA, do you think it would've been better at another school.

SANDRA: Some stuff would have maybe been better. Like I think the EA is probably meaner than most classes. But other stuff wouldn't have been as good. My sister and brother are grown up and they tell me how bad some teachers are and some classes. And I liked my teachers in the EA and the stuff we did, so I don't know. I guess it's just what it is.

RESEARCHER: Do you think where you lived, or how much money your family had mattered to other kids in the EA?

SANDRA: I know it did. There are always jokes and comments about who has money and who doesn't. Who lives where, what kind of phone you have, what you do on the weekend, a lot of stuff.

RESEARCHER: So do you think being treated badly in the EA is more about money or more about not being part of the boy crazy girl stuff?

SANDRA: I think it's all mixed together. Like girls cloths have to be all tight and sexy Hollister, which I would never wear and couldn't even afford. So I just don't try. (Here she gestured to her black brandless outfit)

Sandra explained that all of the most popular girls of the eighth grade were in the Elite Academy. That this was the clique earlier referred to as The Mean Girls. This clique ran Oakwood as far as both money and gender were concerned according to Sandra's experiences. She knew them all and had known them since kindergarten. Her claim corresponded to these same girls each claiming Sandra as a friend since kindergarten. Yet where the EA kids spoke of her as a peripheral friend, she spoke of them as menacing and threatening classmates. Her voice rose and her face reddened when she explained how this clique used rumors to include and exclude people from their ranks.

“The popular girls are all the straight girls who like the most popular group of boys.” When Sandra reflected on the qualities of the popular girls at Oakwood, heterosexuality rose to the surface as a dominating factor in participation in the popular community.

SANDRA: Well let's see, the first thing is the most popular girls are all straight girls who like the most popular group of the boys.

RESEARCHER: How do you know that? I mean what makes that obvious?

SANDRA: Because they are really – they like, they tell everybody. Like on a regular basis, they are like, “No, we do not like girls,” like they have to make that clear. And then they will like, they wear things that are more towards being girlie, I suppose you could say even though there are people that are girlie and like the same sex.

RESEARCHER: Right. I did not mean that they were not. I just meant like the way people see them here are the things that seem...

SANDRA: Yes, people here, if they see a girl that is wearing expensive clothes like Hollister or something they automatically think that she is straight.

RESEARCHER: So it is the brand of clothes?

SANDRA: Kind of yes.

RESEARCHER: It is not the style.

SANDRA: And the style. The style is like the low cut shirts and skinny jeans.

RESEARCHER: And then does that have anything to do also with the way that they flirt or interact with people? Like I am going to guess that you do not ever see girls flirting with girls here.

SANDRA: No, you do not.

RESEARCHER: Do you see these girls flirting with boys here?

SANDRA: Yes.

RESEARCHER: How often?

SANDRA: Pretty often like every time you walk down the hallway.

As Sandra noted, open heterosexual flirtations and comments were ubiquitous at Oakwood. Students flirted in class, moved about the cafeteria in flocks of all girls or all boys to sit near groups of the other gender. Months of observations found that marking who could and could not flirt with whom within a classroom and beyond was particularly important to establishing a clique identity at Oakwood. The first vignette in this chapter indicated the sort of political battles at Oakwood that involved rumors of crushes, dating, and heterosexual romance.

RESEARCHER: How about in classrooms (*Do you see kids flirting in the classroom*)?

SANDRA: In the classrooms too. They like disrupt the class and everything with their flirting.

RESEARCHER: And in the cafeteria?

SANDRA: Yes, in the cafeteria.

SANDRA: The most popular boys, you know flirt a lot in public too. They will disrupt the class to like get a girls attention and they are like sometimes the really athletic boys they will like hurt the girls which is like the sign of flirting I guess to hurt someone.

RESEARCHER: Hurt them like how?

SANDRA: Like kick them. Yes, like I have seen that a couple of times. Like the boy will be like, "Hey," then kick her and like she'll be like okay.

RESEARCHER: Which girls do they kick at?

SANDRA: The popular girls.

RESEARCHER: Really? Do they do that to kids outside of that group?

SANDRA: No.

Sandra was more animated as she described this group of girls she had known since she was 6 years old. She shared that she broke away from them last year when there were "better clubs here" and there were "really cool eighth graders around" that she was friends with. When asked if the short lived GSA was the club she was referring to she said yes she had really liked that club last year. She explained that there just weren't the same kinds of people around this year to make anything like that happen again. She also

noted that “there were never teachers who really helped, like Mr. Zinn didn’t even want us in his classroom, so in the end it just sort of fell apart.”

The fall of the GSA and the alienation of “out” students. Thinking about the disbanded GSA seems to push some other memories forward for Sandra. She went on to explain that the students in her eighth grade class were much more judgmental than the class the year prior. “Judgmental” was a word that kept cropping up during our interview.

RESEARCHER: What do you mean by judgmental of other girls.

SANDRA: Well, like usually people will say that if you dress in a certain way, if you dress in like dark clothing and you wear a lot of dark make-up and you don’t try to look like the rest of the girls... Well they’ll say like *Oh she must be like bi or gay*. The average girls, you know not the *popular girls* just the regular ones, usually they wear a lot of regular clothing you know because that is what is comfortable to them and sometimes they don’t have the best haircuts or the newest fashion haircuts and that will also like make people say that they are not normal. So then they say they’re lesbos or something you know. And like sometimes a girl will be like very – she is very emotional towards her friends like, “Oh give me a hug,” you know and they people will be like, “That is weird. She is flirting with you if she gives you a hug.”

RESEARCHER: Who usually starts making that accusation?

SANDRA: The popular girls.

RESEARCHER: Even about people outside their group?

SANDRA: Yes.

RESEARCHER: So they will start naming people? Anybody?

SANDRA: Yes, randomly. Like this one time this girl starting hanging out with one of the popular girls and like she was just hanging out you know, being nice and then, I do not even know what she could have done and suddenly like all these rumors started going around about her. Like, “Oh this girl, she likes her and her and her.” And like people were just like gross. And everyone was talking about her and she felt bad and everything and I got really mad because she was just being nice.

As we discussed the generating of gay rumors, I asked her to elaborate on how teachers handled situations around this topic. This little part of our conversation ended with her suggestion that in her experience, any sort of gender deviance at Oakwood was automatic seen as being gay. At no point during the interview did Sandra say or to my understanding suggested that she identifies as bisexual, as gay, or a lesbian. As I spoke with this young girl I was struck by the fact that she has been referred to by each of these terms to me and in front of me regularly throughout the year. Teachers had said she was bi-sexual, students had said she was a lesbian, and administrators had suggested that she was gay. Sandra herself never claimed to be any of these things during our long discussion on this topic. Instead she talked about people she knew who were considered gay for random reasons she found ridiculous.

RESEARCHER: When you think about how teachers handle homophobia do you think that it is treated the same as other forms of discrimination here. Like if you picked on somebody because of something else like their race or their religion? Some teachers stop this kind of harassment and some teachers do not?

SANDRA: Yes, kind of. But then no, there is actually a really big difference that teachers see between race and people's sexuality and everything. Like teachers think that when this – well, I think that they think that if you are Mexican or Hispanic or African-American, or Asian you are better at least than the gay people.

RESEARCHER: What about people who aren't necessarily gay but their gender appears different?

SANDRA: They are gay people.

Researcher: They are just considered gay automatically?

SANDRA: Yes and people... (Sandra fell quiet)

RESEARCHER: That's a big assumption isn't it?

SANDRA: People will spread a lot of rumors about you if you don't look like a normal girl. A lot.

RESEARCHER: So you could be a girl who does not wear the designer clothes and does not flirt and does not wear make-up and then you are considered gay.

SANDRA: Well probably you mostly get called bi. They would not call you gay unless you are very, very – I mean unless it is very, very obvious that like you are I guess. They will usually call you bi because that makes more sense.

Each time Sandra highlighted the hostile climate at the school I did break from the interview to ask her if she was being harassed and if we could report that to the administration, but she rejected this idea off handedly.

Whatever people say to me here, I can handle it. And if I can't my mom says I can stay home all I want. Talking to anyone here wouldn't do anything for anyone. It'd probably just make it impossible to be here at all.

Pessimistic about reporting harassment, Sandra continued skipping school for the remainder of the school year. As we neared our closing questions I found the interview increasingly upsetting to conduct as I felt complicit in her ongoing alienation at this school. When closing this interview I again asked Sandra about using the harassment policy at school or meeting with an administrator and myself to report her discomfort. She rejected this idea once again which led to the following discussion:

RESEARCHER: Do you think teachers already know what is going on with kids like the stuff that we are talking about? The homophobia?

SANDRA: Yes, I am pretty sure they see it but it is not their job to like fix it; try to like make everyone – well it kind of is their job to make everyone feel equal but they – I do not know. In my opinion they do not do a very good job of it.

RESEARCHER: Do you think that if somebody was using another person's race to single them out and make them feel different, a teacher would do something? Say if someone's saying like, *I do not want to sit by her because she's Latino*, or something like that?

SANDRA: Yes, they (teachers) would definitely do something.

RESEARCHER: What if a student is saying the same stuff like that they don't want to be by someone because they *acted gay* or *looked gay* or something like that. Then don't you think the teacher would do something if they knew.

SANDRA: No I don't think so. That never happens for me. I've never had a teacher get involved and people do that sort of stuff to me all the time.

This was the first time in the interview Sandra fully acknowledged that she was being harassed at school. At the close of the interview I made one final appeal to Sandra to discuss her situation with both her family and the faculty at Oakwood. She rejected my request and said it was better not to start something now, that her mom's boyfriend couldn't handle it, and that there were really only "seven more weeks" to get through until she could go to high school and be with her friends again.

She left the interview in silence and continued to miss school on a regular basis for the remainder of the school year. At the end of the year she had missed nearly half of her spring classes and had failed several classes. Looking back at the beginning of her sixth grade year at Oakwood, she was an outstanding student with perfect attendance in the advanced academic program. I rarely saw her after her interview as she was rarely in attendance for the remainder of the year.

Sandra Disappears—Analysis

The self as Other and the range of possible heteronormative meanings and markings for this subjectivity. In returning to the themes of this project, the analysis of Sandra as the Other and of the vacillation between high visibility and invisibility she experienced within the Oakwood community will again focus on five prevalent patterns in making and marking gender at Oakwood: first, the gendered performances related to the Othering of Sandra; second, the intersectional gender identity making impact of racial, able-bodied, and social class discourses; third, the discursive void within an implicit heteronormative school setting to identify and articulate the workings of power in violence and abuse; fourth, the professional lack of expertise in addressing heteronormative incidents; and finally, the systemic failure to articulate a democratic

gender standard or track, record, and transmit knowledge of this gendering process that would render it visible.

Unlike Caleb, Sandra did not claim the language of the Other in reporting about herself of her experiences at Oakwood. Instead she generally reported on the violence of Othering by referring to general experiences and unnamed students who experienced heteronormative abuse. At the same time Sandra was identified by many members of the community and marked as the Other. Many claimed to have been told by her that she was bi-sexual and that she had publically announced her bi-sexuality. I as a researcher did not interrogate this claim as I feared she would see this as me marking her as Other and or see this as blaming her for the abusive actions of her peers. I simply allowed Sandra to represent herself to me in whatever ways she choose and this resulted in a fluid sexual and gender representation of herself that avoided being captured in heteronormative terms.

The gendered performances related to the Othering of Sandra. Sandra embodied difference from the heteronormative subject space for girls in her class through clothing, hair style, and social interactions. Everything from her black high top tennis shoes to her refusal to participate in classroom flirtations signaled difference in her subjectivity. And while she did not proclaim the Other as her identity, as Caleb did in calling himself gay and discussing who he was out to as gay, Sandra regularly constructed her identity against emphasized femininity.

In this way she her gender identity was like Elizabeth's when each girl would explain, I am just not like them (*heteronormative girls*). However the "them" to which Elizabeth and Sandra referred was presented as all the girls of Oakwood, girls in the

general category. This broad reading of heteronormative gender as the singular girlhood was a product of the gender binary and lack of a critical awareness at Oakwood of girlhood as existing across a spectrum of gender possibilities.

Given an unattainable and or undesirable gender option Elizabeth had then authored for herself this identity as a skater to capture her as essentially different from the girls of Oakwood. Sandra with two more years at Oakwood Middle School discussed the heteronormative gendering of her peers in greater detail than had Elizabeth. However, she did not articulate a gender space for herself at Oakwood. Instead she simply painted herself out of the picture altogether.

“I just stay home when it gets too bad.”

“I mean, what is the use of P.E. anyway? I exercise, I don’t need it, I don’t go.”

“There’s no use telling anyone, it’s not even something you can tell about really. I just take breaks from this place when I need them and that’s enough.”

This Other identity was certainly registered and capitalized upon by Sandra’s peers and teachers who marked Sandra as queer in order to perform a sort of liberal inclusion politic in some instances. In other instances Oakwood community members would mark her as Other to amplify their heterosexuality as in the locker room moments. Even teachers marked Sandra as the Other and used her GSA experiences to hand wring about the dangers of making sexual minority youth visible in middle school. In professional discourses Sandra became the outsider because the GSA had introduced this outsider topic that the community “wasn’t ready for.” This marking tidily placed the blame on Sandra rather than looking to the community as the problematic space.

The intersectional gender identity making impact of racial, able-bodied, and social class discourses. As the final vignette in this chapter Sandra once again highlights the importance of intersectional identities in informing her gender and sexuality possibilities at Oakwood. Sandra concisely highlighted the social class element of the EA cohort and the intersections between social class and gender and sexuality performances in her discussion about which high school she planned to attend. A discussion about high school choice and perceived gender and sexuality freedom turned into a discussion about geographic location of housing.

Sandra and the other GSA members from the previous year had all elected to attend Arts High School over Varsity High School when transitioning from eighth to ninth grade. These students saw VHS as reinforcing the gender paradigm of Oakwood while they saw AHS as a space where difference would be accepted and embraced. The two schools did in fact serve different economic demographics with VHS housing the highest income students in the community and AHS serving a much more economically and racially diverse population.

I will also note that as an EA member, Sandra's poor academic performance and low attendance did once again slip below the radar of the administration at Oakwood. I argued earlier in this chapter that I believe ablest discourses privileged the students of the Elite Academy. It is possible that Sandra's school troubles were not seen because as a "talented and gifted" student she was less supervised by the teachers and administrators at Oakwood.

The discursive void within an implicit heteronormative school setting to identify and articulate the workings of power in violence and abuse. Having considered this

problem from an array of vantage points at this point in the chapter I would like to focus on Sandra's inability to report her experiences at Oakwood. I see this as a grave disservice on the part of the teachers and faculty at Oakwood. A student who has been hit, or has had an item taken from their locker knows the language and the means to report the situation to the school faculty at Oakwood. However in Sandra we see a student who has been isolated, harassed, shamed, and made less than human in her classes and in the hallways of the school. And in her own discussion as well as in all reports about her it is apparent that she cannot find a language to articulate her abuse to the same faculty.

It would be easy to say, "She never told us what was bothering her." But that sort of claim cannot come from a school, the very place producing knowledge possibilities. For Sandra to "tell us" would require that the school make its anti-homophobic policies real in the lives of the students of Oakwood. Her claim of abuse has no language for articulation because this form of abuse is naturalized day in and day out at Oakwood through everything from the barrage of homophobic slurs to the gender privileging of heterosexual masculinity and femininity.

The school has failed to establish a discourse in which Sandra's gender and sexuality rights existed at all. To presume that Sandra will arrive at a language on her own to establish and lay claim to her rights is as improbable as the educational assumption that a group of marginalized students can create a club to establish their own "Safe Space" within a hostile community. Therefore a harassment policy that sits on the books while the teachers and faculty do not verbally or materially support marginalized youth is a meaningless and lifeless piece of policy within the school community. The

system is missing a comprehensive understanding of the disempowered positions of marginalized youth and failing to empower these subjects with the educational authority that would legitimate their presence.

The professional lack of expertise in addressing heteronormative incidents. In this final story of Sandra what is disturbingly apparent is that the vast majority of the faculty can point to Sandra as a marginalized student at Oakwood. And at the same time no one on the faculty identifies it as their responsibility to make sure Sandra is safe, healthy, and able to learn at Oakwood. Instead her presence is used to ironically highlight her marginalization while simultaneously suggesting that it is symbolic of inclusion at Oakwood.

The built in assumption that Sandra is accepted and content in the community runs counter to all that is known about the risks and abuses LGBTQ youth face in schools (Kosciw et al., 2010). And based upon this assumption the school provides no means to work with her directly, provide her with any resources, or seek her council about her experiences related to the schools homophobic climate.

In discussions with faculty members about Sandra I got the consistent impression that everyone could see the child sitting on the tracks, but no one wanted to look at the train barreling down the hillside. More importantly it became quite clear that it was not anyone persons educational job to consider ways to slow down the train. Therefore they created frames for Sandra that took her out of the Oakwood context in their thought process. For example one teacher explained, “Sandra is just more mature than her classmates. She is way beyond most kids here and will do great in high school.” This sort

of bracketing of Sandra as beyond her peers Oakwood allowed her to be seen as impermeable and safe from the context of Oakwood.

The professional discourse surrounding the disbanding of the short lived GSA also illustrated the lack of professional expertise or leadership in addressing heteronormativity at Oakwood. In considering the GSA teachers consistently suggested that students at Oakwood were “too young” for such a club and “not ready to handle” knowing that students in the club were gay. The removal of the role of education and or educators in managing the discourse about gender and sexual diversity at Oakwood reflected the overall reluctance of the faculty in this area.

With a limited professional discourse regarding gender and sexuality and a faculty and unwilling or unable to address gender and sexuality diversity the decline of the GSA becomes an inevitability. This same lack of expertise is also predictive of the violence Sandra is then forced to endure in the presence of her less “mature” peers who are not being taught anything other than heteronormative boundaries for gender and sexuality at Oakwood.

The systemic failure to articulate a democratic gender standard or track, record, and transmit knowledge of this gendering process that would render it visible. Sandra, like many of the other students discussed in this chapter sent out signals that her life at Oakwood was not functional. She was frequently absent, she stopped doing most of her work and began failing classes, and she was regularly reporting to the office with a parent note excusing her as late for classes. She could be seen moving through the hallways alone when everyone else was in class, she sat alone in the cafeteria, and she was frequently alone in open spaces during open periods.

On paper through grades and attendance as well as physically, Sandra could have been seen as floundering if not drowning in her life at Oakwood. Yet instead she was regularly interpreted as an example of maturity, a kid ahead of her time, and an example of Oakwood's liberal and inclusive community.

While there were mechanisms at Oakwood for tracking school absences and tardies, Sandra was able to slip through these systems time and again by simply providing the exception documentation. She always provided a parent note for her absences and she always had a parental or teacher based excuse for her tardies from one class to another.

Conclusion

The gender (re)production or the making of girls and boys at Oakwood can be seen through the cases in this chapter to be highly constricting and heteronormative. And where there are brief individual forays into a more liberating or diverse discourse of gender and sexuality the overriding dichotomous discourse nearly always manages to absorb and reconfigure new performances to ultimately reproduce heteronormative dominance and subjugation.

The cases considered in this chapter illustrate how a heteronormative gender and sexuality discourse (re)produces while simultaneously naturalizing hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity (Connell, 1999). How marginalized and subjugated Others are violently co-constructed within this dichotomous discourse of gender and sexuality norms (Rasmussen, 2006). And finally how interpolation into the subject possibilities of heteronormativity results in both enacting and experiencing dehumanizing violence on a regular basis in the moment to moment performances of

one's gender and sexual identity at Oakwood (Kimmel, 2006; Mason, 2002; Tomsen & Mason, 2001).

In considering the gendering of students within this study a series of themes emerge to be considered with regard to the (re)production of heteronormative gender possibilities. First it is clear that divergent identity discourses are at play in the gender identity making of students. Heteronormative gender (re)production is impacted and influenced by Oakwood's racial discourse, social class discourse, religious identity discourse, and the community's able-bodied and embodiment discourses.

The intersection of gender and sexuality with race is most apparent within this study in the desperate professional interpretations of masculinity as violent or as errant and playful among the male aggressor of the study. Whereas students of color like Marcos and Julius are perceived and persistently marked and disciplined as dangerously aggressive males, white males engaged in similar activities are frequently unseen by the faculty with regard to male aggression. And on occasions where white males like Chad, Cameron, and Samuel are reported on for gender or sexual harassment or violence their performances are addressed with instruction rather than discipline.

Yet there are no clear bounds between the discourse of race and that of social class in relation to the production of multiple masculinities and femininities at Oakwood. For as the many Elite Academy cases illustrate, social class is co-constructing gender possibilities alongside the racial discourse among the students and faculty of the community. Thus the heteronormative masculinity of low income students like Jackson, Rodrigo, Bruno, and Marcos is reined in by swift authoritarian discipline. While in contrast affluent students with cultural capital like Olivia, Julius, and Samuel dominate

and subjugate their peers based upon gender and sexuality norms only to have the faculty offer these students additional educational supports and resources.

Religious discourse emerges within these cases to buoy a heteronormative construction of gender and sexuality which necessarily constructs and simultaneously condemns gender and sexuality diversity. While this chapter touches on this intersection of religious discourse with that of gender and sexuality, the following chapter will offer additional cases in which the intersections of religious identity and heteronormative discourses create a fertile space for the Othering of non-conforming youth.

Cases of gendering within this chapter also point to the discursive void within an implicit heteronormative school setting to identify and articulate the workings of power in violence and abuse. The Oakwood faculty displays a very constrained and untrained knowledge of gender and sexuality diversity and only a rudimentary knowledge of gender and sexuality inequality within the public context. Thus in moments of sexual domination or aggression toward female like the Muffin Top scenario, teachers fail to note let alone address the gender power and aggression associated with the “teasing.” With much the same blindness to the discursive power of heteronormativity, the sexual marginalization of students with gay love notes is readily compared to the religious oppression of a Christian student.

In a further erasure of the power and material effects of heteronormativity the Oakwood administration regularly engages in a disciplinary discourse of zero tolerance to address student conflicts which decontextualize school violence. In these instances discursive domination and violence are reconstituted as fights in which both parties must be held “mutually accountable.” At the most absurd point we find Othered students like

Kendrick and Elizabeth being sent to the hall alongside their hegemonic tormentors for fighting and disrupting class.

This failure to recognize let alone address discursive power results in a professional lack of expertise in addressing heteronormative incidents. Teachers throughout Oakwood abdicate addressing heteronormative peer harassment and peer conflicts to the school administration. Teachers proclaim accurately that they have little to no training in addressing homophobic or heterosexist harassment. In addition they claim they do not have adequate time to address these problems with students. In fact they are not asked to, nor are they evaluated based upon any measure of gender parity or equity within either their curriculum or their classroom management.

Compounding the professional ignorance regarding the violent gendering taking place at Oakwood is the erasure of this gendering process altogether. For the vignettes in this chapter clearly indicate a systemic failure to articulate a democratic gender standard. In case after case we see a systemic failure to track, record, or transmit knowledge of this gendering process that would render it visible to the faculty of Oakwood.

There is no written documentation noting in name or in detail the persistent sexual harassment of Angela, the heterosexist cyberbullying of Sophia, the homophobic knife assault on Peter, the persistent homophobic harassment of Kendrick, the vindictive “outing” of Bobby, the homophobic power grab of the gay love notes or the explicit homophobic assaults on Caleb and Sandra. These stories are simply not written down, the stated district violation of harassment based upon gender identity or sexual orientation is not documented, and there is no systemic professional discussion to consider these many ongoing events. At the professional level it could be stated that all of this gender

dominance, violence, and subjugation quite simply does not exist. As I was told repeatedly at Oakwood, “We don’t have a problem with homophobia at this school. Just look at how popular Caleb and Sandra are, and they are both gay.”

And so the vignettes of this chapter conclude with the unsettling narratives of the two “out” queer students, Caleb and Sandra. Yet while the faculty and students of Oakwood mark these two students as the revered Others of the community, each child’s own story reflects a humiliating and violent gendering process at Oakwood.

As the marked and interpolated Others of this study, both Caleb and Sandra were rapidly disappearing from Oakwood Middle School throughout the project. By the end of this study, Caleb no longer attended Oakwood and it is uncertain whether he has ever enrolled in another middle school since withdrawing from Oakwood. At the end of the study Sandra was only sporadically attending Oakwood and as a former A student Sandra ended the year barely passing her required courses. In reviewing this chapter on gender production at Oakwood I wish to first highlight these two closing vignettes as they unfortunately serve to illustrate what we know to be true about the educational and social experiences of LGBTQ youth in our society.

The vignette of Caleb as an “out” gay youth tells of harassment, threats of violence, and hiding out to get to and from his classes every day. He discusses reporting his harassment only to have it intensify. And while teachers speak of an awareness of his unique social position as a gay youth, no professional on staff seeks to assist or support him as a student at Oakwood. In the face of violence Caleb speaks of hiding his sexual orientation from his step-father and anticipating the loss of his housing if he were to come out to his mother and step-father. His fear of homelessness reflects the most recent

study on disproportionately high rate of homelessness among queer youth (Quintana, Rosenthal, & Krehely, 2010). And his experiences of school violence and a lack of professional support reflect the newest study released on school violence toward LGBTQ youth, *Safe at School* which notes the persistent victimization and lack of professional intervention³⁸ queer youth face while at school (Biegel & Kuehl, 2010).

Sandra's vignette as an "out" bi-sexual youth tells much the same story. In the case of Sandra we see a queer student adapting to the violence and harassment of her student experience by slowly attending less and less of her classes and ultimately skipping school for days on end. Sandra's drop from an A student in the Elite Academy to a marginally passing student in the year following her coming out experience readily represents the potential for "lower educational attainment" noted in studies of the dropout rate associated with LGBTQ youth. LGBTQ youth are known to have with some studies finding up to 60% of LGBTQ youth are high school drop outs (Quintana et al., 2010). And in fact Sandra expresses that she intends to drop out of the Elite Academy for high school rather than continue her studies in a hostile environment.

The public gendering of Caleb and Sandra as the Other and their individual interpolation into the subject space of queer youth serves as both a promising and a cautionary tale. This gendering is promising in that, like Elizabeth and Kendrick of earlier vignettes, Caleb and Sandra speak of their gender and sexuality differences from the community norms with pride and acceptance. These students like their vignette

³⁸ According to the 2010 *Safe at School* report 86.2% of LGBT public school students reported being verbally harassed because of their sexual orientation, 44.1% were physically harassed, and 22.1% were physically assaulted. The majority of these students did not report the incidents to school officials, believing that little or no action would be taken or that the situation might even be exacerbated if reported. Nearly one-third of those who did report the mistreatment said that school officials did nothing in response (p. 7).

predecessors only and speak of their circumstances in a highly heteronormative and homophobic environment as pathologic.

A common factor in the resilience of each of these four students is that each of them had access to someone in their life who offered them a divergent sexuality and gender discourse from the pervasive heteronormative discourse of Oakwood. Recall Elizabeth's brother and step father encouraged her gender identity with haircuts and clothing, Kendrick and Sandra's parent's supported their non-conforming gender identities, and finally Caleb's long distance brother coached him on how to survive as a gay youth in a homophobic setting. Yet each of these students was marginalized and harmed regularly while at Oakwood where there was only a heteronormative gender and sexuality discourse that (re)produced these student identities as either sub-human or invisible.

The following chapter will directly consider the institutional silence and ultimate erasure of heteronormative gender (re)production at Oakwood. Considering yet another series of vignettes I will in that chapter consider how this gendering repeatedly disappears from the professional or public text at Oakwood.

CHAPTER IV

INARTICULATE DISCIPLINE AND DISCURSIVE SILENCE

Introduction

During my year of observations at Oakwood, classrooms were the sites of countless heteronormative incidents where normative ideas about gender and sexuality were embedded within the social practices of students and teachers alike. These incidents were sometimes captured in momentary acts as simple as brushing up against a particular person's body or a word shouted across a room and sometimes repeatedly enacted in repeated practices like the pervasive naming and mocking of Elizabeth as *Trevor*, Rebecca as *Muffin Top*, and Kendrick as *Homo*.

This chapter will consider yet another series of such moments in the Oakwood classrooms. Again they will be represented as short vignettes. In these vignettes rather than focusing on the gendering of particular subjects I will highlight the discursive practices that result in the effective erasure of student's experience from the community dialogue and the consequential abjection of the children at the school (Rasmussen, 2004, 2006).

As I document these practices, I will continue to focus on this project's central concerns; how heteronormativity reproduces in the daily practices of students, teachers, and administrators at Oakwood. And how the interactions surrounding these moments reproduce and in some cases endorse the same heteronormativity we as educators wish to disrupt and put an end to.

Of specific interest will be the way staff disciplinary practices intended to interrupt sexual and homophobic harassment can be interpreted as reproducing the discursive norms that enable that harassment (L. J. Moran & Skeggs, 2004). In other words, the cases to follow will illustrate contradictions in contemporary school discipline practices that can help explain why these practices systemically fail to stop sexual and homophobic harassment (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003).

In representing the following events, I have set my focus on the silences and erasure of these moments of violence. I am interested in how these stories and the people within them can become highly visible and quickly be rendered invisible in the public sphere of Oakwood. Where the last chapter considered the making of heteronormative subjects this chapter will map the elusive ways in which this violence is erased from the collective knowledge of the Oakwood community.

These vignettes are thematically organized in the following manner; vignettes one and two consider the erasure of the production of emphasized femininity and hegemonic masculinity. These first two vignettes consider the erasure of the production of these subjects; the naturalizing of the privileged status of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity. Vignettes three and four explore the erasure of the production of “homophobia” at Oakwood; the erasure of the violence within the social construction of the Other. And vignette five considers how educator’s individual lives, their individual sexed and gendered identities, exist within and are placed under erasure through heteronormative discourses in schools.

Vignette 1: “Copping a Feel” considers the erasure of heterosexist objectification of female bodies. Like *Muffin Top* from the previous chapter, this vignette looks at how

the heteronormative violence toward the female is rendered invisible. *Vignette 2: “Stop Looking at My Ding-dong”* returns to the pattern discussed in earlier analysis of *The Eighth Grade Boys*. In this vignette I consider the normalized construction of masculinity as violent and homophobic. *Vignette 3: “I Won’t Sit by Fags”* carries this normalization of masculine violence and homophobia into the structural organizing of schooling. *Vignette 4: “I Ain’t No Homosexual”* explores the limitations of educational discourses related to bullying, masculinity, and sexuality. And *Vignette 5: “Do I look gay to you!”* takes into consideration how teachers are implicated in heteronormative discourses.

Vignette 1: Copping a Feel

Copping a Feel—The Story

I knew he was copping a feel when he put the gum back in my pocket. Then I saw they were all chewing gum and laughing. He did it at least twice and they were all watching.

~Tori’s response when asked why she swore at a male classmate who stole gum from her breast pocket

Tori gets sent to the hall. When Mr. Martin wasn’t dealing with discipline in his office, he supervised behavior in the open areas of Oakwood. He often “made the rounds” by walking throughout the building in the late afternoon. One afternoon when he and I were walking the hallways and looking in on classes we came upon a young girl named Tori standing outside Ms. Rivera’s classroom.

Tori was an eighth grade girl at Oakwood. She was fairly tall, about 5’10 and thickly built from head to toe. On this particular day he was casually dressed wearing an oversized shirt over a t-shirt and a pair of torn up blue jeans. The very large clothing

appeared to be an attempt to conceal her very developed female body, though it was clear that she was more curved and had a much larger chest than the other female classmates.

As Mr. Martin and I approached her we were both significantly shorter than her and each of us looked slightly up into her red and tear-streaked face. She stood with her back to the classroom window and her face dropped when she spotted Mr. Martin approaching. Mr. Martin immediately registered surprise to see her “kicked out of class” and asked her why she was in the hall.

She began her response with the accusation that Drew, a boy in her class, had been stealing gum out of her pocket and passing it to all the boys in class. She gestured with her index finger to the breast pocket of her oversized shirt which hung open revealing a partial pack of chewing gum. She went on to explain that when she caught Drew with his hand in her pocket she had “accidentally” cursed really loudly and struck out at him. As she was speaking, Ms. Rivera saw the three of us through the classroom window and came out of the classroom to explain the situation to Mr. Martin.

Ms. Rivera and Mr. Martin interview Tori and Drew. Almost immediately a conversation between Mr. Martin and Ms. Rivera ensued about what a perfect student Tori had been, and what a shame it was that she had now tarnished the end of her eighth grade year. Their words volleyed back and forth, noting that Tori got good grades and normally got along with everyone, and now this “level two violation” would mean she couldn’t be part of the end of the year party. As they spoke, Tori stood teary eyed looking at the two of them.

When it grew quiet again Tori quickly admitted that she had lost her temper and apologized for her indiscretion. Mr. Martin suggested that since her behavior was “so

public” they couldn’t just let it go. She was told that she would need to publically apologize, and maybe over the next few days Mr. Martin could find a way for her to do community service and still be part of the end of the year party.

Quickly Drew was summoned to the hallway for apologies. He was ordered to apologize for taking her gum and she was to apologize to him for her inappropriate language and for attempting to strike him. Drew was told that he would serve community service for his part in the situation. At this point the situation was resolved to the satisfaction of the teacher and administrator. The two students returned to the classroom with Ms. Rivera stating that she intended to address the class on this type of disruptive classroom behavior when she returned from the hallway.

I introduce a concern about Tori’s body being touched. As the door closed behind the two students there was an awkward moment of silence between us three remaining adults. At this moment, my researcher and advocate roles collided in my mind. The advocate in me spoke as I stated, “Did you see where she was carrying that pack of gum?” Both Mr. Martin and Ms. Rivera responded with blank looks as I pointed to the classroom window. Looking into the classroom you could see Tori slouching at her desk with her breast pocket slightly puffed open. There sat a green pack of gum perhaps a centimeter away from her left breast.

Mr. Martin and Ms. Rivera remained quiet as I awaited their response. “I think there may have been other reasons Tori swore and slapped Drew,” was all I could think to say. Internally I wondered why Mr. Martin and Ms. Rivera did not register Tori’s larger than average breasts or the gum’s proximity to them. Mr. Martin looked at me and

said, “Don’t you think she would have said something if there was something else going on just then?”

I felt torn in that moment between observing and intervening and was calculating my next comments when Ms. Rivera broke in, “Oh! I don’t know why I didn’t see that before.” She didn’t look at me or Mr. Martin but was now focused on Tori as she opened the door and called her back into the hallway.

We three adults stood once again looking at this girl and questioning her behavior. Ms. Rivera spoke first; “Tori, I’m sorry to call you back but I just wanted to ask you one more thing. Can you tell me where Drew touched you? I mean where on your body. Where did he touch you when he took the gum out of your pocket?”

Tori’s face grew red once again as she looked down at her chest and the pack of gum in her shirt pocket. She responded, “I was leaning over my desk and I was really just thinking about my drawing so I never felt him take it. It was just when he put it back! Right then I felt something really weird and creepy. I thought like that there was a mouse in my shirt or something. And then I realized it was his hand moving around in there. I jumped back and slapped him.” Mr. Martin and Ms. Rivera were quiet as Tori went on talking. “Then I looked around and saw all his buddies grinning at me and chewing gum. So I called him a name and that’s when you heard me.”

Mr. Martin and Ms. Rivera were again blank faced and quiet. The adult silence following Tori’s comments made me extremely uncomfortable and I found myself intervening once again; “No one ever has the right to touch your body without your permission Tori. Ever. If someone touches you like that you have every right to get them away from you.”

This comment awoke a different voice in Tori who then said in a wizened tone, “I knew he was copping a feel when he put the gum back. Then I saw they were all chewing gum and laughing. He did it at least twice and they were all watching.”

Ms. Rivera now also took a new tone in the discussion, “Tori, I wish I’d understood from the beginning what was going on. I wish you’d told me.” To which the student replied, “I was just so embarrassed. I didn’t know what to say.” After a moment of quiet, Tori was sent back to the class. Drew was again called back out to the hallway.

Drew returns to explain his actions. This time Drew was asked to explain his actions. When the door shut behind him, Mr. Martin stepped toward him and took over the questioning. His voice grew lower and sterner as he said, “Drew I’d like to know exactly where Tori’s gum was before you took it and what your hand was doing there.” Mr. Martin emphasized the word “I” as he spoke suggesting that he personally was talking to Drew now, rather than we three adults.

Drew offered a series of explanations at that point, suggesting among other things; that he didn’t notice how close the gum was to Tori’s chest, that it was all just a joke anyway, that he was only responding to a dare, and that someone else he wouldn’t name had done it first and he was just the one who got caught. Some of these explanations contradicted one another.

Mr. Martin and Ms. Rivera made eye contact as Drew spoke. After a few minutes Mr. Martin interrupted, “Drew, touching Tori like that is inappropriate, it’s harassment. You’ll have a level two (discipline referral) for this just the same as she does. As of now you are both out of the end of the year party and events. She can’t be hitting and cursing

and you have to keep your hands to yourself. I'll be calling both of your parents when I return to my office.”

With that Drew was sent back to class and Ms. Rivera was told to pass along Mr. Martin's decision to Tori. With this situation resolved the two of us, Mr. Martin and I, walked away from the classroom in silence.

Copping a Feel—Analysis

The erasure of hegemonic masculinity as a social construction, and the naturalizing of the subordination of femininity within this discourse. In the preceding vignette it seems clear to the researcher, as well as to Ms. Rivera and Mr. Martin, that Tori has been sexually harassed. However, in the end, the educators equated the seriousness of that violation with her violation of the schools language policies. Additionally, from Tori's perspective, it was the language policies that were clearly and definitively articulated and acted upon while the harassment she experienced was neither definitively named by the educators present (aside from the researcher) nor did its recognition change the disciplinary consequences for her or her harasser.

What contributes to this erasure of the significance of her harassment? In the analysis to follow I consider the following five prevalent patterns of erasure within the moments between all of the participants in this story: first the illegible lives and unspeakable experiences of Othering; second the missing discourse of sexuality and gender power and oppression at Oakwood; third the reluctant, silent and inarticulate targets of heteronormativity; fourth the break within educational discourses on adolescent gender and sexuality; and fifth the lack of structural means to track and historicize heteronormativity at Oakwood.

The illegible lives and illegible experiences of heteronormative Othering. In the events which took place in and outside of Ms. Rivera's classroom teachers and students alike lacked a normative vocabulary that would have enabled quicker recognition and more appropriate response to the act of harassment. In this brief encounter between first the students and then the students and faculty there existed gendered bodies and gendered experiences that hovered just behind the veil of normativity only to flicker onto the screen momentarily and then disappear again into illegibility.

All of the events and interactions skipped along the pervasive discursive path of authoritarian discipline with Mr. Martin and Ms. Rivera assuming the educational position of moral arbiters and Tori assuming the role of wayward youth with little to no consideration of the context of the earlier events. Tori's earlier experience as a single female potentially targeted by a group of males was masked beneath this rote performance of teacher authority and student subjugation. She quickly took up the role of apologist while both Mr. Martin and Ms. Rivera enacted institutional authority in tandem.

The illegible experience of heteronormative assault and the invisible presence of Tori's sexed and gendered body was only presented and considered when I, as a party from outside of the school's customary practices suggested the faculty reexamine Tori's body in relation to Drew's actions.

Yet even when this unintelligibility was briefly ruptured and Ms. Rivera came to consider another possible text taking place between Tori and Drew her next move was to erase the heightened focus on heteronormative violence. In a moment of both support and admonition Ms. Rivera said, "Tori, I wish I'd understood from the beginning what was going on. I wish you'd told me."

Rather than considering the sexual and gender norms that contributed to Drew's game and Tori's emotional response, Ms. Rivera's response erased this power differential altogether and once again placed Tori in the position of apologist to authority.

Mr. Martin and Ms. Rivera did call Drew's behavior harassment. But beyond that simple designation, there was no further conversation or examination of what led up to the act. Nor was there a conversation or examination of why that young woman had been unable to name the behavior as a violation of her personal boundaries.

The elusive space through which Tori found it difficult if not impossible to make claims about her sexual and gendered marginalization stands in stark contrast to the readily available naturalized discourses of power and oppression available to those like Drew who are enacting heteronormativity. In a matter of moments Drew was able to offer an array of discursive accounts for his physical aggression toward Tori. Recalling Drew's use of naturalizing accounts of masculine domination, "he didn't notice how close the gum was to Tori's chest, it was all just a joke anyway, he was only responding to a dare, and someone else he wouldn't name had done it first and he was just the one who got caught." Tori on the other hand could only explain, "I was just so embarrassed. I didn't know what to say."

Finally between Mr. Martin, Ms. Rivera, and myself there was no meaningful language outside of the shared heteronormative discourse for the three of us to take account for our own silence and contributions in the marginalizing and marking of Tori's body as a heterosexual object of play and desire.

The missing discourse of sexuality and gender power and oppression among the students. An array of advocacy groups from the American Association of University

Women (Lipson, 2001) to Human Rights Watch (Bochenek & Brown, 2001) to the Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006) have spent the past two decades tracking and publicizing the pandemic of heterosexist and homophobic violence taking place in U.S. public schools. Researchers like Nan Stein (2005), Michael Kimmel (2006) and C. J. Pascoe (2007) have written extensively about this unchecked tide of heteronormative violence among our countries youth. And high profile cases of pervasive heterosexual and homophobic harassment appear in the mainstream media on an increasingly frequent basis.³⁹ (Vavrus)

At Oakwood sexual and homophobic harassment were certainly understood to be inappropriate and to be a necessary focus a discipline policy. If asked, any teacher or administrator would confirm this belief. However, daily professional discussions related to gender and sexuality at Oakwood were generally structured within a heteronormative framework. For example there were abundant professional discussions about girl's short skirts and shorts as "distractions to the educational environment." These discussions reflected lack of any critical concern for male self restraint as well as a presumption that heterosexual desire permeated the classrooms of the school.

There were also regular professional speculations about any one of many particularly "different" and therefore annoying boys being "set straight" when he got to high school by the presumably violent policing of older males. In considering the homophobic harassment of Kendrick for example, Mr. Martin helpfully suggested to Kendrick that he should, "Really think about what's happening between you and Rodrigo

³⁹ Carl Walker-Hoover (1997- 2009) and Pheobe Prince (1994-2010) were two adolescents whose suicides garnered national attention during the period of this research project (Gibbs, 2010) . Both students left a trail of evidence of homophobic and heterosexist "bullying" resulting in Massachusetts 2010 passage of anti-bullying legislation and a national push for a federal anti-bullying law (Safe Schools Act, 2009) specifically identifying bullying related to sexual orientation, gender, and gender identity.

before you get to high school. Those guys at VHS won't put up with *any nonsense* and they can be brutal." The nonsense (*emphasis mine*) Mr. Martin suggested Kendrick reconsider could only be interpreted as Kendrick's gender non-conforming performances and personal style. This naturalizing of male violence and policing of masculine performances was, as noted here, offered to guide and support students like Kendrick navigate and conform to heteronormativity at school.

Tori's experiences can then be read through the lenses provided by this heteronormative professional context. And these discursive lenses within this professional context recognized some elements of heteronormative gender which were readily named and negotiated while others remained invisible. In the context of Tori's experiences in this vignette perhaps the most significant unnamed and unseen interactions within the power discourse of sex and gender at Oakwood were as noted here, the physical objectification of her body and the brute power of masculine dominance. For the two unseen moments which were only brought out at the end of the discipline were the touching of Tori's breast and the collective group of males participating in this objectification.

First it is important to note that Tori's exceptionally mature chest was not seen as vulnerable or as sexually invaded by the same professionals who regularly scrutinized and sexualized female skirts and legs. Below I go into greater detail considering the experiences of "early breast development" (Summers-Effler, 2004), here I simply wish to point to the discursive silence and lack of awareness related to Tori's initial report about having her breast pocket invaded by a boy's hand. I would argue that in this moment Mr.

Martin and Ms. Rivera failed to see Tori as female and Drew as male within the heteronormative frame of Oakwood.

Aside from a lack of considering Tori's embodiment, clothing, and style of girlhood in questioning her about the events, both Mr. Martin and Ms. Rivera also failed to register the moment in which Tori pointed to the pack of gum snugly located in her breast pocket.

Second and equally important within the silences of this event was the lack of any professional discourse to capture and consider the masculine domination of Tori's body in this event. There was no discussion related to the fact that Tori was female while Drew and every other participant in this "game" was male. Ms. Rivera initially commented, "I know Drew and his buddies were messing with you, but hitting is never acceptable." Registering and simultaneously erasing any level of awareness of the gender power dynamic of the actors within this conflict.

As these events came to a close, following repeated interrogations of both Tori and Drew, the remainder of the class, including a small number of boys chewing gum, watched the scene through the classroom window. The group nature of this gendered harassment was obscured until it was rendered irrelevant and only Drew was sanctioned. And his sanction was readily interpreted as related to "stealing" rather than heterosexual harassment and assault. Tori too was visibly sanctioned for on one level cursing and hitting and while on another level she was in fact disciplined for registering, reacting, and defending her body from masculine invasion.

The reluctant, silent, and inarticulate targets of heteronormativity. In looking back at the array of cases shared in this study up to this point it can be argued that Tori,

as an Oakwood girl, was not at the center of emphasized femininity within this community. In talking about girls and gender among the Oakwood community children like Olivia of *The Mean Girls* were readily offered as examples of femininity. A gender non-conforming child like Elizabeth might eventually come to mind to represent the sexual and gender Other of girlhood. But what of someone like Tori, how would she be interpreted as a girl within the heteronormative discourse of femininity at Oakwood? Could her girlhood be seen as such and her interactions and experiences be interpreted within the context of sexual and gender power and oppression prevalent in these adolescent years of sexual maturation and development?

In considering Tori's embodiment of girlhood within Oakwood's heterosexist framework, a fundamental element of her public gender presence was her larger and more mature body. Of particular importance were her developed breasts which were significantly bigger than those of all of her female peers.

In her research on the social experiences of girls with early breast development Erika Synners-Effler (2004) considered the symbolic importance of breasts to patriarchal discourses. She noted that in U.S. culture breasts have been co-modified to symbolize heterosexual desire and feminine availability. Synners-Effler went on to consider the school experiences of "*Little Girls in Women's Bodies*" noting the sexual objectification of these girls, and their developing strategies for adjusting to this social space.

When women are subject to the inevitable and uninvited evaluating gaze of male observers, they learn to evaluate and constrain themselves to avoid interactions that lead to further loss of emotional energy. These early breast-developing women used defensive strategies that were based on controlling that which stigmatized them, their body. (p. 40)

Looking back at Tori's experiences from this frame one can see everything from her style of wearing oversized clothing to her reluctance to discuss the moment when Drew was caught "copping a feel" as strategies to control the stigma of what Synners-Effler identifies as Patriarchal heterosexual objectification or what the current project more broadly labels heteronormativity. In Synners-Effler's study the girls interviewed found that defense and denial were the most effective means of adapting to the sexualization and objectification of their breasts. Girls who attempted to resist objectification or to manipulate that objectification, what she called "using it strategies" became more and more marginalized by both peers and educators (p. 41). Given this sexual socialization, Tori's registered silence could be seen as both interpolation as well as a form of resistance to further heteronormative marginalization.

The break within educational discourses on adolescent gender and sexuality. As was noted in the previous passage, there has been a good deal of research and policy initiative over the last two decades regarding heterosexual and homophobic harassment in schools. In fact Oakwood's school district has, at the district level, taken on an active role in tracking and addressing these forms of harassment within the schools. During this study there was a school wide culture survey asking students about gender and sexual harassment and there were district administration and school board meetings regarding this topic. Mr. Clark participated in this administrative educational discourse just as Mr. Martin acted as a district wide administrative leader on issues of diversity and bias.

In these institutional roles the administrators of Oakwood operated from a more nuanced position on gender and sexuality identities among the students at Oakwood. The teachers at the school however primarily operated from the heteronormative "Children

Should Be” narrative regarding gender and sexuality (Epstein, O’Flynn, & Telford, 2003). In this educational framing of child development there is a bizarre conflation of social construction and essentialist notions of gender. This common sense, “boys will be boys” ideology makes boyhood out of a stack of dominating and superior signifiers and then attaches those signifiers to individuals as if they were essential to the male sex.

One day following a fight Mr. Reed explained to some co-workers, “Boys pecking order is just biology. I mean look all the animal species males put on a display. They’re adolescent boys, they just trying to get noticed. We’re not going to stop the fighting. They just have to figure out where they stand.” This neat merger of a social signifier, fighting, with an essentialist notion of heterosexual competition and desire as essential elements of boyhood was common gender speak among the faculty. The central professional discourse regarding girls and girlhood among teachers were related to fertility and sexuality. Most frequently these discussions were about girls clothing, bodies, and sexual appearances as heterosexual objects of desire. Public dress code lectures about visible cleavage or thighs on a girl was a daily feature of discipline in the fall and spring at Oakwood.

Thus among teachers the discussion regarding student gender and sexuality was heteronormative and assumed the power dynamics of patriarchy. Even Oakwood teachers like Ms. Rivera who were more attune to other discursive power dynamics regarding race and social class seldom suggested or openly considered the pervasive power imbalance of gender and sexuality at Oakwood.

Therefore in the moments following Drew and Tori’s pick pocket incident there were divergent discourses of gender and sexuality in operation among the education

professionals. As Mr. Martin, Ms. Rivera and I watched Tori gestured to her breast pocket and explain that Drew had picked her pocket while his friends all watched the information was assembled in each of our minds into a different pattern. Thinking back on Foucault's work on the construction of knowledge, this moment illustrated the unlikelihood if not impossibility of Ms. Rivera and Mr. Martin to know or interpret this moment as heteronormative. The limited binary essentialist and heteronormative gender discourse in operation at Oakwood asks very little of these professionals in considering even a tentative gender reading of Tori's experience.

Therefore, Mr. Martin and Ms. Rivera read the moment absent bodies, gender, sexuality, and power and leapt to Oakwood's pervasive zero tolerance discourse of authority over disorder.⁴⁰ Tori was admonished for rule breaking inappropriate language and for violence. Drew was chastised for stealing and both were equally assigned discipline to restore the authority of the teacher and the docile compliance of the students. This should have been the end of this situation and the erasure of any violence or subjugation.

However I, as a queer theorist, immediately constructed a different meaning for this text along the lines of gender sexuality and power. And as it appeared there would be silence regarding this possibility I felt a compulsion to attempt to break this silence. My question, "Did you see where she was carrying that pack of gum?" pointed to Tori's body as gendered and her breast as a sexualized target.

⁴⁰ Susan Talburt (2004) in her essay *Intelligibility and Narrating the Queer Youth* discusses the competing knowledges at play in the social construction of adolescent sexed subjects. She notes that there is a pervasive adult/youth binary intersecting with the gender and sexuality binaries. In considering what can be seen or known about a heteronormative incident at Oakwood all of these ideological binaries are at play in professionally considering interpersonal moments regarding gender and sexuality. (p. 20)

Ms. Rivera rather than Mr. Martin quickly took up a gendered analysis of the moment and reconsidered her initial knowledge of the events. Given Mr. Martin's added expertise in this area I found it interesting that Ms. Rivera was more readily able to engage in a discourse critical of heteronormativity when the discussion was made available. With Ms. Rivera's second round of questions the secondary text arose temporarily to the surface.

Mr. Martin and Ms. Rivera briefly came to a second knowing of these events as heterosexual harassment and gender domination. Yet even as the two engage in a more critical consideration of this moment the discourse of authority over disorder or adult over child quickly subsumed any critical awareness of heteronormativity within the moment once again. The power dynamic, domination, and humiliation were quickly erased as Mr. Martin penalized the two students equally for breaking the rules. The remaining males could be seen happily chewing gum and watching from the window where their participation was not acknowledged or addressed by the educators. And with the discursive silence of both Mr. Martin and Ms. Rivera the classroom as a forum for heteronormative social interactions was naturalized.

The lack of structural means to track and historicize heteronormativity at Oakwood. As noted above the professional discourse on gender and sexuality at Oakwood was so habitually and thoughtlessly heteronormative that this entire event was destined to be erased even as it was being addressed.

All of these structural barriers exist at Oakwood: the faculty is not educated on issues of gender inequality or sexual oppression in education; there is no institutional means by which to specifically document and track sexual or gendered harassment and

assault; and there is no professional community or professional forum through which to discuss and consider the school as a social organism.

To put it quite simply, the school provides no professional training in order for teachers to observe these moments, no clerical means to document these moments, and no organizational means to transmit professional knowledge about these moments.

Vignette 2: Stop Looking at My Ding-Dong

Stop Looking at My Ding-Dong—The Story

We just call all harassment “harassment.” I could make a note in the details section if this had been a referral, but we don’t really track it that way.

~ Mr. Martin’s response to a question about how Oakwood kept records of homophobic harassment

The police arrive on campus to report a fight. One Friday morning in January a local police officer, Officer Jones, dropped by Oakwood School to talk to Mr. Martin. He made this stop to inform Mr. Martin about a potentially violent situation the previous afternoon. According to Officer Jones two sixth grade boys had needed a police escort home from school. He explained to Mr. Martin that one of the two boys had used a cell phone to call a parent because he was afraid they were about to get beat up by a group of eighth graders. That parent had in turn quickly called the police.

It seemed according to the mother’s police call that the boys, Dillon and Jessie, had been walking home along Otter Creek in a fairly isolated area when they “were jumped” by three bigger boys from Oakwood. Officer Jones went on to explain that due

to the time of day he was already assigned to be in the area so he had arrived at the scene quite quickly and unexpectedly.

When he pulled up to the location the boys were all within sight of the road and were all standing in a brushy area about 500 yards away near Otter Creek. Along with the two sixth grader boys Officer Jones could see three additional boys who were much bigger. He said that as he stepped from his car and began to cross the field the bigger boys turned and sprinted away from the scene.

When Officer Jones arrived at the creek bed Jessie and Dillon reported that the bigger boys were throwing glass bottles at them. Dillon showed Officer Jones a torn backpack to evidence this activity. Canvassing the area Office Jones found that the frozen creek bed was riddled with broken glass. He asked the boys for descriptions of their adversaries and then escorted them the rest of the way home from school.

In concluding his discussion with Mr. Martin, Officer Jones explained that he did not know who the bigger boys were but that Jessie and Dillon assured him that their adversaries were also Oakwood students. The officer requested Mr. Martin take on this investigation and call him back in if any of the families were interested in pressing charges.

Mr. Martin investigates the situation by interviewing Jessie and Dillon. After Officer Jones left campus Mr. Martin initiated an investigation. Jessie and Dillon were called into the office to relate to Mr. Martin what had happened after school the prior day. Jessie was a blond white boy who was about 4'10 and weighed 80 or 90 pounds and Dillon was a brunette boy who was about the same size. When the boys entered the office Jessie immediately said, "Did my mom call you? I told her she didn't need to call you."

Mr. Martin explained that the police had been by, and that the school did have jurisdiction over fights happening on the way to or from school. Dillon then began to recount the events of the previous afternoon. He shared that the two boys had been walking home along Otter Creek and breaking ice when these bigger boys had come upon them and started some trouble. “We were poking around the ice with sticks and I don’t know why but those kids came over and were throwing a jar. Then it hit the fence. Then they threw another jar and it shattered and then they threw another one at us and it hit Jessie’s backpack and cut it.”

Jessie jumped in at that point to explain that he had called his mom to tell her where they were and that they were having some trouble getting home. Both boys readily described the bigger boys though they didn’t know their names or recognize any of them. Mr. Martin was able to pinpoint all three of the bigger boys from the description as three eighth graders named Eli, Rickey, and Ryan.

Eli, Rickey, and Ryan are interviewed. Later in the morning Eli, Rickey and Ryan were brought together into the office to address the incident. These three eighth grade boys were all well over five feet tall. All three boys were white as were the sixth graders who had reported them.

Upon arrival Eli complained about how unfair it was for Mr. Martin to be involved given that the incident had occurred outside of school. Once the school jurisdiction over the incident was again established, Eli insisted that the sixth graders had been the ones to start the fight. He stated repeatedly that the younger boys should be in the room to explain themselves.

Ignoring this, Mr. Martin asked the boys about the complaints he had received from Officer Jones about broken jars all along the creek. Rickey jumped in and said, “We were just throwing bottles. I don’t know why, we weren’t throwing them at them. The second time it just cut that one kids backpack is all. And it was an accident.”

Eli returned to his repeated position that the smaller boys had started everything by threatening this group with sticks. “They were swinging at us with those sticks and trying to hit us.” Ryan and Rickey on the other hand were no longer defending their position and had moved to apologies and negotiating for minimal consequences.

At this point Mr. Martin said to the three boys, “I am not sure exactly what happened there. But I know you outnumbered them and it sounds like you intimidated them.” He added, “I am not going to overwhelm this office with a suspension of all of you. You admit that you intimidated them whether you meant to or not. We are short handed but consequences will be assigned. For now you are to avoid these kids. Unless you have a sincere and humble apology you are to stay away from them.” And with that the three boys were then sent back to class.

The things that were left unsaid. After the students departed, Mr. Martin expressed concerns aloud that perhaps he had not gotten an accurate picture from the younger boys about the altercation. “I guess this could have actually been a fight,” he said to me as I sat in the corner taking notes. He then decided to call Jessie and Dillon back to the office to give him a more detailed account of the incident.

When they arrive Mr. Martin explained to them that Eli claimed that they both tried to hit him with sticks. “I’m afraid you boys didn’t tell me the whole story and I need to know exactly what you did, even if it was in self defense. If there were sticks involved

you should have told me that in the first place. This time around I want to know exactly what happened.”

In this new retelling of the afternoon events Jessie explained for the first time that everything had started when they were walking down the creek breaking ice with sticks and came upon Eli peeing into the creek bed. Jessie said when Eli saw them down in the creek he started yelling and cursing at them as he continued to pee. Then when Eli rejoined his buddies the three of them all came quickly toward the two of them angrily yelling.

Mr. Martin pressed the boys to explain why Eli was angry and what was being yelled. Dillon finally explained, “He was accusing us of wanting to see his ding dong.” He blushed notably as he made this statement.

Jessie then joined in, “Eli said a lot of stuff, bad words I don’t wanna repeat. Then one of his friends came over toward me with a stick and I defended myself with my stick.” Next according to the boys, more boys appeared on the hill and glass bottles began to fly over their heads. As the story was told, both boys said, “I can’t repeat the things they were saying.”

Mr. Martin took additional notes and finished the conversation and arranged to send the boys back to class. As they were preparing to leave Mr. Martin asked me, as the researcher, if I had any questions for the boys. I said I did and then asked them if Eli had actually said, “Don’t look at my ding dong.”

Again the two boys blushed and Dillon said, “No those weren’t the exact words.” I asked them to tell Mr. Martin and me exactly what Eli and the other boys had said, but they stammered at this request and ultimately refused to repeat what they had heard.

I then asked if they could write down what was said that started this altercation. They agreed to try and write it down and then sat quietly together attempting to remember. They whispered and worked together to discern spelling and to try to recall the precise content of the yelling from the day prior.

Mr. Martin took the notepad from Dillon when he finally offered it and read over the comments. As he read his forehead furrowed and said, “Are you sure this is what they said?” Both boys nodded.

Mr. Martin told them he would be checking with the other boys to confirm that they had made these comments. Jessie and Dillon stood fast by their report of the language used by Rickey, Ryan, and Eli. Martin then told them, “Are you willing to say this is what they said to you in front of them?” Here the boys looked at one another and then agreed that they would do that if necessary.

At this point Mr. Martin said, “I don’t think that will be necessary, but I do think this was an important part of what happened yesterday that you didn’t tell me about before. I wish you’d have been more forthcoming the first time I called you in.”

Dillon took the lead in apologizing and said he’d just thought the part about the bottles was what the policeman was interested in so that’s what they thought this was about. Mr. Martin responded that the investigation was about everything that happened. He explained that in the future they should tell him everything, even if it was a little embarrassing, “So I can do my job correctly the first time.”

The boys nodded in compliance and were dismissed once again to their class. Mr. Martin now looked to me and in a slightly irritated tone said, “You knew all along what was happening in that ditch, didn’t you?” I still hadn’t seen the notepad and was

somewhat nervous about what the boys might have written. “I still don’t know what was going on,” was all I could manage as a response. “Oh well, I guess it’s good that you stayed through the interviews since it turned out this incident was right up your alley.”

Mr. Martin then passed the paper over to me. What they both specifically recalled was Eli yelling out, “You big homos. You pencil dicks. Get your faggy eyes off my dick you homos.” Dillon also wrote that Rickey told him to “suck my dick,” and Ryan had chimed in, “We’ll fuck you over little faggots.”

The school day was nearly over at this point and Mr. Martin decided not to call back Eli, Ryan, and Rickey. As he read through the scribble once again, he sat back and shook his head and sighed. “Well, they know they’ll have community service. I guess I’ll call their parents and tell them they’ll need to stay after tomorrow and clean.”

At this point I asked Mr. Martin how the school kept records on homophobic harassment like this. He responded, “We just call all harassment ‘harassment.’ I could make a note in the details section if this had been a referral, but we don’t really track it that way anyway.”

The following day Rickey, Ryan and Eli were sent notes to report for community service after school. None of the five boys were called to the office again about this incident.

Stop Looking at My Ding-Dong—Analysis

The erasure of hegemonic masculinity as a social construction, and the naturalizing of the privileged status of hegemonic masculinity. When Eli, Ryan, and Rickey, three large eighth grade boys were questioned about a violent confrontation at Otter Creek the Oakwood administration treated the situation as an after school fight. The

gendered and sexualized elements of the events were not openly considered or addressed in any meaningful way as the result of professional intervention. In fact the homophobic nature of the confrontation would not have surfaced at all had this researcher not been invited to ask a question of the victims of the harassment. Once the students had testified to the homophobic nature of the harassment, the homophobia was not addressed except to chastise students for not revealing this earlier. The school administrator went on to affirm that there was no practice of recording or transmitting information about the homophobic aspect of this harassment to other members of the Oakwood community.

The heteronormativity that shaped the violence and arguably inspired it underwent a triple erasure in this vignette. First, the taboo nature of the topic left the students reluctant to even describe the details of their harassment. The lack of a conceptual framework for recognizing the way gendered and heteronormative discourses shape interpersonal violence between students made it unlikely the professional educator in this moment would ask the questions that would surface the details of the harassment. Once the details were surfaced, the lack of a professional culture that sustains a critical discourse about gender and heteronormativity allowed this information to receive without effect. “We just call all harassment ‘harassment.’ I could make a note in the details section if this had been a referral, but we don’t really track it that way anyway.”

The illegible lives and unspeakable experiences of Othering. When the white male police officer arrived at Oakwood to report Jessie and Dillon’s distress call to Mr. Martin the two men shared only a brief exchange about the events which took place the previous afternoon. The officer was most emphatic about the breaking of bottles and the evidence of broken glass along the creek bed. His was a narrative bent toward legalistic

concerns about property damage and delinquency. Mr. Martin was most concerned with the timing of the events, as both men noted the schools responsibility for the behavior of students traveling to and from school.

As the conversation volleyed between a legal discourse and an adolescent educational discourse the thread related to the gender of all of the students involved, the age differences, the size differences, and the group number differences was noted as factual information. However these facts were treated as legalistic evidence rather than as potential gendered knowledge that might inform the men about the events.

Social theorist Jackson Katz among others has done a good deal of critical work documenting the erasure of masculine violence in U.S. criminal discourse (Jhally, 1999). He notes that the single most significant similarity within the vast majority of interpersonal violence trends among youth is gender. Yet the gender of perpetrators of violence is generally not highlighted or interrogated by educators or by other social institutions.

When considering the interrogations and self reports of all of the boys in the previous narrative I would argue that neither the boys nor the men involved interpreted this violent domination and interaction as notable within a gendered context. In other words gender as a social location for power and domination itself was illegible to Mr. Martin. The initial text was brought forward by Dillon reporting that the events were instigated at his personal witnessing of Eli's body while the boy was peeing, yet the lack of a discursive frame regarding gender and power left this text invisible to Mr. Martin. Thus he did not follow up by questioning the gendered or sexualized nature the subsequent conflict.

As in the first vignette where Tori's sexed body, her breast, disappeared from the events under consideration by the faculty, in this case Eli's exposed penis as a potential site for gender and sexuality negotiations was not visible to Mr. Martin. Therefore he deployed a criminal discourse in his interrogations. This discourse drove the investigation to unearth any material harm and determine who should be held accountable for such harm. As the dominant figure in the teacher/student discourse his interpretation and subsequent questions about the events then directed all five boys accounts of what had happened.

Given as Katz (Jhally, 1999), Messner (2002a), Kimmel (2006) and others have noted the ubiquitous heteronormative construction of adolescent masculinity as violent, competitive, and homophobic these experiences were quite simply read as mutually violent. In other words, Mr. Martin simply acted on the underlying assumption that boys are violent and physical altercations between boys are inevitable. Any gender or sexual Othering was rendered illegible by this essentializing of masculine violence and dominance.

The missing discourse of sexuality and gender power and oppression. In investigating the events which took place in the creek bed, Mr. Martin and the boys' conversations initially focused on evidence of physical violence. Here as in the preceding case, the dynamics of this conversation revolved around authority and discipline. Martin focused on objects as evidence of violence rather than considering the discourse of masculinity and heterosexuality as the primary tools of violence manipulated within this situation.

Missing from the investigation was any critical interrogation of the size and age difference between the two parties as well as the number difference in group sizes. Missing too was an awareness or consideration of the bodily exposure of gender when Eli was caught by surprise while peeing into the creek. And finally missing was a critical questioning of the escalation of violence between these two groups of young men. There was no moment when Mr. Martin asked Dillon and Jessie precisely what could have motivated them to pursue an interaction with Eli, Rickey, and Ryan.

First, it is important to note that heteronormative gendered and “homophobic” violence has been tracked across size and age difference among males (Plummer, 2001; Renold, 2002; Thorne, 2004). Physical size and age have been noted in study after study as floating signifiers for masculinity which operate in contrast to male peer’s size and age. At Oakwood this pattern held true as the presumed targets of masculine “bullying” who were frequently identified by teachers were smaller and younger than their peers.

For example, one young boy, Timmy was often offered as an example of a typical *bully magnet*. As Mr. Clark once explained, “He’s just such a magnet for bullying and harassment. He gives great reactions when he’s teased, he’s totally immature and annoying, his mother and his grandmother are way too involved in everything that happens here, and teachers don’t really know what to do with him anyway.”

What Mr. Clark failed to note about Timmy was that he was at least 30 pounds lighter and 5 inches shorter than his classmates. Failing to register the physical embodiment of masculine subordination and domination was frequently the case among the faculty. The Oakwood teachers would generally only note male size and age as related to domination when it was counter to the unspoken expectation, but remain silent

about this imbalance of physical power and age when it was supported by biology. In other words, when a small boy held a great deal of masculine power as in the case of student's like Julius, his size would be frequently noted. However when a very large boy dominated smaller male peers the size differentiation was seldom openly noted or addressed.

Finally in considering the missing discourse of sexuality power and oppression at Oakwood, this vignette exposes two frequently enacted heteronormative discourses. The first is a tirade of homophobic insults directed at the younger, smaller boys upon witnessing one of the older boy's exposed body. The second is the combination of veiled and open threats of physical and sexual violence directed at the younger and smaller boys during the ensuing altercation.

As discussed earlier articulating homophobia as a means to crystallize heterosexuality is a fundamental signifier of heteronormative masculinity. A second signifier of masculinity documented by social scientists concerned with both *rape culture* and *hate crimes* is verbally articulating or physically acting upon one's sexual and physical superiority upon the body of the Other (Franklin, 2000, 2004; Kimmel, 2006; Mason, 2002; Quinn, 2002; Tomsen & Mason, 2001)

The reluctant, silent, and inarticulate targets of heteronormativity. In *Silenced Sexualities in Schools and Universities* Debbie Epstein et al. (2003b) consider the ways in which students, "success in school is beset by complex negotiations around heterosexual identity practices" (p. 99). The authors note how youth who identify as anything other than the hegemonic norms alternately keep silent about their experiences of difference or provide robust arguments for their difference in attempts to navigate the

school community. Silence, she notes is a primary navigational tactic of reducing the costs of furthering marginalization as one is increasingly identified as the Other.

In the first vignette of this chapter Ms. Rivera expressed exasperation that Tori hadn't told her about the sexual harassment element of the pick pocket experience "in the first place." In this second scenario Mr. Martin expressed the same frustration expressing his wish that Dillon and Jessie had, "been more forthcoming the first time I called you in." In both cases, these children were marked by the events as the heteronormative objects of ridicule and violence. In both cases one of the means through which this marking was erased was through the silence of these victims. A silence that was interpreted by Mr. Martin and Ms. Rivera as willful on the part of these students, and which a resistance theory may also imply was a willful act on the part of Tori and Dillon.

It is possible that each of their responses of silence was a tactical resistance to further marking as the Other, increased marginalization, and possibly increased interpersonal violence. From their ultimate reluctant reports on the heteronormative discourse organizing their relationships and interactions with Drew and Eli this resistant silence seems likely both a form of resistance and the self policing silence of Foucault's panopticon (1979).

When Dillon and Jessie ultimately reported on the homophobic language and threats directed at them they showed no signs of personal humiliation or association with the language and actions. Rather they marked the language and ideas as unspeakable and were only able to whisper and write on paper what they heard. And when Tori ultimately proclaimed Drew was "copping a feel" she too spoke in judgment of Drew and his actions rather than in shame or embarrassment about her breasts.

All three students, necessarily players in the game of heteronormativity, could reasonably interpret the social meanings of their peer's actions and calculate the cost of further highlighting their own heteronormative transgressions. And so even as this silence operated as resistance to further marginalization it simultaneously shored up the heteronormative discourse and endorsed the violence that was being directed at the three of them.

And this is an important distinction because as noted above, Mr. Martin and Ms. Rivera both sought to place blame for the erasure or invisibility of these heteronormative events upon the victims. And strictly adhering to a resistance theory would also suggest that Dillon, Jessie, and Tori were responsible for their victimization because they absorbed it without seeking redress. However this conclusion misses the point that the heteronormative discourse, the unquestioned binary gender and sexuality norms at Oakwood, is all encompassing. Therefore neither resistance nor endorsement of homophobic or heterosexist interactions can be strictly located in the psyche of an individual. Dillon's silence cannot be interpreted as strictly an individual resistance tactic or the shameful self censoring interpolation of a normative shortcoming. His silence must also be seen as a product of the impossibility of escaping a further marking as the Other.

The break within educational discourses on adolescent gender and sexuality.

Where did the heteronormative account of what happened at Otter Creek get lost? At what moment did the police story of a masculine attack and assault against smaller younger males fall into a generic narrative of kids fighting? Earlier in this section of analysis I noted that there was a missing professional discourse about gender, sexuality,

power, and oppression at Oakwood. I want to make clear here that I do not attribute that discursive lack individually to Mr. Martin or any other professional at Oakwood.

As with the earlier analysis of the professional ineptitude in the story of Tori and Drew, here too the education profession as a whole has shaped Mr. Martin's perceptions about gender and sexuality (Blount & Anahita, 2004; Rofes, 2005). When Mr. Martin with some frustration said to me, "You knew all along what was happening in that ditch, didn't you?" I could not answer that I knew, but it is safe to say I had access to discourses about gender and sexuality that allowed me to formulate possibilities that were outside of his speculative imagination. As a social theorist who has spent time learning about and considering the violent means through which heteronormative masculinity is expressed, I could extrapolate meaning out of the disparate physical size of the boys, the vulnerability of being seen peeing, and the group enactment of male domination. I could not "know" what happened, but I could come closer to exposing the underlying heteronormative discourse which was certainly one of the driving forces behind these events.

Mr. Martin from his limited knowledge of gender domination and violence could possibly enact a discipline or order at Oakwood that perhaps reduced the world of broken bottles and stick sword play. However, if he and the educational establishment were to take serious and deeply consider the violence of privileging and naturalizing particular gender and sexuality norms we might actually address and decrease this interpersonal violence altogether. A professional move from the zero tolerance discourse that focuses on the material tools of violence, knives, bottles, and sticks to a critical discourse about the violence of gender and sexuality norming and assimilation must be made before Mr. Martin is able to readily identify a scene like the Otter Creek incident.

The lack of structural means to track and historicize heteronormativity at Oakwood. The Otter Creek investigation, which barely registered a blip on the schools homophobic harassment radar, was quickly erased from the institutional cannon of gender, sexuality, and discipline at Oakwood. The only material record of heteronormative discourse, the sheet of note paper documenting the homophobic rantings of Rickey, Ryan, and Eli was of no documentation value following the summary dismissal of these events.

In assigning the boys community service, Mr. Martin acknowledged an ambiguous wrongdoing on their part. He did not as repeatedly noted in these vignettes have a systemic means through which he could record this situation as homophobic or heteronormative bullying. The aggressors themselves were never interrogated about homophobic language, nor were they questioned about threats and the enactment of physical and sexual violence related to this language.

There was no means for the education community—the teachers and administration at Oakwood—to collectively discuss and consider this situation as representational of the endemic masculine enactment of homophobia at Oakwood. In other incidents, documented in the second and third chapters and later in this chapter, teachers would express a lack of practice or skills related to addressing incidents of homophobia and heteronormativity. Yet moments like this one at Otter Creek, and even the later moment in which Mr. Martin came to realize “what was happening in that ditch” are not professionally discussed or considered by the staff. This professional silence perpetuates the skill deficit in addressing heteronormative violence at Oakwood.

Here as in the vast majority of these heteronormative incidents at Oakwood there remains no record, no situational or ideological knowledge is passed along to teachers, no collective meaning can be made about the social environment or interactions at Oakwood, and there is no opportunity for learning for the students. The erasure works both to uphold the community norms of Oakwood and to affirm and naturalize the heteronormative assault which took place that afternoon in the creek bed.

Vignette 3: I Won't Sit by Fags

I Won't Sit by Fags—The Story

So anyway, I said, well you know I can move him, no big deal. And then Cameron said I cannot wait to get on the line across from him at football practice next year because I am going to take him out on the football field. And I said Cameron, you know, that is terrible. And his mom was like, that is how boys handle it.

~Mrs. Fleming explaining how she handled a parent and child who requested classroom seating away from a peer they believed was gay

Mrs. Fleming's thoughts on how schools deal with bullies. Mrs. Fleming sat down for an interview with me a month after I began observing in her classroom. On the day of our interview I had observed in her classroom earlier that day. When Mrs. Fleming spoke with me she openly talked about the culture of the school, the behaviors in her classroom, and her ideas about managing bullying and harassment at Oakwood.

As our conversation turned from general chatter to the issue of bullying and harassment, Mrs. Fleming shared a personal story from a previous year when her son attended Oakwood. She felt this story aptly illustrated her view on the current state of bullying and harassment at Oakwood:

MRS. FLEMING: It just seems like I remember being in school and there were a few kids who would, you know, from time to time be bullying another kid. But here and in this day and age, it seems like anybody is a potential bully at any given time or a potential recipient in any given time.

And you know I remember when my son experienced this – my middle son is this very black and white person. There are no gray areas for him. You are either on the side of good or you are on the side of evil. That is just how he has always seen the world. Well he stopped the bullying scene here in his eighth grade year.

He is a freshman now, but– last year he told me that he had seen this kid bullying kids all the time. And he said, finally he picked on the autistic kid and that was “more than I could take mom.” And he ran up to stop it. He is a karate guy and all that. And he just dumped this kid on his head and did not get in trouble for it because the administrator saw that as justice.

And I thought, what is happening to our society? I mean, what my son did was not right. That should not be allowed, this sort of vigilante behavior. And you know, it was not that I wanted my son to get in trouble. It was just that I think the whole issue of bullying becomes so overwhelming for school administrators that if they can take care of the discipline without having to mess with it themselves I do not think they are unhappy with that. And it stopped the problem you know.

They called the kid in that was doing the bullying and talked to him. I do not know whatever happened to him. But nothing was ever done about the fact

that my son physically did something to this bully to stop him. And that to me says that administrators are overwhelmed. They just have too much on their plate and this is an everyday thing for them. Everyday there is an incident and I do not recall that being the case when I was in school. It was not every day. It was isolated incidents here and there...

Mrs. Fleming interpreted the administrative response to this event as relief that her son had taken care of the bullying situation. I asked Mrs. Fleming, given this particular story of her son taking over the discipline of a bully about the extent to which she felt teachers use peer pressure in their classroom to manage student behaviors. I asked her to think of the ways in which she relied on peer pressure for behavior management. She offered immediate examples of teaching tactics she uses offering the following example:

MRS. FLEMING: I use peer pressure, I say, you know what, look around you.

Look at your buddies. Look at those who are sitting quietly, who want to play the game. And if you want to play the game, you need to look like that. You need to be listening and you need to be quiet and in your seat, and attentive. I use peer pressure in that way and I do not know if that is right or wrong but I do it.

This comment reflected my observations within this eighth grade Elite Academy classroom. Mrs. Fleming would often withhold instruction or activity while waiting for those who were off task to align themselves with those she pointed to as sitting quietly and waiting for the next direction. This tactic was employed on a daily basis within many of her classes. So that on a regular basis those who were talking out of turn, out of desks

or without the proper materials were told to direct their attention toward those who were compliant. And throughout this time the class instruction would be postponed until they complied in some minimal manner.

RESEARCHER: Do you see that (*teacher using peer pressure*) as similar or really different from this kind of hope on the administration's part that one of the students is going to straighten out some kid's errant ways? Like your son did in that story you told.

MRS. FLEMING: Well, I don't know that I see that as the same because when I use the pressure, they are modeling a good behavior. And I am hoping that those who are a little less in control of their impulses will, you know, copy the good model behavior. I would never wish for a kid to be physically dealt with by their peers and I have actually had a conversation with the mother and son who mentioned it.

RESEARCHER: Who mentioned what?

MRS. FLEMING: A kid getting pasted (*a football term for being beaten to the ground*) by other kids.

The recollection of this student's threat she pointed to in stark contrast to her son's assault on a student she believed to be a bully. Having never heard the term "getting pasted" before, and interested in learning more about this threat I asked her to tell me more about this sort of peer policing.

Cameron tells Mrs. Fleming he plans to hurt Riley because he believes Riley is gay. Here Mrs. Fleming began relating the story of the homophobic bullying and

harassment of a student named Riley. “You know Riley Cooper right?” Mrs. Fleming asked me, to which I responded no.

Riley was the student who immediately came to Mrs. Fleming’s mind as a kid who was going to get pasted by one of his peers. According to Mrs. Fleming, Riley was a well known object of peer derision and aggression. In fact one student had already mentioned to Mrs. Fleming that he planned to paste Riley on some future date. What follows is Mrs. Fleming’s brief account of Riley as a target of peer harassment and how she became aware of him as a target for future violence.

MRS. FLEMING: So in my eighth-grade class, I have 25 students and a bunch of them will not sit by one of the boys. Don’t know Riley Cooper? I mean I’m really surprised you don’t. But then again, I guess how would you know him.

Anyways the boys do not want to sit by him because he is too touchy for them and they do not like that and Cameron Stewart in particular does not like Riley. I think Riley really wants to be good friends with Cameron. I think he admires Cameron. He sees Cameron as being good at everything. And so through this interest on Riley’s part Cameron seems to have stronger feelings against him. And Cameron has decided that Riley must be gay and Cameron’s mom figures well, Cameron thinks Riley is gay, then that must be a correct assessment.

So anyway, I ran into them (*Cameron and his mother Mrs. Stewart*) one weekend at the garden store and Cameron said, “You know, you have to move our seats because I am sitting too close to Riley. I’ve got to get away from him and I do not like sitting next to him and he pokes at me and touches me.”

Then his mom goes, “Yeah Cameron thinks Riley is gay.”

And he chimes in, “Yea, I won’t sit by fags.”

Well that really startled me. And I told them both I do not think he is gay. You know if he were, he would probably be more careful to not be so touchy, don’t you think? I mean, you know? But she said, “Well we think he is gay and that’s that.”

And I said, “But he has a girlfriend, you know, who he seems quite in to. And you know, and he traveled to France with me and he was very interested in girls.”

Mrs. Fleming’s defense of Riley’s heterosexuality was however not persuasive to Cameron or Mrs. Stewart. Mrs. Fleming went on to note how pretty Riley’s girlfriend was and how he had his “hands all over her” in the hallways. Mrs. Stewart and Cameron were not interested in hearing about Riley’s girlfriend. In fact Mrs. Stewart got pretty upset at that point and went on the offense about moving the boys’ seats:

MRS. FLEMING: Well then Mrs. Stewart said she knew the way teachers are always trying to accommodate people like Riley here at Oakwood. But she said her family was Christian and that if Cameron said Riley was gay, then I had no right to make him sit by someone like that. Making him sit there was being intolerant of their Christian values.

Mrs. Fleming was taken aback by this religious argument and again reiterated that she did not believe Riley was gay. At this point Cameron rejoined the conversation and responded to Mrs. Fleming’s advocacy by explaining how he planned to physically take down Riley the following football season.

MRS. FLEMING: I told them how Riley was very interested in the girls from the other schools that were on the trip to France and...

I mean, not that I care if Riley is gay, I just really do not think he is and I do not think Cameron should use that as an excuse for disliking Riley.

So anyway, I said, "Well you know I can move Riley, no big deal." And right then Cameron said, "I cannot wait to get on the line across from him at football practice next year because I am going to take him out on the football field." And I said, "Cameron, you know, that is terrible." And Mrs. Steward was like, "That's how boys handle it."

Wow... now, well... I do not know— I mean, I wish I could have thought of the better response. But you know, you are kind of off your guard. It's the weekend, you are relaxed, you just want to buy some plants and all of a sudden you're faced with one of your students and their parent. And then they start up this conversation about people being gay and taking them out on the football field.

And, you know... I know that my son was on line for two and a half years on the varsity offense and there were times when other kids on the team would, you know, irritate him or whatever. And you know, he might hit them a little harder and I know they do that in football.

But you know, he never premeditated it you know. He would be like, "He really pissed me off because he kept pushing me out of the huddle and so I went hard against him on the next play." Something like that. But it was never like, "I am going to wait all summer to get this kid." Nothing like that but— so

that was a little... it was concerning to me that the mother did not seem to feel that what Cameron was saying was not okay.

Mrs. Fleming's voice and hesitancy throughout this recollection reflected a concern and discomfort with this memory. She paused repeatedly, shook her head, and lowered her voice trailing off thoughts as she replayed this unsatisfactory interaction.

Mrs. Fleming's response to Cameron's demands to be moved away from the "gay kid." As she concluded and fell silent I directed the conversation once again to the original issue Cameron made during the conversation. Cameron had claimed that he did not want to be seated anywhere near Riley because he believed Riley was gay.

Both Cameron and Riley had been seated in the back corner of the room during my last observation in Mrs. Fleming's room. They were not next to one another, but rather seated amid a group of boys and no one among the group was seated in any desk for most of the 45 minute class period. I was curious how Mrs. Fleming had resolve this situation given that she had promised Cameron and his mother that she would move Riley.

RESEARCHER: So at first you said there is a whole group of boys that do not want to sit by Riley.

MRS. FLEMING: There are boys and girls, but most of the boys.

RESEARCHER: And so...

MRS. BROWN: Boys like let's see...Ty Howard will not sit by him. Cameron will not sit by him. Cole Ward will not sit by him. And of course Olivia

Barnes, but she is really just such a bitch and does not like to sit by anybody.⁴¹

⁴¹ Olivia Barnes is the same Olivia from the earlier chapter's Mean Girls vignette. Here Mrs. Fleming once again articulates the general professional assessment of Olivia as the essentialized mean girl.

RESEARCHER: So why do you think that only one girl cares about Riley? Are there any of the other students with a strong opinion of Riley?

MRS. FLEMING: Let me think. I guess when I have done— actually, when I have done seating charts, two girls in particular, Olivia Barnes and Sydney Griffin will just say right out in front of the class, “I will not sit by him.” And I do not know what their reason is. They are just very loud about it and it’s uncomfortable because there is a lot of laughing.

RESEARCHER: So then what do you do when they say that?

MRS. FLEMING: I just rearrange the seats so that we do not have a scene, so we do not have troubles so we can just get back to learning and, you know...

RESEARCHER: So where do you sit him? Or where did you sit him after talking to Cameron and his mom?

MRS. FLEMING: Just next to kids who are more relaxed. Let’s see... who have I sat him by recently? Sierra Ford who is a sweetheart. And she and Riley traveled to France together. Donald Graham and Sierra Ford and Riley all traveled with me at spring break. So the three of them, I can sit them close to each other no problem.

Educators dealing with affluent and influential parents. Mrs. Fleming’s willingness to accommodate the demands of students and parents in the AE program reminded me of something the principal had told me earlier in the year. At that time I asked him why he thought teachers avoided confronting certain students and parents about harassment and bullying. I noted that instead Oakwood’s teachers generally sent harassment complaints to Mr. Martin and Mr. Clark to address.

MR. CLARK: Well, if you wanted the easiest job possible as a teacher, you make the popular kids really like you. You make sure they are happy, and you protect them. So that pressure is there every single day for me. I know taking on certain things or not taking on certain things has an effect on how well I am liked.

And it will have an effect on how much time I spend on the situation, if a particular parent is unhappy. There will always be three or four parents who are unhappy if it is a popular kid. And as a result of that unhappiness, you know, you get calls or e-mails. And parents will complain saying we have been talking on the soccer field...

And so you calculate, you know, I need to stop what just has happened there but how much do I lose from stopping that one particular thing. And then maybe whatever happened was not that bad anyway because it could have been way worse and of course. And soon you've moved on from the moment.

I briefly shared with Mrs. Fleming a bit of this conversation I had had with Mr. Clark about the political pressure he felt from "popular" generally affluent AE families at Oakwood. I asked Mrs. Fleming if she thought Mrs. Stewart's involvement in the situation influenced her decision to move Riley. She responded that she didn't think it was so much about Mrs. Stewart's influence as it was her own lack of confidence on how to balance religious rights with LGBTQ rights in her classroom.

MRS. FLEMING: Well, I'm not one to go up against anyone's religion. I mean I'm Buddhist myself and I have to respect the beliefs of any family that is in

my classroom. So I guess it was a mix of concern about her complaining and me not really having a defense anyway. I mean can I really prove Riley isn't gay? I don't think so.

Professional silence regarding Christian anti-gay sentiment and professional silence about patterns of anti-gay harassment. Mrs. Fleming explained that she felt her biggest problem was that she didn't really know how to talk about this topic especially with a Christian. She said it was just one of those things that nobody talked very much about so even though she knew that it was wrong for some of the kids to pick on Riley like that, she just didn't know what to say except to move him away from those kids and try to cut off whatever was being said or change the subject.

I asked her if she knew about the bigger incidents of homophobia that had occurred within the EA program over the past several months. In particular I was curious what she had heard about the YouTube video, the gay love notes, and the administrative meeting with EA parents about bullying and harassment all discussed in the previous chapter. Mrs. Fleming was not aware of any of these conflicts and interventions on the administrative level. I suggested she speak with the principal about the earlier incidents and perhaps ask for some professional advice on how to deal with the situation in her classroom.

The interview ended with Mrs. Fleming asking me what I might say to a parent or student demanding a seat change or refusing to work with a gay student. I shared with her that I was aware that both Oakwood and the school district had non-discrimination policies and harassment policies that all specified sexual orientation and gender identity as protected from discrimination. I suggested that I might share these policies with the

parent, explaining that I intend to enforce them by not discriminating or tolerating discrimination against Riley or any other student. If that response wasn't adequate I would tell the parent to take their concerns to the administration.

As I finished my response, Mrs. Fleming's face tensed and she replied:

MRS. FLEMING: You can say all of that right out and whereas, I am like thinking... oh my gosh, this is not okay. (*Mrs. Fleming was fully flushed at this point and waived her hand in her face*)

And I am trying to address that – but like all those right words don't pop in to my head because I don't have that much training, which is no excuse. I should just try to teach myself, but it would be nice to have a little more staff development, around these issues and what are some buzz words and what are some things to say you know...

(*Mrs. Fleming fell silent for a few moments and then continued*)

I mean how do you know a way to address these issues to 12-year-olds and how can you teach them? And you are right; all of the children come from different backgrounds and have different beliefs. Like, I had a kid last year who would not sign something we did as a class. It was after the Expect Respect Assembly. And she would not sign the agreement to treat everyone with respect. She got angry and told the whole class she wouldn't sign it because in her family and in her church – being gay is bad, it is evil, and she would not sign something that said she would respect gays.

And I was like – “Ugh okay.” And there I am thinking boy I'd like to address that but I don't really know how. And I don't want to get into an

ideological philosophy discussion with this 11-year-old sixth grader, and how do you explain that anyway. So I just stood there, and then I said, “Okay, let’s move on,” and we did.

Where does this silence leave Riley? For the remainder of the year Mrs. Fleming seated Riley in what she considered a protected seat in a front corner of the classroom surrounded by his traveling companions. Cameron and his pals continued to occupy their self selected back corner of the classroom. Olivia and Sydney took up their daily post front and center, and the remainder of the students selected “assigned seats” in proximity to whomever they wished to sit near. Each time the seat assignment changed, Mrs. Fleming would put up a seating chart on the overhead entertain requests to move, and when everyone was satisfied call that the new seating assignment for the next few weeks.

Students in this class continued to make comments about Riley but after our discussion Mrs. Fleming said she had decided to limit open classroom “personal conversations” to a minimum. “We’re just going to focus on talking about the class subject, assignments and things like that from now on.” Late in the year Mrs. Fleming checked in with me to report that she thought the rumors about Riley were still very much a part of the class, but that at least it wasn’t out in the open any more.

I asked her if she had discussed this with Riley and his family or ever asked Mr. Clark about the other situations and gotten his advice. She replied, “No... I know I should have talked to Mr. Clark, but there’s never really time and it’s impossible to find him alone in his office ever.”

I asked about talking to Riley about the harassment and she explained, “At this point he only has a few weeks left and then he’ll be in high school where he can pick

different friends. I just don't think there is any reason to get into this all now. It's too near the end to matter anymore."

Her final thoughts on the subject returned to Cameron rather than Riley. "I'm just so glad to be done with him. He never stops demanding things. This is my third year with him and I have had more than I can stand. I can't wait for him to be done."

"Yes," she reaffirmed to herself, "thank goodness I am done with him for good."

Within weeks of this conversation Riley and Cameron would "graduate" from eighth grade and leave Oakwood only to become ninth grade classmates at Varsity High School.

I Won't Sit by a Fag—Analysis

The erasure of "homophobia" at Oakwood, the erasure of the violence within the social construction of the Other. As Riley and Cameron headed off to VHS the impending promise of heteronormative violence on the football field lingered in the two boys future. Cameron was willing to make this masculine commitment to both his mother and his teacher, even as Riley was ostensibly unaware of their future date with violence. And while Mrs. Fleming was concerned about a school in which the administration might allow her son to violently police bullying behavior, her attempts to normalize Riley as heterosexual and her participation in segregating him from "normal" students endorsed Cameron's right to police him in much the same manner. In moment after moment, as well as in the retelling, this case naturalizes and erases the heteronormative discourse in operation at Oakwood.

Here I consider the following five prevalent patterns of erasure within the moments between all of the participants in this story: first the illegible lives and

unspeakable experiences of Othering; second the missing discourse of sexuality and gender power and oppression; third the reluctant, silent and inarticulate targets of heteronormativity; fourth the break within educational discourses on adolescent gender and sexuality; and fifth the lack of structural means to track and historicize heteronormativity at Oakwood.

The illegible lives and unspeakable experiences of Othering. Here I will highlight and consider Mrs. Fleming's concerted efforts and insistences that Riley wasn't gay. In this vignette Mrs. Fleming deployed a series of arguments that Riley was not the Other and attempted to mark him with three frequent signifiers of heterosexual masculinity discussed throughout earlier vignette analysis; heterosexual attraction, heterosexual consumption through "girl watching," and heterosexual performances of sexuality on his girlfriend's body.

In *The Social Organization of Masculinity* Connell (2004) considered the multiple masculinities necessarily operating within a heteronormative discourse and the importance of tracking this dynamic interaction. "A relational approach makes it easier to recognize the hard compulsions under which gender configurations are formed, the bitterness as well as the pleasure in gendered experience" (p. 38). In the social practices in operation in Mrs. Fleming's classroom as well as the interaction between Mrs. Fleming, Mrs. Stewart, and Cameron the open combat of dominating masculinities is laid bare.

The negotiation between Cameron and Mrs. Fleming highlights the performative character of heterosexual gender construction, the centrality of the hegemonic subject and unintelligibility of the Other. This situation also illustrates the discursive impossibility of

possessing a static heteronormative gender. And finally and importantly this set of circumstances demonstrates the silent indefensibility of the Other within a heteronormative discourse.

In this case, Mrs. Fleming offered up a series of hegemonic signifiers in an attempt to normalize, assimilate, and defend Riley from the assertion that he is gay. Yet even as she attempted to capture Riley within heteronormative hegemony, Cameron was committed to performing the homophobia which was also fundamental to heteronormative masculinity.

The instability of hegemonic masculinity and the performative nature of this gender construct are highlighted in Mrs. Fleming and Cameron's exchanges about Riley. Yet the implicit text, that of Othering Riley, remains primarily below the surface in part due to Mrs. Fleming's own commitments to heteronormative gender constructions. In fact at no point during our conversation did Mrs. Fleming identify Cameron's behavior and statements as specifically homophobic or as bias and harassment.

Throughout Cameron and Mrs. Stewart's accusations of Riley's homosexuality and in Mrs. Fleming's counter claims of his heterosexuality the Other is imperceptibly co-constructed as indescribable, indefensible, and immoral.

Even as the negative signifiers constructing the Other and the social negotiations engaged in as the Othering of Riley remain the shadowy and nameless counter production there is a surface performance which casts out the Other. And so while neither the Other nor hegemonic masculinity can be captured in the text of this verbal combat, the mere suggestion of Riley as gay allows for moral claims, seating changes, and public marginalization. This is because Mrs. Fleming, like many of the faculty at Oakwood and

across the United States, operates herself from within the heteronormative ideology of gender and sexuality.

As was highlighted in the previous analysis, Mrs. Fleming as a teacher is herself the professional product of pervasively heteronormative educational and developmental discourses (Blount & Anahita, 2004; Epstein et al., 2003a; Griffin & Ouellett, 2003). Two of her statements in particular highlight the emphasis here on hegemonic masculinity and the peripheral importance of the abstract Other. First she earnestly asks, “I mean can I really prove Riley isn’t gay?” And later she exclaims, “Not that I would care if he was gay, I just don’t think he is.” These moments highlight the heteronormative impossibility and indefensibility of the Other within an educational framework which is entrenched in and uncritical of a heteronormative ideology of gender and sexuality.

The missing discourse of sexuality and gender power and oppression. In the last chapter on the production of gender I considered the subject space of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity (Connell, 1999). In the vignettes on the *Eighth Grade Boys* and *The Mean Girls* I noted the centrality of these subject spaces to the school faculty’s overall discourse on gender and sexuality. I noted that these gendered subjects were reified in the bodies of particular children and that there was a symbiotic relationship between the performances of the children and the perceptions of the faculty which rendered the power and oppression of heteronormativity inevitable, natural, and ultimately invisible.

I recall this gender production analysis here to consider the way in which this reifying and naturalizing of dominant gender subjectivities erases the text of

heteronormative power and oppression from interpersonal conflicts as well as the authoritarian management of social groups.

In the case at hand then it is important to note that Cameron has been present for a variety of heteronormative moments already documented in this project. Cameron was present when Peter, “the fag,” had a knife held to his chest. And Cameron was among the boys who chased Caleb, “the homo,” down the street on Halloween afternoon. Cameron was not held accountable for his actions in these events and his presence and participation was not interrogated by the school nor was it brought to the attention of his parents. In effect his heteronormative performance of dominant masculinity was both taken into account and subsequently treated as a non-event by the school faculty.

Chapter III’s *Mean Girl* Olivia also appears in Mrs. Fleming’s classroom within a school wide context of heteronormativity in which both Cameron and Olivia are expected to dominant, humiliate, and subjugate along gender and sexuality lines. When Mrs. Fleming offhandedly refers to Olivia, who openly subjugates Riley, as a “bitch” she erases the heteronormative text of power and domination from the moment. Instead the social violence enacted by Olivia is attributed to her as an individual, as if she is the author of the anti-gay discourse in Mrs. Fleming’s classroom. By uncritically locating Olivia as the mean girl of emphasized femininity Mrs. Fleming erased Olivia’s public domination and humiliation of Riley as if it was predictable or inevitable given her personal character.

In bending to the will of Cameron on multiple occasions, and in ignoring his participation in the homophobic domination of Riley, Caleb and Peter the school faculty steered clear of engaging in a gender discourse that could have considered the open

homophobic text of these events. And even as the homophobic text was erased from the educational management and authority of the student body, heteronormativity was simultaneously reinforced by Mrs. Fleming and others ongoing silence as Cameron perpetually dominated and subjugated his peers along the lines of gender and sexuality.

The reluctant, silent, and inarticulate targets of heteronormativity. While there is now a growing trend within the field of education toward professional practices for addressing homophobia and abuse of LGBTQ youth in schools (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003) the reluctance to name and professionally address these moments of social domination is exemplified in this vignette.

At Oakwood the most frequent response of students and faculty to a claim that an act or statement was homophobic was to deny the possibility because the target, Riley in this case, was not gay. Rather than professionally approaching this situation by applying the districts policies and practices for addressing sexuality and gender discrimination, Mrs. Fleming focused her energies on heterosexualizing Riley.

Mrs. Fleming's persistent promotion of Riley as a heterosexual prevented her from engage in any professional anti-homophobic discourse. Fleming's cognitive barrier against the notion that Riley might be gay was not markedly different from the vast majority of the Oakwood professional community. The faculty regularly and thoughtlessly interpreted the sexuality of all students through a heteronormative frame with heterosexuality as the default for all children. As Eve Sedgwick (1990) so eloquently highlighted in the Epistemology of the Closet, "coming out" is a perpetual event in a society which persistently erases or re-closets the Other.

In this vignette Mrs. Fleming doggedly attempted to make Riley heterosexual, and thereby she was able to avoid the task of taking up the anti-homophobia discourse Griffin and Ouellett (2003) chronicle in *From Silence to Safety and Beyond*. And while I do not wish to make claims about Riley's sexual desires or attractions, I note that this distinction regarding his proclaimed sexuality is irrelevant to the interactions which are taking place within Mrs. Fleming's classroom and beyond.

What is of crucial importance in this case is that a forced heterosexual distinction foreclosed any critical discussion of the heteronormative harassment Cameron directed at him. It foreclosed any critical educational discussion with Cameron's mother, Mrs. Stewart, about religious tolerance and democratic access to the classroom.

Further this practice of silencing and avoiding anti-homophobic educational discourses by heterosexualize the target was widespread at Oakwood. For example in a conversation with Mr. Clark I asked him to talk to me about the persistence of homophobic harassment at Oakwood:

RESEARCHER: As you think back over this year can you think of some highlights, some particular incidents or conversations that were related to my research? Can you think of some stories that you think of as highlighting homophobia among kids during this year? Can you think of one or two sort of common examples of homophobic harassment and we can talk about those a little bit...

MR. CLARK: Well, so when you say homophobia are you meaning the use of derogatory terms? Because I do not even know some of the stuff we have been

having or anything has to do with fear of homosexuals but the use of language to put people down...

RESEARCHER: I want to talk about harassment at Oakwood that is in any way about homosexuality.

Mr. Clark went on to discuss two conflicts in which he suspected at least one student was gay. Here, as in Mrs. Fleming's interview, the emphasis was placed on the presumed sexuality of the individual student involved. By applying these criteria identifying a behavior as "homophobic harassment" required a fear of a homosexual and thereby implicitly required an identified or presumed homosexual as the target. Given that criteria, there were only a very small number of moments which came to mind when considering this question. In contrast, the moments Mr. Clark labeled as "use of (*anti-gay*) language to put people down" were ubiquitous at Oakwood where fag, homo, and gay were the most common epithets used in public settings as insults to individuals, ideas, or activities.

For Mrs. Fleming in this particular case, it was crucially important to mark Riley as heterosexual and then to suggest puzzlement over why Cameron, Olivia, and others "did not like him." After all, one cannot be homophobic if there is no gay person involved in the situation.

With Riley as heterosexual, the anti-homophobia discourse was rendered irrelevant and there was limited professional means to address the situation. In fact with Riley emphatically marked as heterosexual, Mrs. Fleming was unable to even recall the school or districts anti-discrimination policies related to gender and sexuality.

The break within educational discourses on adolescent gender and sexuality. A wide array of public ideologies collide at the school doors in what has come to be known as the culture wars of the U.S. public and political life (Hunter, 1992). The preceding section considered the rising anti-homophobia discourse embedded within teacher education, curriculum studies and social justice educational discourses (Birden, 2005; Kumashiro, 2002, 2004). The anti-homophobia educational discourse commonly collides with education's religious neutrality discourse in the culture wars related to gender and sexuality diversity within the school community.⁴²

In the last chapter I began to consider the intersection of discourses on religious identity with those of sexual and gender identity in the case of Samuel and the forged gay love notes. In that chapter I considered the claims made by Samuel and some other "Christian" students that their student rights had been violated by anti-Christian sentiment at Oakwood. In that case no one suggested that Samuel's homophobic harassment reflected Christian beliefs they were defending, merely that the school was not protecting their son's from religious oppression. This argument triggered an educational discourse surrounding religious freedom and religious neutrality to dominate the discourse of many of the parent and school administration meetings.

However in that earlier scenario Samuel was merely justifying a ploy to publically mark two of his peers as gay as a degrading justice for their humiliating dismissal of his Christian beliefs and practices. He and his family suggested this was simply an insulting

⁴² Anti-homophobia discourses and expansive and inclusive gender and sexuality discourses also intersect and collide with racial discourses, social class discourses, ability discourses, and other social ideologies. Many of these intersections were considered in greater detail in the previous chapter.

game of tit for tat fighting which was in no way related to homophobia because Jerrod and Teddy were not gay.⁴³

I noted that curriculum theorist Warren Blumenfeld (2009) has chronicled the long history of Christian privilege and non-Christian religious and moral oppression within our public schools. In contrast the marking Jerrod and Teddy as gay could readily attach itself to the long institutional history of homophobia in public education (Blount, 1996; Blount & Anahita, 2004). Therefore when the school accepted Samuel's equivocating arguments about religious dominance and normativity the staff missed the important a distinction between these two subject spaces as they relate to educational dominance and power. Instead they were addressed as equivalent forms of oppression by the Oakwood faculty.

I reiterate this analysis here as again "Christian" values were called forth in this vignette in an attempt to contest or silence any educational discourse that might acknowledge and simultaneously value gender and sexuality diversity. In this case Mrs. Stewart's introduction of a religious argument left Mrs. Fleming at a loss as to how she might advocate for sexual and gender diversity rights at Oakwood. The educational discourse associated with religious freedom has a long and storied history within the U.S. public school system where the educational discourse associated with gender and sexuality diversity remains fragile and is frequently contested (Blount & Anahita, 2004).

Catherine A. Lugg an education policy scholar has done extensive historical analysis regarding the public discourse of religion and education (2004). She notes, "In

⁴³ This argument reiterates the previous section's analysis in which the Oakwood faculty apply the term "homophobia" only to acts directed at known LGBTQ youth. Whereas the application of homophobic or heteronormative tactics to harm or humiliate a presumed heterosexual student were commonly addressed as bullying and harassment.

the relationship between man and religion, the State is firmly committed to a position of neutrality” (p. 169). However her review of case law suggests that this presumed neutrality in fact privileges a “consumer” model of education, with Christian consumers steadfastly directing public education discussions and legal decisions. Therefore the democratic educational discourse with its premise of religious neutrality actually masks a persistent Christian norming and privileging within public education.

Instantaneously Mrs. Stewart's appeal to religious tolerance ideology overtook Fleming's fragile grasp on a school policy or educational ideology related to sexual diversity or homophobia. Mrs. Fleming quickly began to articulate this religious neutrality when she identified herself as Buddhist and as one who would not question the religious beliefs of another faith. She went on to explain that the educational discourse of religious neutrality required her to leave unchecked other anti-LGBTQ statements and acts in her classroom. As she explained, “What can I say? I'm not going to get into a religious debate with an 11 year old?”

On each occasion when religious ideologies related to public schooling were brought into conflict with a social justice or equity discussion in the classroom regarding sexual and gender diversity, the LGBTQ human rights discourse was erased by the religious neutrality discourse.

The lack of structural means to track and historicize heteronormativity at Oakwood. The case of Cameron and Riley ends with Mrs. Fleming noting her relief and pleasure that this situation was finally over. And by over she implies that Cameron will finally no longer be at Oakwood where he would presumably go on bullying her in her own classroom.

However it is clear from Cameron's own comments that the perpetual heteronormative domination and subjugation practices enacted in this case are far from over. In fact these social practices were not interrupted during Cameron's time with Mrs. Fleming. And I have argued that through Cameron and Mrs. Stewart's public interactions with Mrs. Fleming, and Mrs. Fleming's institutional responses, the heteronormative harassment perpetuated by Cameron has been reinforced and made natural and inevitable.

Beyond the erasures embedded in Mrs. Fleming's individual professional response to Cameron and his mother, the school at a macro level was also engaged in silencing professional practices which fertilized the field for future homophobic harassment and violence. Earlier vignettes considered the erasure embedded in a lack of disciplinary referral documentation of these heteronormative interactions. This erasure occurred here once again in the lack of any documentation whatsoever of harassment in Mrs. Fleming's classroom. Earlier vignettes also noted the lack of professional meetings and learning opportunities related to these events which would offer opportunities for forming institutional knowledge of heteronormativity at Oakwood. Mrs. Fleming confirmed this professional silence related to her concerns about Riley and Cameron.

Here I would like to consider an additional school wide silence which operated to erase the heteronormative environment at Oakwood. The lack of professional observations or evaluations of teacher conduct which would take into account the management of gender and sexuality politics within the classroom.

In considering the professional void within teacher evaluation and supervision I think it is important to note that Mrs. Fleming, and Mrs. Price were each identified by the administration as particularly challenged with regard to student behavior and discipline.

The school administrators were all quick to dismiss events which occurred in either of these teachers classrooms as related to the teacher's lack of behavior management skills. As Mr. Martin explained, "These two teachers probably send me more referrals than the rest of the staff combined."

Over time the administration developed an ad hoc teacher evaluation system for considering teacher weaknesses at student behavior management. Through the disciplinary referral process and subsequent student interviews the administrators came to identify these particular teachers as unskilled at managing student interactions. However, the lack of systematic documentation of the heteronormative nature of the behavior problems in each of these classrooms meant the diagnosis of the problem lacked specificity. A track record of excessive disciplinary referrals marked Mrs. Price and Mrs. Fleming as unable to address student behavior, but it was not clear what behavior they were both struggling to manage.

Vignette 4: I'm Not No Homosexual

I'm Not No Homosexual—The Story

Logan has been complaining about this boy calling him a homosexual. And I am not okay with this retaliation, but it is not okay for anyone to be calling Logan a homosexual. Ever!

~Mr. Elm, a parent, speaking to the vice principal about why his son may have been involved in a fight

Caught in the act. The final bell rang and the hall monitors were working to clear the building when a call came in over the walkie-talkies. "We need an administrator in

the courtyard now. “Following radio silence there was another call as the same voice now said, “I’m holding Alex Case in the courtyard and I need help right now.”

This time there was a radio response from Mr. Martin, “I have Logan Elm in the back office. Tell Alex I will be in the courtyard in one second.” It seems that Mr. Martin had been returning from a classroom in the back of the building when he found Logan running wildly from another classroom. When Martin stopped him the boy explained that he was running in fear because Alex was about to “take me down.”

Mr. Martin found another staff person to sit with Logan as he walked into the courtyard to get Alex. When he arrived in the courtyard he found Mrs. White standing in front of a thin muscular Latino boy who was pacing back and forth. Ms. White was holding her walkie-talkie in front of her as if she were about to radio someone or use it in some manner. She was standing between Alex and the building exit. All the while Alex was pacing and muttering, “I’m gonna beat the crap outa him. I’m gonna beat the crap outa him.”

When Alex saw the assistant principal his pacing stopped but his face remained clenched and he mutter one last time, “I’ll kill him.” Mr. Martin stepped in close and spoke to Alex quietly and said, “I need you in my office right this second.” With that the boy turned and walked directly toward the main offices and into the assistant principal’s office.

When they arrived there Mr. Martin asked Alex to explain himself. “I’m gonna beat the crap outta him. I’m gonna beat that boy into the ground,” was his only response.

At this point Mr. Martin attempted to get more information. But Alex had nothing else to say. Mrs. White stood outside of the office and Mr. Martin approached her to get

some sense of what had happened. She explained that she didn't really know what was going on. She only knew that she had been monitoring the courtyard when Alex and Logan had both come flying out of a classroom one after the other with Logan shouting, "Get away from me Alex!" At the same time she heard Alex shout, "This is it Logan."

Mr. Martin returned to Alex and asked him why he was chasing Logan. "I have had it with him. He took it too far today. He's never gonna touch me again," was Alex's response. With each statement his body tensed. He was again standing in the office and he began pacing. "When we get out of this place I am gonna beat him. And there's nothing anyone can do about it."

At this point Mr. Martin called Alex's father and told him to come to the campus to pick Alex up and take him home. With the phone call made Alex sat in silence awaiting his father arrival. When Mr. Case came into the office Mr. Martin explained that the staff had just stopped a fight in the courtyard and that he couldn't let Alex leave the building on his own. Mr. Martin told Mr. Case Alex was still planning to pursue the fight after school. Mr. Case asked his son what was going on and Alex replied, "I gotta get that guy. I'll get him now or later. He's gonna get it."

Mr. Martin told Mr. Case that he'd never had a student make threat after threat in front of teachers and himself and that he was very concerned about the way Alex was acting. Martin told both father and son that Alex would not be allowed back on campus until it could be determined that he was not a danger to anyone. Mr. Case was unable to get any other information from Alex. He and his son left the office with the situation unresolved. Mr. Martin told them he would call them later to plan for Alex's possible return to campus.

All the while, Logan was waiting in another room within the main office. The school policy related to such events ruled that neither boy was to be released to walk home. Both boys were required to be accompanied home as the threat of violence loomed and the school was accountable for student altercations on the way to and from school.

As Alex and Mr. Case left a large group of eighth grade boys lingered outside in the school bus zone. Staff members went out to clear the bus zone and told friends of both boys it was time to leave campus and that they needed to go home. Alex's friends watched as Alex and his father drove away from the campus then they wandered a block or so away from campus and continued to linger talking with one another.

Piecing together teacher information about Logan and Alex. Mr. Martin now returned to the office to talk to Mrs. White and the other teachers involved in order to get some sense of the events that had preceded this near explosion. Mrs. White was waiting in the main office with Mrs. Fleming the teacher whose classroom was wedged between the courtyard and the eighth grade hallway. The two teachers had been comparing notes while Mr. Martin was questioning Alex and now each of them each explained what they had witnessed that afternoon.

According to Mrs. White earlier that day Logan had blocked the door when Alex got up to leave at the bell. Blocking Alex into the classroom effectively blocked the remainder of the class from exiting her room at the end of the class period. This she noted was one of Logan's many antics directed at Alex. She said her entire class of students had had it with Logan's behavior. However she noted Alex was a particular target of Logan's playful or harassing attention.

Alex was a very popular athlete in the eighth grade. As a Latino boy he was one of the many boys of color in the amorphous Eighth Grade Boys clique. Alex was also a boy who crossed groups and was known to hang around with the skater kids and with other groups of students who many of the other athletes seldom took any note of. Alex and Logan were both assigned to Ms. White's class for extra reading and study support as they were both lagging behind in reading skills.

Logan was a well known black boy who was not really a member of any clique in the eighth grade. He was an average sized boy with no claim to an athletic prowess, the primary trait for eighth grade boys to establish social status. Logan came from a well connected family with parents who were high status community members. Logan was a student who had regular run-ins with the administration over discipline issues for everything from defacing school materials to disrupting classes with his antics.

As Mr. Martin, Mrs. White and Mrs. Fleming continued to puzzle out the last twenty minutes of events, Mrs. Fleming added that at the end of the school day Logan had come into her room through the eighth grade hallway. Once in her room Logan had been wandering around the desks when Alex walked in the same door. Logan had then gone over to her desk and begun to ask her questions about an old assignment. When she and Logan began talking Alex stepped back out the door and into the courtyard.

Mrs. Fleming noted that Logan continued to linger in her room for a few minutes and then as he exited Alex appeared in the courtyard from behind the door. At that point both boys broke into a run. Next a chase ensued with doors slamming and both boys shouting and sliding across the cement floors.

It seemed from pieced together accounts that Logan must have unintentionally run into Mr. Martin as he was making a full sprint toward the front exit just as Ms. White came upon Alex cutting through the courtyard once again to catch him.

Interviewing Logan about the conflict. When Mr. Martin felt he had a general understanding of the events leading up to that moment, he called Logan into his office and began to question him about the situation. “Logan, in all my years as a teacher and school administrator, I have never seen a student as mad as Alex was when he went after you. He said he was gonna beat you up in front of students, in front of teachers, in front of administrators, even in front of his dad. No matter what we said or did he said he was going to beat you up.”

Logan sat quietly at Mr. Martin’s conference table and waited. Mr. Martin went on, “So what I need to know from you, so what you need to be really upright about and explain to me is this... No one gets that mad without being provoked. Something happened and I need to know what you’ve done.”

Logan pushed his chair back and stood up. He responded in a tense agitated voice, “Well, he kept on calling me faggot, faggot, just faggot all the time. So finally I just said it to him.” He was quiet then for a moment. Mr. Martin remained silently seated looking at Logan now standing across the table from him. In the silence Logan burst out, “So did he say I hit him or something?”

At this point Mr. Martin suggested Logan take a seat assuring him that no one had accused him of hitting Alex. He explained to Logan that all he wanted to hear right now was Logan’s version of events. He would discuss Alex’s version later, but right now he wanted the exact truth from Logan.

Logan calmed himself, sat in the chair, and cleared his throat, “I’m not no homosexual and he kept calling me a faggot so I called him what he called me. Well that just set him off.” Here Mr. Martin pressed him for more details about what specifically had happened leading to the chase through the hallways.

“I just called him back what he calls me and then after the bell rang he started chasing me so I held the door shut. I went out and then back in and I went to Ms. Edmund’s room asking what my grade was in her class. Then I started walking around to different rooms trying to get to the front of the building and he just kept following me.”

Logan’s trip into Ms. Edmund’s classroom was news to the office staff and Mr. Martin then asked Logan how Mrs. Fleming and Ms. Smith came to be involved. At this point Logan shared how he had used a variety of teachers as cover as he moved around the eighth grade corridor. He had gone into classroom after classroom to avoid Alex. In the classrooms he’d talk to a variety of teachers without telling any of them that there was a problem until finally Mrs. Fleming told him it was time for him to leave the building. At that point the situation turned into a full speed chase toward the exit which was directly in front of the administrative offices.

Mr. Martin couldn’t get Logan to give him any more information on his relationship with Alex, or why Alex was determined to beat him up right in the middle of the campus. He finally sat Logan at an isolated desk to await his father’s arrival.

Preparing for Mr. Elm’s arrival by interviewing more teachers. While Logan simmered, Mr. Martin called to the office and questioned several of the teachers who worked with the two boys. He wanted to know as much as possible before dealing with Mr. Elm. Earlier disciplinary problems with Logan and the subsequent meetings with the

powerful and influential Mr. Elm drove Mr. Martin to be cautious and thorough in his investigation of the situation. As he explained, “Mr. Elm has a hard time seeing Logan’s behavior as any part of the problem.”

The ensuing investigative conversations with the teachers revealed that Logan had been touching Alex in all of the boys shared classes on a regular basis. According to each teacher, Logan made regular efforts to sit by Alex and to talk to, tease, or amuse Alex during class. Mrs. White explained that Logan frequently requested partnering with Alex or working with Alex on different assignments. She suggested that she thought perhaps Logan had a crush on Alex. Mrs. Fleming wasn’t really sure what to make of the relationship between the boys but rejected the notion of a crush. She suggested instead that Logan really admired Alex and “wanted to be like him.” Ms. Edmund quite simply found Logan hyper active and extremely annoying and she assumed Alex did as well and quite rightly was going to “knock some sense” into Logan.

According to all three of the boys’ teachers, Logan kicked Alex’s chair on a regular basis, sat in his own chair and stared at Alex, and touched Alex’s desk and materials regularly. All three teachers confirmed that Alex had complained to them about Logan and that at some time in the past they had each spoken with Logan and told him he must stop this behavior. Later when his father arrived Logan confirmed this version of his interactions with Alex explaining, “I’m not really doing anything wrong, and when they tell me to stop I always stop.”

Mr. Elm defends Logan: “We’re church going people and it’s been really difficult for Logan to have this boy calling him something so repulsive.” Logan’s father came to pick him up about forty-five minutes after school ended. When he arrived

he was personally greeted by most of the staff in the front office as he was a well known and prestigious community member. There were very few black students at Oakwood and even fewer black parents so regardless of his notoriety there was little doubt who Mr. Elm was when he arrived.

When Mr. Elm entered Mr. Martin's office the men greeted and reviewed a previous incident Mr. Elm had been called in to Oakwood over concerning Logan. Logan had been defacing school property in that instance and Mr. Elm had questioned the supervision skills of the teacher in that classroom. Eventually the two men had determined that it was indeed a supervision problem and Mr. Martin had talked to the teacher about keeping better control of her class. Mr. Martin reported that there had been no further problems with that teacher. He then suggested that Logan explain to his father the current situation.

Here Logan immediately said, "Dad, Alex was calling me a homosexual again and you know calling me a *faggot* and all that and so I just kicked his chair on the way out of class. I guess I might have kicked him too and he got up and started chasing me. So I tried to block him at the door to get away. Then he started chasing me in the hall and saying he was gonna beat the crap outa me. But I just called him what he's been calling me all the time anyway."

Logan quickly went on with his explanation, "Everybody thinks Alex's bisexual anyway. He says he is. Ask anybody. Anyway everybody says he is and for some reason they still think he's cool or something." Ms. White later confirmed that she had heard rumors about Alex's bi-sexuality, as had Mrs. Fleming and Ms. Edmund. "So I don't know why he'd be getting all mad – I was just calling him what he called me all the time

anyway. And most of the time we're just playing and he doesn't get all mad at me. But today he was outa control."

Mr. Elm turned to Mr. Martin and said, "Logan has been complaining about this boy calling him a homosexual. And I am not okay with this retaliation, but it is not okay for anyone to be calling Logan a homosexual. Ever. This goes very deeply against our family and our beliefs and it is very provocative for someone to be calling Logan a homosexual all the time." Mr. Elm and Logan's repeated use of the word "homosexual" stood out dramatically in this environment, in that, of over four hundred hours of observation and interview data, the term homosexual was only used on very rare occasions.

Logan appeared to calm down as his father's responded. He sat back in his chair expectantly awaiting the outcome of this meeting between Mr. Martin and his father. Mr. Martin returned to the concern that Logan himself had been heard today using the word "faggot" as a provocative term and kicking Alex during class.

Mr. Elm responded that although he considered retaliation wrong, Logan was only attempting to deal with being called a homosexual himself. He stated again that calling Logan homosexual was completely "offensive and provocative" as it went "against everything we believe in." As he explained, "We're church going people and it's been really difficult for Logan to have this boy calling him something so repulsive." Mr. Elm said he had been working with Logan at home on how to deal with these situations but that the school was doing little to help Logan when he was being harassed.

Mr. Martin and Mr. Elm continued this discussion for some time with Mr. Martin explaining that this was the first time he had been told that Logan was being harassed by

anyone. “I haven’t had a single report and none of these boys teachers have ever said that Alex was teasing Logan or calling him names. In fact they all say Logan has been doing the teasing.” Mr. Elm responded that he had been hearing about this from Logan for a long time. He refused any suggestion that Logan be held responsible for any part of the altercation after school. “As I understand it my boy was being chased around this building by a kid threatening to beat him into the ground. Are you telling me you want to blame Logan for that?”

The level of this argument was similar to those made by Elite Academy parents, but uncommon when the situation involved students like Logan and Alex who were in the “regular” academic track. Both men used educational jargon with ease and made similar moves in making their points. Logan simply sat back in his seat watching as the men attempted to locate some level of blame on someone involved while each diverted the others attempts. Mr. Martin and Mr. Elm maintained an excessively respectful tone toward one another even as they blocked each idea passed across the table.

A disciplinary compromise? As Mr. Martin suggested he did believe Logan be “held accountable” for harassing Alex, Mr. Elm again responded that he would not tolerate anyone calling Logan a homosexual and harassing him. Mr. Martin suggested that Logan could not “take things into his own hands” at Oakwood by calling Alex names back or taunting him in some other way.

For a brief moment Mr. Elm agreed that retaliation was unacceptable, but then he said that he knew that Logan had tried telling on Alex and nothing had come of any earlier teacher intervention. He said Mr. Martin should hold Alex and the boys’ teachers accountable rather than Logan. “If they’re not going to help him when he’s being called a

homosexual, well I don't know what else we can expect from the boy but to defend his name."

The discussion between Mr. Martin and Mr. Elm ended with an agreement to put Logan "on notice." As Mr. Martin explained, "There's no more room for warnings and reminders for you. Nothing can get any worse than what it is right now."

The two men then coach Logan on how to behave toward his peers. Mr. Martin gave the advice, "You're going to have to know how to stand up for yourself, and when it's time to get an adult."

Mr. Elm told his son, "I know I told you that you were going to have to show him that you're not a homosexual but we need to think about how that's done." Logan looked up to his father's face attentively, "If someone is bothering you it's time to get loud. Right now we've got one month of school left, but then you got four years at the high school. The bottom line is you gotta save face. You gotta get loud and realize that he (Alex) is the weak one."

Mr. Martin joined in, "You need to tell an adult. Don't worry about word getting out to the kids, they've already made up their minds anyway."

And Mr. Elm jumped in again, "I expect you to be appropriate, but I don't expect you to get jumped on either."

At this point Mr. Elm stood to leave with his son and Mr. Martin stood to shake his hand. The father and son left the building and entered a car parked at the front entrance under the watchful eyes of a group of Alex's friends who were milling about on the opposite side of the street.

Different boys, different outcomes. The following morning Alex and his mother would be informed that due to Alex's extensive file of disciplinary actions for everything from disrespect to disruptive behavior, he would be assigned a disciplinary hearing with the possibility of expulsion. He was suspended pending this disciplinary hearing. Later a disciplinary hearing was held and Alex was expelled for the remainder of the school year.

That same morning Logan returned to class and to his regular schedule. There was no written documentation in his student record of the prior afternoon's events. There was no recording of the consistent reports from the three teachers that Logan had been harassing Alex.

In addition there were no referrals or record of Logan reporting homophobic or any other form of harassment by Alex. When Mr. Martin went back to the teachers involved, none of them were aware of any sort of history of harassment by Alex, and there was no teacher who could confirm Logan's claim that he had ever sought help in dealing with Alex.

I'm Not No Homosexual—Analysis

The erasure of "homophobia" at Oakwood, the erasure of the violence within the social construction of the Other. The case of Alex and Logan is one in which public performances of same sex sexual attraction, gender harassment, and explicit homophobia were witnessed and reported repeatedly within at least three classrooms only to disappear quickly from the consciousness of all of the teachers involved. When the conflicted relationship between Alex and Logan finally erupted into full scale violence, the teachers present were only able to piece together a considerable history of sexual and gendered

conflict after they were prompted by the two boys' accounts of events within their classrooms.

In investigating the situation it became clear that these same teachers were repeatedly able to forget and erase complaints of verbal and physical gendered harassment and to maintain ignorance regarding the intimate nature of this harassment. Faculty members were also ignorant of the homoerotic and homophobic discourse surrounding the lives of Alex and Logan. And even as this case closed with the expulsion of Alex and the reintegration of Logan into the community, there remained no institutional text of either the sexual harassment or the homophobic discourses surrounding this violent situation.

The individual and institutional erasure of earlier reports of gendered harassment, the intersections of social class and religious discourses to shore up heteronormative discourses, and the pervasive presence of a masculine discourse of heterosexuality and domination all can be seen as partially accountable in contributing to this eruption of this scene of heteronormative violence. And the resolution to the situation again erased from institutional memory these heteronormative events, silenced professional conversations about masculinity and sexuality and once again naturalized masculine violence at Oakwood.

Here I consider the following five prevalent patterns of erasure within the moments between all of the participants in this story: first the illegible lives and unspeakable experiences of Othering; second the missing discourse of sexuality and gender power and oppression; third the reluctant, silent and inarticulate targets of heteronormativity; fourth the break within educational discourses on adolescent gender

and sexuality; and fifth the lack of structural means to track and historicize heteronormativity at Oakwood.

The illegible lives and unspeakable experiences of Othering. During the investigation into the explosive conflict between Logan and Alex it was slowly revealed that there was a significant history of interpersonal conflict and complaint related to these two boys. This history of discord only emerged as a text after Logan claimed Alex had persistently harassed him by calling him a homosexual. And as the roots of discord were uncovered, it became clear that this final incident of Logan calling Alex a “faggot” was related to a lengthy history of touching, teasing, and name calling on the part of Logan related to gender and sexuality.

What was perplexing to Mr. Martin following this investigation was that Logan’s claims of victimization were the exact opposite of the behavior problems teachers witnessed in the classroom. While Logan and Mr. Elm each claimed Alex had defamed and gravely insulted Logan by marking him as gay, the three teachers questioned about these events said Logan had made no such complaints.

In fact, the prompting of these claims by Logan forced each teacher to recall the boys’ interactions within their classroom. And in this recollection it was revealed that Alex himself had complained repeatedly to each teacher that Logan was touching him, taunting him, and “flirting” with him during classes. This ongoing history of gendered conflict had been forgotten until the investigation placed all of the teachers together in one room to discuss classroom interactions between Logan and Alex.

The erasure of this type of student complaint has been documented throughout this study and was first noted in Chapter II when Elizabeth appealed to her teachers for

support as Jackson and his friends repeatedly taunted her as “Trevor” and called her a man. The invisibility and erasure of gendered physical and sexual harassment among boys was extensively highlighted in Chapter III in the case of Kendrick and Rodrigo and again in this chapter in the case of Riley and Cameron.

Here again three teachers confirm that they were each witnesses to Logan touching, teasing, and taunting Alex and none of them took note of this behavior. They also confirm that on occasions Alex complained to them about this behavior and requested seat changes away from Logan. However, there was no documentation of any of this behavior, and none of the teachers involved reported having done anything to address Alex’s complaints.

In reconsidering the history of Alex and Logan all of the professionals involved speculated about the Logan’s unwanted attraction for Alex, acknowledging each perceived there to be some form of attraction. Yet lacking any professional discourse related to gender, sexuality, and same sex relationships the observations and complaints simply were not intentionally or critically considered or addressed. Instead these observations fell into the recesses of teacher memory, categorized as associated with Logan’s exceptionality. Just as students like Cameron and Olivia were reified as masculine and feminine dominators, students like Logan were categorized as “pests” or as students who Mrs. Fleming noted would be taught a lesson by their peers. This categorizing of individuals erased any teacher responsibility for educating, addressing, and managing gender and sexuality discourses within the social setting of the classroom.

The missing discourse of sexuality and gender power and oppression. When considering Logan and Mr. Elm’s interpretations of the events addressed in this vignette

Logan's masculinity is premised on two important assumptions related to gender and sexuality: first, that same sex attraction is impossible and intolerable; and second that an appropriate degree of violence and dominance will signify and protect a person's heterosexuality. At this point in the analysis we have repeatedly considered these elements in the construction of hegemonic masculinity and I reiterate them here only to highlight the educational silence in response to these assumptions.

In considering the power and oppression presented here in relation to sexual orientation and the Othering of same sex attraction, Mr. Elm asserts on multiple occasions that same sex attraction is repulsive, intolerable, provocative, and insulting. Each of these statements is left unanswered within the educational setting as Logan, Mr. Elm, Mr. Martin and I as an educational researcher consider Logan's claim that Alex called him a "faggot" on previous occasions.

This adamant domination and defining of same sex attraction as subhuman then supports the homophobic conditions in which Logan proposes he used the same term on Alex to get him back, "I just called him what he calls me." The educational failure to identify and reject these normative claims of the moral and social superiority of heterosexuality suggests to Logan as well as to Alex or any other student that "faggot" is the perfect weapon for dehumanizing a peer.

Also missing in this professional consideration of gendered and sexual orientation harassment is any critical teaching or individual intervention related to masculinity and physical and or sexual domination. In fact rather than troubling the performance of masculinity as dominance, Mr. Elm and Mr. Martin offer Logan instruction in how to

enact dominance in ways that each suggests may signify heterosexuality to Logan's peers.

Mr. Elm told his son, "I know I told you that you were going to have to show him that you're not a homosexual but we need to think about how that's done." Logan looked up to his father's face attentively, "If someone is bothering you it's time to get loud. Right now we've got one month of school left, but then you got four years at the high school. The bottom line is you gotta save face. You gotta get loud and realize that he (Alex) is the weak one."

In an elusive manner, Mr. Elm attempted to instruct Logan on how to enact masculine domination and mark Alex as his subordinate. Mr. Martin also gave Logan this instruction in performing masculinity, with the caveat that Logan should get an adult before resorting to physical violence. Both men uncritically perpetuated the idea that Logan must dominate and subjugate his peers in order to escape the "faggot" label and thus embody hegemonic masculinity. And yet this exact enactment of domination and subjugation simultaneously resulted in Logan's peer Alex being removed from campus pending expulsion.

The lack of a discursive means for considering how power and domination were related to gender and sexual politics at Oakwood perpetuated boys performances of gendered and sexual orientation violence upon one another even as this discursive void also perpetuated the uninterrupted wave of male discipline referrals and expulsions for violence and fighting.

The reluctant, silent, and inarticulate targets of heteronormativity. As in the previous analysis, in this case Alex did not make claims that Logan called him anti-gay epithets and he did not make claims that Logan was sexually harassing him. All Alex would say when questioned about the situation was that he planned to beat up Logan.

When Mr. Martin repeatedly asked Alex to explain his violent charge toward Logan, Alex offered no explanation.

Alex was seen by the faculty at Oakwood as heterosexual and masculine therefore his teachers couldn't read sexual and gendered harassment in Logan's treatment of him. In fact the ubiquitous professional presumption (Epstein et al., 2003a) that Alex was heterosexual allowed all of the teachers associated with the boys to dismiss ongoing rumors and behaviors that suggested Alex was bisexual.

This professional presumption of normative heterosexuality for both Alex and Logan allowed the boys teachers to both register Logan's attraction for Alex, and then dismiss that attraction within moments of registering it. As Mrs. White explained, "It's like Logan has a crush on Alex the way he's got his hands on him all the time. I guess in a way he does (*have a crush on him*), he wants to be just like him I suppose."

In a heteronormative setting (Rasmussen, 2006) in which neither Alex nor Logan could be seen as the object of sexual or gendered attention by the other boy, it should not be surprising that Alex was unable to fully articulate to the faculty his frustrations with Logan's attention. The fact that he initially reported unwanted touching and unwanted physical attention and later was unwilling to report on his motivation for hostility toward Logan reveal the limitations of a binary gender and sexuality discourse that prevented Alex from articulating the conflict between he and Logan.

The break between within educational discourses on adolescent gender and sexuality. The educational discourse which dominated the investigation into the interaction between Alex and Logan was that of zero tolerance of physical violence within the school setting (Stein, 2003). Therefore when Mr. Martin considered the

situation which took place after school, he was primarily concerned with details regarding who had expressed intent toward physical violence and who had demonstrated any physical violence.

This preoccupation with a legalistic determination of school violence as physical altercations prevented Mr. Martin from exploring the student stated discursive violence of homophobia and sexual harassment. And so, while the school of Oakwood proclaimed a policy which would address both sexual harassment and homophobia, Mr. Martin did not consider either of these concerns as he focused his investigation strictly on physical threats of violence.

The overriding of a school safety discourse about harassment, discussed previously, which recognized sexual and gendered violence as pervasive in “harassment” and “bullying” by a zero tolerance discourse regarding physical violence silenced any discussion regarding gender and sexuality (Meyer, 2009). And so while Oakwood faculty could identify a school policy which addressed sexual and gendered harassment, this policy was here again silenced by the superseding educational discourse of zero tolerance which in this case resulted in the suspension and ultimate expulsion of Alex.

The lack of structural means to track and historicize heteronormativity at Oakwood. In this case there was no institutional record maintained of earlier harassment, no record of current situation in relation to gender and sexuality, and no record of a heteronormative reason for Alex’s expulsion.

As was discussed in the previous section, the zero tolerance discourse applied in this case required that Mr. Martin’s investigation focus on acts of or threats of physical violence. And in this case, Alex articulated repeatedly the intention to physically harm

Logan. Therefore, in the documentation of the events discussed in this case, the focus was strictly on threats of harm or acts of violence.

There was in fact, no written documentation regarding either Alex or Logan's complaints about the other boy's unwanted sexual advances. Nor were there any written documents regarding Logan's claims that Alex repeatedly used homophobic slurs against him. No documentation was kept regarding the teachers' assertions of a history of gendered tension between these boys, or of the three teachers' acknowledgement that there were earlier complaints of sexual and gendered harassment.

Following the interview process, the faculty of Oakwood did not revisit this situation as a professional community on any occasion. There were individual rumor oriented conversations among faculty members regarding the expulsion of Alex, however there was no formal discussion among the faculty regarding the sexual and gendered nature of this conflict.

Presuming that there were tensions in other classrooms relating to sexual tension or sexual harassment among same sex students, or gender tension and gender domination among students, this instance of unmanaged peer to peer sexual harassment was not used to improve management tactics or to improve the enforcement of the school policy on gender bullying and harassment.

Vignette 5: Do I Look Gay to You!?

Do I Look Gay to You!?!—The Story

JESSICA: I can't see how anyone would say this school is like homophobic, I mean at least not in my class. I mean really! Just look at how much everybody loves Mr. Wilson and he's gay.

RESEARCHER: Mr. Wilson told your class that he is gay?

JESSICA: No. I mean well, everybody already knows he's gay.

RESEARCHER: How is that known?

JESSICA: What do you mean?

RESEARCHER: Like... how do you personally know that he's gay?

JESSICA: Well, everybody knows that he moved Frankie Bean to the hallway for the rest of the year for calling him a homo. Frankie even admitted it and he told me he doesn't want to be in the classroom with a homo teacher anyway.

RESEARCHER: So your class saw Mr. Wilson kick Frankie out of class for calling him a homo?

JESSICA: No, I'm not in that section (class period). But I walk by Frankie in his desk in the hallway every day and one day he told me what happened. Plus everyone in that section says they saw it happen too. I mean I know it's true, you can ask anyone. But nobody cares because Mr. Wilson is great... See that's what I was trying to say.

What does it mean to be a social justice advocate in the classroom? The rumor that Jerry Wilson, a newer male teacher at Oakwood, was gay spread throughout the seventh grade student community. Mr. Wilson was a newer teacher to the Oakwood

community. He entered teaching as a second career, yet his youthful appearance and verbal style connected with students in a different way than many of the other teachers on the faculty. Students regularly spoke of him as younger, more like them, more contemporary, and more connected to their world.

Early in the year he made his presence known to me by identifying himself as an advocate for equality among students. When I asked him to explain what that meant to him as a teacher he said, “Oh you know. I am very into social justice advocacy in education. I mean I’m really ‘not down’ with schools participating in oppression.” When I pushed for more of an explanation he went on to say, “I guess I really mean like on issues of racism and homophobia and things like that. I just don’t tolerate that sort of bullying and harassment in my classroom.”

Throughout the year Mr. Wilson regularly joined in conversation with a small cohort of his professional peers who also self identified as social justice advocates against “oppression.” These professionals would engage in conversations critiquing racism, sexism, and homophobia in the external political world. For example, as this was the year of the Obama election, there were many conversations about racism related to media coverage of Obama. Additionally there were conversations advocating for same sex marriage, and conversations about the sexist content of contemporary adolescent music and other media. While this group of teachers expressed interest in analyzing issues of oppression on a national scale, they seldom discussed in any depth how race, sex, gender, and sexual orientation were operating within the school itself.

As a participant researcher, I developed an ongoing relationship with Mr. Wilson throughout the school year. He regularly sought me out to discuss my research and he

often offered observations from his classroom which illustrated how masculinity seemed tied up in negative classroom behaviors among his students. He was particularly concerned with how to deal with boys who were acting out in class, and had a variety of theories related to their gender and presumed heterosexuality which explained why they were acting out in his class.

Mr. Wilson was also among the teachers who opened up their classroom to my presence. He regularly taught with an open door and students spilling out into the hallway so it was less intrusive to pass by and join in on events within his class. On one occasion I observed Frankie Bean arrive at class, grab a desk and drag it out to the hallway and take a seat before the bell rang. I asked him about this seat and he said, “This is where I wanna be. Me and him (he gestured to Mr. Wilson) we don’t work together.”

On another occasion Mr. Wilson shouted out, “Stop right now and get back here,” to a student who was exiting his classroom yelling “you’re such a ‘mo” at a male peer. When he stopped the boy who had shouted the slur the student began a fast paced response, “I don’t mean it like that. I don’t mean “gay” gay. I mean your cool and all that. I’m sorry.” Mr. Wilson curtly reprimanded him for using the term and told him he would receive a referral if it happened again.

Mr. Wilson reacts to the gay rumors. At this point I had already observed several conversations among students within his classroom referring to their assumptions about Mr. Wilson’s sexual orientation. I was also aware that Mr. Wilson identified as heterosexual and was married to a young woman. Because Jerry had regularly come to me to discuss my research and larger issues of oppression I decided to approach him and

ask him how he felt his rumored homosexuality impacted his relationships with students and or his management of his classes.

Ms. Carr, a teacher on Jerry's teaching team, was present during this conversation. She and Mr. Wilson worked closely together and were quite frequently together when I observed in the classroom or when we talked outside of class time. Mr. Martin was also present as Ms. Carr and Mr. Wilson caught the two of us in his office for a chat when I proposed the interview.

In discussing current events and stories circulating at the school I casually asked Mr. Wilson if he would be willing to meet with me during his prep period to discuss a student rumor that he had kicked Frankie Bean out of his class because he was gay. As his face registered surprise I jokingly said, "I always tell people I think of that as a compliment." I went on to say I wanted to hear his thoughts on how students interpreted and responded to anti-homophobic discipline as he was one of the few teachers who regularly engaged in gay positive discipline.

His immediate response to this request was absolute silence as his face became stiff and slowly flushed to a dark red. He said he needed to leave the building and told me he would talk to me the next day. I realized in that moment that he was not aware of the rumor and had not interpreted any student interactions to indicate that there was any rumor about his sexual orientation. Further it was painfully obvious that my approaching him directly about this topic as it may relate to him personally had upset him.

Mr. Wilson seeks an interview to set the record straight. The following day he approached me and asked to sit down to discuss the issue with me. He was clear that he wanted the interview on record, though he explained, "I don't know what I'm going to

have to say, I'm still feeling pretty worked up about this." We began the discussion with my acknowledgement that I had caught him by surprise and had perhaps upset him.

RESEARCHER: I really want to apologize for approaching you and possibly upsetting you with this story or rumor or whatever you would call it that you might be gay. I guess to explain my actions I just want to say that I knew that you knew that I was gay. So for me when I approached you about this topic I guess in my mind I thought of that as a compliment. Actually I think I even said that as a little joke yesterday. *(Here there was very awkward laughter by Mr. Wilson.)*

In any case it was clear to me that you had a very different emotional reaction to the information and did not take it as a compliment. I am very sorry.

MR. WILSON: I guess what irritated me the most is that I felt like, hey this is infringing on my personal rights. Get the hell out of here, I don't want to talk to you. So I think that's what I was reacting to. Even now I'm still kinda fuming about it.

RESEARCHER: Well I want to apologize again for upsetting you. I thought you were aware of the rumor. But after I spoke to you yesterday and realized you weren't I worried that you would feel self conscious or concerned now.

MR. WILSON: Totally, it was like I heard this, I was having a great day and then I was like, "Now I'm kinda pissed." And then I started callin my wife and I was like guess what? And she goes what.... And I go, "Why is this always happening to me?"

(A few moments of silence pass.)

Because it happens. It has happened to me a few times before you know.

And she goes it's because....

And I go, "Is it because I'm not macho enough?!"

And she goes, "Maybe. And that you're um.... You know you're energetic. You know and the stereotypical homosexual man traits. You know."

You know like how they use their hands. And you know I'm a musician and stuff like that. And so it's like when I heard that rumor I was just like hmmm.... Now I'm stuck.

RESEARCHER: By stuck do you mean it inhibits you?

MR. WILSON: Oh totally, it's like: Am I acting gay!? Do I look gay to you?!

And then I was like, well I didn't think I was. Whatever that is.

Seeking out the roots of this rumor. After Mr. Wilson spent some time speculating about his gender performance in relation to why students might think he was gay he asked me to interpret the rumor. He expressed interest in capturing the moment, act, or gesture that might have marked him as queer to any of his students. I suggested that there were countless unspoken and unacknowledged norms at Oakwood regarding sexuality and gender. I also said calling someone gay was very often simply a tool in an attempt to socially overpower that person. I explained that my interest in this rumor was connected to the fact that it revolved around his alleged discipline of a student for using anti-gay slurs in his classroom.

Mr. Wilson remained most interested in specific actions that students might consider abnormal or "gay."

RESEARCHER: Well, one thing that contradicts the norms here is interrupting homophobia.

MR. WILSON: What do you mean by interrupting homophobia

RESEARCHER: Well, it can be as simple as a teacher saying, “Don’t call him a homo.” Don’t use the word “gay” as an insult.

MR. WILSON: I thought that’s what you mean, but I just thought I’d ask because I thought you might have been in the room when I was finishing up the class. Because when the class left um some boy was called, “Oh you’re such a homo.” And I said, “Get back here” and I was wondering if you heard that?

RESEARCHER: Today?

MR. WILSON: Yes.

RESEARCHER: No.

MR. WILSON: It was a pretty loud shout from a girl named Susan and then I yelled at her. But then you know, of course, you know, I was like uh oh. (*Here he began to laugh again nervously*)

Here Jerry described a student disciplinary interaction similar to others I had witnessed in his class on other days. This interaction was also similar to the moment associated with the original rumor about his sexuality. The earlier story of Frankie’s being sent to the hall for calling Mr. Wilson a homo had been shared with me by multiple student informants including Frankie himself. It was this moment I had originally been interested in exploring; however Mr. Wilson’s consistent repulsion at the notion of being marked as gay led our conversation in a different direction.

RESEARCHER: I guess I am just wondering, would that be such a bad thing?

Would it be such a bad thing if students said you were gay? I mean like take that scenario you just shared. Say that girl left your classroom and said Mr. Wilson won't let us say homo cuz he's gay. If that rumor were to spread all over the place what would that mean for you as a teacher here?

MR. WILSON: I think starting yesterday I knew for sure that I really didn't like it. Maybe because it kinda struck close to home, because like I said before I've been called that. I've been called that more than once.

And I've also worked in a very male dominated environment, selling electronics you know and that's... well that was really male dominated and would make some great research for you. But anyway it was very male dominated and since I wasn't like the typical male and since I don't like sports and I don't really talk about women that graphically I'd get called a homo.

Like all the time it was like: "Oh you're such a homo" or "What are you a homo? You're gay! Are you gay? Are you gay and married—to a woman?!"
(Jerry's voice imitated a mocking angry tone as he repeated this barrage of insults)

So when I've been away from that for a while and then now to hear it from students! It's like "Shit! Really?! Really?! Huh?!"

And so, but I think if there was a gay rumor I wouldn't like it even if I was gay. I mean I guess if there was that rumor I want to say, "Oh, it wouldn't bother me at all."

But really I know it would bother me. And I think that I would make some concessions to that.

RESEARCHER: What do you mean concessions?

MR. WILSON: Like as far as like you know maybe show a picture of my wife, or you know, those kinds of things, but it shouldn't bother me.

Here again Jerry began to consider what sort of performances might mark his sexuality, on this occasion seeking out what might be the most obvious heterosexual moves he could make in front of his students.

Closeting a “social justice advocate.” As our discussion came to a close it was clear that Mr. Wilson was no longer interested or able to talk about my research or homophobia in the abstract manner with which he had earlier engaged this topic. His focus was now on his personal performances of gender and how to better adapt them to this heteronormative environment. In the days and weeks after being marked as gay by students and again by me as a researcher his interactions became more guarded.

Among the changes he made immediately following our discussion, he unceremoniously brought Frankie's desk back into the classroom and seated him by the exit. At the first sign of rebellion from Frankie he simply sent the boy to the office on a referral. His interactions with his cooperating teacher closed down as Ms. Carr noted, “Mr. Wilson is having end of the year breakdown. He's ready to explode so I'm just keeping my distance.” He on the other hand suggested, “Ms. Carr and I simply see things very differently and operate very differently. I think we've worked too closely together and that she's misinterpreted our relationship.” Finally our professional relationship became stilted even as he continued to check in with me, invite me into his classroom,

and share little stories of his teaching experiences. Rumors about his sexuality lingered among the students throughout the remainder of the school year.

Do I Look Gay to You!?!—Analysis

Educator's individual lives under erasure, the erasure of teachers' individual sexed and gendered identities. This final vignette brings the discourse of heteronormativity starkly onto the bodies of school faculty. Mr. Wilson was by no means the only faculty member who was called upon to directly address gender and sexual orientation norms related to his personal life. There were faculty and student; faculty and parent; and interfaculty incidents of heteronormativity occurring on a regular basis at Oakwood. I have brought forward this particular vignette of heteronormativity because it explicitly touches on the difficulty of professionally addressing heteronormativity from within a heteronormative framework (Rofes, 2002).

I have also brought this forward as the final vignette as it most clearly implicates me as the researcher in this violent norming discourse within the education setting. This final vignette is unsettling in that it illustrates quite well that we are all as professional educators seeped in heteronormative discourses. We are all acting from heteronormative assumptions and simultaneously erasing the lives and experiences of those outside of those assumptions. We are in our every move and attempt to liberate, reproducing dominant cultural norms through our necessary use of cultural terms and shared meanings which have been long built on gender and sexuality binaries that presume the superior status of masculinity and heterosexuality.

This final vignette explores the undercurrent of erasure beneath both Jerry and my own attempts to negotiate and expand the bounds of heteronormativity. For Jerry this

negotiation appears to have established both a more tolerant as well as marginalizing classroom for LGBTQ youth (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003; MacIntosh, 2007; Rasmussen, 2004). While simultaneously experiencing personal marginalization based upon the very same discourse of intolerance (Rofes, 2002). For me as an advocate researcher, this negotiation resulted in a highly compromised conversation in which any queer positive sexual orientation was negated and erased.

Here I consider the following five prevalent patterns of erasure within the moments in this story: first the illegible lives and unspeakable experiences of Othering; second the missing discourse of sexuality and gender power and oppression; third the reluctant, silent and inarticulate targets of heteronormativity; fourth the break within educational discourses on adolescent gender and sexuality; and fifth the lack of structural means to track and historicize heteronormativity at Oakwood.

The illegible lives and unspeakable experiences of Othering. When Mr. Wilson was confronted with the fact that there were rumors among his students that he was homosexual, his response was strictly physical. He quite literally ran from the conversation and the situation and only returned when he had adequate time to prepare himself to speak to the allegation by applying a heteronormative discourse to his personal life. His initial silence on one level illustrates the inarticulate professional space for considering sexual and gender diversity at Oakwood.

Unfortunately even though Jerry was a professional educator himself, who personally articulated a liberal stance toward queer youth, he did not possess an adequate discourse of gender and sexuality that could offer him the means to respond to this marginalization. Like several other faculty members at Oakwood, when his own gender

identity and sexuality were called into question he quickly lost sight of Oakwood's very minimal professional critique of heteronormativity and homophobia and instead invested himself in materializing heteronormative standards on his own body.

While Jerry and some of his colleagues could disrupt external moments of homophobia with rudimentary human rights responses when homophobia was directed at individual students, their redirection and overall instruction generally focused on personal rights and personal harm rather than on expand the local discourse of gender and sexuality. Thus when the gender and sexuality norms were directed at his body he was unable to respond to the experience at the level of social significance and instead focused on his own personal performances.

Given the limited professional discourse on gender and sexuality Mr. Wilson had adequate time to consider his own Othering through student rumors about his sexuality he returned to the situation and applied the discourse of heteronormativity to himself and his gender performance. This series of defenses of his heterosexuality effectively erased his own individual identity and replaced it with a series of heteronormative stereotypes.

The missing discourse of sexuality and gender power and oppression.

Throughout this study I have documented the lack of a professional discourse to address the workings of power and oppression in relation to gender and sexuality. In this final vignette Mr. Wilson has been interpolated into the heteronormative discourse to the extent that he is unable to consider how a gay rumor perpetuated by a disciplined student articulates a heteronormative power over him as an education professional.

By finally implicating the intimate lives of faculty in the (re)production of heteronormativity these case points to the ubiquitous nature of a normative discourse to

implicate and police everyone within a community. Mr. Wilson's "concessions" to heteronormativity, his willingness to present photos of his wife, to dress less gay, and so forth belie his suggestion that this was simply an affront to his personal sexual preference.

His panic and plotting of concessions to the students he supervises reveal a dramatic inversion of the instructor pupil power discourse of education and discipline at Oakwood. While the disciplinary and instructional practices at Oakwood were all centered on teacher power and student subjugation, in this instance Mr. Wilson was prepared to alter his performances to meet the homophobic demands of his students. A more complex understanding of how power was operating in student rumors could have offered Jerry alternative plans rather than seeking to improve his mimicry of particular heteronormative performances.

The reluctant, silent, and inarticulate targets of heteronormativity. Mr. Wilson's attempts to recover what had been his personal assumed heterosexual status required the use of a heteronormative discourse which simultaneously erased the lives of LGBTQ youth and faculty. Ironically his commitment to being interpreted as heterosexual contradicted his earlier public gestures affirming gender and sexuality diversity. And this discourse which flattened sexual and gender minorities into a series of negative assumptions and stereotypes was offered as explanatory to me effectively erasing my public identity as a sexual minority educator and as a sexual minority individual.

And while I have recorded my presence throughout this research, I have up to this point written little about my presence as a researcher. As discussed in the first chapter of this book, in this post structural ethnography I do not presume to play the "god trick" and

do wish to recognize my presence as an influence upon the events surrounding this research (Haraway, 1988). Yet I wish to highlight my presence here in order to point to my own erasure throughout this discussion regarding gender, sexuality, and heteronormativity at Oakwood.

While my presence as a queer scholar and a queer advocate were known to the faculty at Oakwood, moments of what I would consider heterosexual consultation like those which took place during this interview were common place during my year at the school.

For example on another occasion Mr. Martin consulted with me on how to respond to and quell malicious rumors that he was homosexual. Mr. Reed also discussed with me his tactics for “un-gaying” himself after learning of rumors about his sexuality. And a variety of faculty members privately speculated to me about particular peers and students they perceived to be “closet cases.”

I frequently made attempts during these moments to expand the sexuality and gender discourse by attempting to explore why faculty felt compelled to prove a heterosexual status. I sought answers how faculty were interpreting particular performances as “closet cases” while they considered those same actions heterosexual performances on the part of other people. Yet these discussions were actually simultaneous monologues rather than dialogues. I would speak from an expansive discourse of gender and sexuality and Jerry and others would respond from a dichotomous discourse of gender and sexuality. And in this discursive dance, only ideas which relied upon heteronormative discourse were taken up as dialogue.

Within my research field it was possible to discuss gender and sexuality diversity and to meaningfully state, “I consider it a compliment that people think you are gay.” Within the Oakwood professional context that statement and the recognition of the very research I was conducting was most often an impossibility.

The break between within educational discourses on adolescent gender and sexuality. This vignette graphically illustrates the highly limited discourse of sexuality and gender available to professionals at Oakwood. When Mr. Wilson was asked to consider how heteronormative gender and sexual orientation were related to professional power and authority, he immediately moved from a critique of gender and sexuality norms to applying those norms to his own life.

In adopting a heteronormative frame with regard to his own gender and sexuality, Wilson considered a variety of performances he hoped would establish his heterosexuality and repudiated those he felt may have marked him as homosexual. In listing off gender performances he felt signified homosexuality he rapidly reproduced a heteronormative discourse of gender and sexuality that was void any critical dialogue regarding power and oppression. Instead his response reflected the social and historical context in which professional educators have been deliberately selected and explicitly required to model heteronormative gender and sexuality performances (Blount & Anahita, 2004).

This limited professional discourse meant that while the rumor of Wilson’s sexual orientation was a direct response to a moment of discipline and student teacher power relations, he was primarily focused on investing his energies on heterosexual performances. Rather than considering what Frankie may have gained by labeling him as

gay, or how that label had impacted his authority among students who had adopted it, Jerry directed his thoughts and attention to appearing heterosexual.

In this instance as in other moments in which teachers and administrators discussed gay rumors about themselves Jerry strategically considered his gender and sexuality performances with the intent of shoring up his heterosexuality. Rather than critically identify and rebuke how sexual orientation was being used to undermine the authority of the teacher, Jerry invested his energies in approximating heteronormative performances. Like Mr. Wilson, Mr. Martin and Mr. Clark also discussed addressing hostile and problematic rumors about their sexual orientation by inviting their wives into the workspace on highly public occasions. As Mr. Clark explained to me on one occasion, “I just can’t afford to have parents hearing that kind of thing about me. The simplest thing to do is just have Kathy drop off my lunch or show up for random reasons a few times.”

Ironically, the lack of a critical professional discourse regarding the power inherent in reproducing a heteronormative professional stereotype assures the power imbalance will carry on producing gay rumors to discredit educators (Rofes, 2002).

The lack of structural means to track and historicize heteronormativity at Oakwood. All of the vignettes within this study illustrate the lack of a professional discourse that would allow the stories to be documented, shared, discussed, and thus become professional knowledge at Oakwood. This final case, as I noted earlier was not uncommon, during my year at Oakwood I was aware of an array of heteronormative rumors circulating among both students and staff regarding a great number of faculty members. And regardless of whether any of these rumors were grounded in material

reality they all served to undermine authority, discredit teachers, and reinforce heteronormative social standards.

In this final vignette Mr. Wilson discussed enacting heterosexuality in a highly visible manner in order to put an end to a rumor that he was gay. In another interview Mr. Clark spoke about inviting his wife to school during lunch to make his heterosexuality visible. As discussed earlier, Mr. Clark and Mr. Reed also spoke of instances in which they very intentionally enacted heterosexual performances which they each suggested were necessary to escape a gay rumor.

None of these incidents were ever publicly discussed among the faculty however. While these rumors circulated among students and faculty, there was no opportunity available to compare these incidents and note the patterns of disempowerment each faculty member was responding to as well as contributing with his actions.

And so this hidden curriculum, written on the bodies and lives of the teachers remained invisible to the staff. Aside from this research project there was not a space to call forward, discuss, or document the sexual and gender domination of faculty members by one another or by the students and families they served.

Abjection Discussion and Conclusion

Throughout this study, in case after case, students have been at a loss of words to articulate who they are and what is happening to them in relation to the gender and sexuality norms at Oakwood. In the earliest case Elizabeth developed her own term “skater” to capture her gender in terms beyond male and female. And here in this final case Mr. Wilson became estranged from himself and began observing himself from

above in an attempt to capture the gestures which betrayed his sexuality. All throughout members of the school community at Oakwood have been made strangers to themselves by the insidious heteronormative discourse.

The Missing Subject

In considering the many of moments silencing and erasure at Oakwood one notices the lack of a material Other within the heteronormative educational discourse of gender and sexuality (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Thorne, 2004). At Oakwood children and faculty are heterosexual and gender normative because that is all that is possible within the discourse. This normative framing precludes the existence of an Other even as performances and signifiers are pointing to exclude and Other some subjects within the community. Therefore while it is impossible for the faculty to see a child like Tori or Riley as the Other heteronormative events are marking them as less than an Other.

Yet because the faculty does not see them as Other educational discourse of anti-homophobia are inaccessible. For the faculty perceived a targeted person must be identified as queer in order to label the interactions as homophobic. And the unchecked risk of either self identifying as the Other or identifying a student as the Other suppressed the likelihood of having this subject present on nearly all occasions.

To put it simply the faculty demanded a queer youth's presence in order to engage in meaningful anti-homophobia discourse, while at the same time the faculty operated from heteronormative gender ideology which prevented them from interpreting students as potentially queer. Further this practice of silencing and avoiding anti-homophobic educational discourses by making the target heterosexual was widespread at Oakwood.

While Mrs. Fleming made Riley straight, Mr. Clark was busy making Jerrod and Teddy straight to somehow lessen the sting of the pervasive abuse they were enduring.

The demand for a queer subject to enact anti-homophobic discourse is the discursive equivalent of suggesting that a comment or interaction is not racist because there are no people of color present during the conversation. In these normative professional moments the discourse is located on individual bodies rather than within public ideology. As if racism were produced or perpetuated by individuals of color, or homophobia by a gay youth.

The catch 22 of this situation is that neither faculty nor students at Oakwood willingly identified themselves or others as sexual minorities. There was no one on staff who publically identified as queer, and only two students were known to publically identify as queer. In fact the final vignette of this chapter considers the means faculty went to in order to avoid being identified as queer. Within this context intentionally lacking an Other, an anti-homophobia educational discourse among the faculty or directed toward students remained inarticulate.

Instead as was discussed in the previous chapter, a general “bullying” discourse emerged which ignored the explicit heteronormative gender and sexuality domination embedded within bullying (Meyer, 2009) Thus moments for instruction or intervention related to homophobia and anti-homophobia remained largely unintelligible even as the ongoing and open conversation about bullying was based upon heteronormative incidents (Stein, 2002).

Invisible Power and Oppression

Throughout this chapter I have argued that the professionals at Oakwood lacked fundamental educational knowledge about gender, sexuality, power, and oppression within U.S. society. This professional ignorance of marginalization rendered it difficult for the faculty to interpret and thereby name and document incidents of heteronormativity within the community.

The lack of a discursive means for considering how power and domination were related to gender and sexual politics at Oakwood perpetuated boys performances of gendered and sexual orientation violence upon one another even as this discursive void also perpetuated the uninterrupted wave of male discipline referrals and expulsions for violence and fighting.

Were the staff and students at Oakwood to have been engaged in an open discussion about the physical, social, and emotional domination of larger older boys, perhaps Mr. Martin would have been able to immediately identify more events as heteronormative. Had there been a professional discourse surrounding the pervasive homophobia of heteronormative adolescents, Mr. Martin may have more readily seen the potential for violence in the exposure and observation of Eli's penis while he was peeing for example. And were the staff and students engaged in educational discourse related to conceiving of sexuality as a consensual interaction rather than as a commodity to be consumed or taken by force, the rape threats would have jumped out as a stark example of the heteronormative ideology of predatory and dominating sexual acts.

One must wonder if instead of ignoring the power differentiation of gender and sexuality at Oakwood and sending Drew and Tori back into the classroom with "equal

consequences” Mr. Martin and Ms. Rivera had stopped the momentum of that event once they considered the sexual and gendered nature of it to review the school policy on sexual harassment. What if these two professionals had instead engaged one another, their peers, and ultimately the students of Oakwood in a critical discourse on sexuality and gender and the power imbalance that both sustained that moment and was reinforced by that moment? What would it have taken to arrive at such an intervention?

Discursive Distractions

The very limited educational discourse of gender and sexuality was repeatedly subsumed by more pervasive educational discourses throughout this study. The discourse of religious freedom was frequently deployed to justify heteronormative violence. The power of this religious discourse to silence any advocacy or even acknowledgement of gender and sexuality diversity was repeatedly displayed in explicitly homophobic cases of violence perpetuated by Samuel, Cameron, and Logan.

This religious discourse erasure allowed a public text in which Cameron could protest seating by a gay student and Riley could then be forcibly moved. This same application of religious neutrality discourse had allowed for a public text in which Samuel’s family could turn a meeting about homophobic harassment into a meeting about Samuel’s religious rights. This dominant Christian discourse underwrote a public text in which a student could publically declare refusal to a school wide policy to respect students who are LGBTQ for religious reasons. Each of these moments goes beyond silencing educational discourses on gender and sexuality diversity. Each of these and other moments of privileging religious intolerance and silencing educational inclusion

and diversity policies actually commit the public space of Oakwood to a heteronormative discourse.

The educational disciplinary discourses of zero tolerance and anti-bullying also displaced any critical evaluation of gender and sexuality norming or harassment on the part of students. Where there were moments of possibility like Tori's acknowledgement of being sexually groped, the discourse quickly reverted to a teacher pupil discourse of admonishment and apology. And where there was the possibility of unearthing knowledge about the powerful practice of Othering a peer with gay love notes, the conversation instead turned to a generic discussion of bullying, respect, and civility.

Institutional Amnesia

And of course it would have taken a recorded and transmitted history of these many moments of discursive violence to allow these educators to move beyond the compelling individual narratives of students like Tori and Drew or Alex and Logan and so forth to begin a discussion about heteronormative social patterns and practices. It would be necessary to move beyond maintaining generic "harassment is harassment" records in order to accumulate knowledge of the workings of heteronormativity within the school. Professional time would have been needed to collectively consider the details of this social violence and collaborate on developing a professional discourse and response.

Instead to a large extent the social signifiers of interpersonal violence and homophobia, frequently associated with masculinity (Kimmel, 2006), were frequently uncritically absorbed as essential elements of boyhood. The text of heteronormativity was

erased in faculty interventions and supplanted with a disciplinary discourse associated with bullying.

In addition, annual classroom evaluations and professional consultations between teachers and supervisors missed the explicit heteronormative discourse present at Oakwood. While educational and public policy literature have clearly mapped out both gender and sexual orientation inequity within U.S. public schools, the system for evaluating teacher effectiveness ignores the management of gender within the classroom. Therefore, neither the documentation efforts of the disciplinary referral system, nor the documentation and professionalization efforts of a teacher evaluation system were concerned with capturing and addressing heteronormativity in the classrooms of Oakwood.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Thinking back on Elizabeth's seventh grade experiences of gender and sexuality difference at Oakwood, I am struck by the lack of critical discourse about the topic of gender identity, and sexuality. This discursive void left people thinking that Elizabeth's gender non-conformity meant she was genderless. It enabled pathologizing rumors and stories to circulate about her unchallenged. It enabled the harassment she endured. And it contributed to the ways teachers both registered and ignored her as a person. Her invisibility is revealed as an endemic problem in the school culture when it is juxtaposed to the frequency with which I was told by the students and teachers of Oakwood that there was no problem with homophobia at Oakwood. Experiences like those Elizabeth was having simply could not be seen by most of the school community.

Elizabeth's experience was not just ignored or missed in a generic fashion. Her invisibility was gendered. It was the interpretation of Elizabeth as everything from transgendered, to male, to lesbian that rendered this child's experience invisible to her teachers. A myriad of heteronormative meanings were projected onto her body, none of which seemed to correspond to Elizabeth's own understanding of herself. And even as Elizabeth resisted these misrepresentations of who she was, producing instead her own language for gender and identity, she was continually harassed and marginalized by both students and faculty within the school community. Her isolation was acute. Elizabeth's experiences offer us a window into the social processes behind what news reporters often note as the persecution of the child who is "perceived to be gay." The persecution and

harassment is only one part, one symptom, of a more pervasive cultural and structural problem—a lack of discursive resources that would enable educators to recognize gender difference and challenge heteronormative harassment and isolation. Lacking such resources, Elizabeth is not only harassed, she is abandoned. Furthermore her embodiment of gender becomes a cautionary tale for her peers; if you cross the gender boundaries of heteronormativity you're on your own.

Like Caleb and Sandra, the two youth at Oakwood who sometimes publically identified as gay and bi-sexual, Elizabeth left Oakwood the year following this study. The isolation and lack of support they experienced at the Oakwood community offered these students little opportunity to learn, let alone to thrive as human beings. The classrooms, hallways, and public spaces of Oakwood were universally hostile to these non-conforming adolescents despite the concerted efforts of the school administration to address individual acts of bullying and harassment, to profess a respect for difference, and to sometimes champion LGBTQ issues. These gestures focused on behaviors and public statements, but did nothing to alter the heteronormative discourses that shaped teacher and student expectations about gender performances. The resulting inability to recognize gender difference combined with the specter of the community's hostility toward gender difference permeated student and teacher interactions.

In one interview after another, in disciplinary investigations, and in observations throughout the school gender norming and gender rejection at Oakwood repeatedly violated the rights and negatively impacted the lives of students under the supervision of a generally earnest and well-intended Oakwood faculty. All too frequently the Oakwood faculty themselves were caught up in these normalizing practices as in the case of

Elizabeth when her teacher interpreted her friendship with Laura as homosexual and acted upon that with public alarm. Even as the school community was aware of bullying and harassment as generalized problems among adolescents, and to some extent also aware of sexual and gendered harassment, the silence and shame associated with deviance from the heterosexual norm prevented these professionals from openly discussing, recording, and ultimately learning from the repeated and pervasive heterosexist and homophobic violence taking place daily within the school.

It would be difficult to interpret these dynamics as being associated with some deficit uniquely associated with the Oakwood faculty. The administration and faculty self-identified as progressive, inclusive, and supportive of LGBTQ students. This was a school located in a more liberal than average U.S. city, judged by voting patterns, and the school was considered more progressive than most by this city's standards. The conclusion instead is that even in these more "progressive" conditions, heteronormativity operates at a level still not reached by current efforts to respond to homophobic bullying and behavior. Educators focusing on disciplining the perpetrators of such acts are unprepared to recognize the ways harassment and isolation of gender non-conforming students happen in schools. They lack the vocabulary to ask questions about heteronormative harassment. This contributes to a lack of institutional memory about this kind of harassment and isolation—it is not recognized, written down, nor discussed. Students—even the targets of harassment—find it difficult to name and object to even violent forms of heteronormative harassment. What is needed, before any specific disciplinary policy is put into place, is a cultural intervention. Heteronormativity needs to be named, and teachers need to be prepared to challenge it as an ideology. Only then will

schools be able to develop and retain the discursive resources needed to recognize, protect, and support gender non-conforming children. In what follows, I elaborate on this conclusion.

Looking Beyond the Symptoms of Heteronormativity at Oakwood

Limitation, (Re)production, Resistance, Silence, and Erasure

When I began my work with Mr. Martin, Mr. Clark, and the Oakwood community I brought my two research questions to these professionals:

1. How are the heteronormative incidents and events which take place at Oakwood related to the (re)production of heteronormativity?
2. How do these incidents and events work to naturalize the (re)production of heteronormativity at Oakwood?

It is a credit to the professional community at Oakwood and an indication of their commitment to a different and more democratic future that these administrators and teachers opened up their classrooms and offices to such a critical observation process. As educators and student advocates we all shared an understanding that the problem of sexist and gendered bullying among early adolescents is unresolved and is a pressing concern. This faculty invited my observations and individuals engaged in critical conversations with me on a regular basis. We agreed that homophobic and heterosexist bullying and harassment were problems among the adolescents of Oakwood.

In my early days at Oakwood, Mr. Clark, Mr. Martin, and other Oakwood staff would often note as we debriefed a student conflict or incident, “It’s a good thing you

came by today, this sort of stuff doesn't come up that often." Later in the fall Mr. Martin joked, "I know I better be ready when you come to visit, these things (*gender and sexual harassment incidents*) always happen on the days you come by Oakwood." Of course my presence did not cause events to happen. It does seem reasonable, however, to infer that my presence made such events more visible to the educators working most closely with me. My presence as a researcher known to be tracking the conditions that enabled gender and sexuality based harassment functioned as a kind of panoptic gaze on Mr. Clark and Mr. Martin, as well as a few teachers, increasing their self-consciousness about gendered language and their response to gender inflected disciplinary issues.

The effects of this self-consciousness were limited. Because of my life experiences as a target of heteronormative harassment as well as my years of study and education about heteronormative discourses and practices, I noticed things most Oakwood educators did not. This fact eventually became a topic of conversation, as, for example when Mr. Martin remarked after investigating a fight, "You already knew that was all about homophobia didn't you?!" My presence in the school was not neutral, and may have had a limited educational effect. For example, at the end of our year together Mr. Clark discussed with me the ways his lens into peer conflicts had expanded during our year of studying this problem together.

I don't know if it's from talking to you, or from the kind of year we had, or exactly what but I have a hard time now not seeing how pervasive this problem of gender and sexuality is among the students. And even among the staff on many occasions.

This "pervasive problem" of gender and sexuality norming and othering became tangible to Mr. Clark as the tales of heteronormative domination and violence accumulated in my research throughout the year. The stories of students like Elizabeth,

Sandra, and Caleb which are systemically silenced and erased from the professional discourse both within Oakwood and within the broader educational community were within this project recorded and thus reviewed by Clark and others at Oakwood. And for those close to this research the moral and material significance of these stories slowly eroded the common sense claim that Oakwood had “no problem with homophobia.”

It is the intent of this dissertation to generate some similar effect for the reader. In recounting some fourteen of these tales of heteronormativity for this project, I have illustrated the educational limitations of trying to deal with gendered and homophobic harassment without addressing the underlying heteronormative discourses that generate and sustain and make invisible the consequences of that harassment. These cases illustrate how a professional lack of knowledge about the cultural production of heteronormativity leads educators to respond to isolated behaviors, and not address the community discourses that create and sustain pervasive gender and sexuality inequality within schools as well as within our entire society. This study highlights documents a professional inability to identify and address heteronormative domination and violence within the classroom and beyond (Kosciw et al., 2010; Kumashiro, 2002) .

Along the way I have also tried to describe the sometimes valiant, sometimes pitiable, and frequently ineffective resistance strategies used by children being erased and assaulted by heteronormative discursive practices in schools. Children are not without agency to resist and survive, but that agency is limited by the quality of community support and adult understanding they have access to. In describing the drama of their struggle, I have sought to convey a moral and political urgency that I believe these issues warrant.

By considering professional practices related to both the normative gendering of youth and the erasure of difference I hope to offer some practical steps earnest professionals like Mr. Clark, Mr. Martin, and the faculty of Oakwood can employ to make schools safer and more welcoming for all children regardless of their gender expression or proclaimed sexuality.

Making Boys and Girls at Oakwood

The Human Cost of Reproducing Heteronormative Gender and Sexuality

In Chapter III we took a closer look at eight cases in which gender norms were both repudiated and brutally enforced. The analysis highlighted multiple ways that heteronormative discourse operated in students' lives, such as the dehumanizing violence of stigmatizing gender difference as a means of establishing, coercing, or performing gender normalcy, and the experiences of abjection where the limited binary gender options proved uninhabitable for students.

To review, *Vignette 1: Muffin Top* considered heteronormative discourse productions of the female subject as a beauty object to be evaluated and scrutinized by a public. *Vignette 2: The Girl Scouts* examined the (re)production of the “mean girl” and a hailing into this subjectivity. *Vignette 3: The eighth grade boys* examined violent constructions of hegemonic masculinity. *Vignette 4: Kendrick keeps looking at me* considered the masculinity as necessarily performative of homophobia. *Vignette 5: “Outing” Bobby* as a joke analyzed the production of a gay male identity to shore up masculinity. *Vignette 6: Gay love notes explored* the public production or marking of a peer with a gay identity as a heteronormative punishment. *Vignette 7: Chasing Caleb*

highlighted the experience of the self proclaimed Other and the use of the heteronormative Other as a site for masculine assertions of heterosexuality and masculine violence. And finally *Vignette 8: Sandra disappearing* took into consideration the link between Othering and educational erasure as Sandra a self identified bi-sexual youth discusses skipping school and dropping out.

From this analysis I noted and considered five prevalent patterns in heteronormative gendering at Oakwood: first, how heteronormativity offers a constricted discourse of gender possibility; second, the influence of intersections between gender discourses and racial, ableist, and social class discourses; third, the lack of a conceptual framework that would enable teachers and students to recognize the gendered structure in violence and abuse; fourth, the lack of professional knowledge that would able educators to move beyond recognition to address patterns of heteronormative violence against students under their supervision; and finally, the systemic failure to track, record, and transmit knowledge of the gendered violence and harassment that would render it visible.

Heteronormativity: A constricted and constricting discourse of gender possibility. This chapter described a range of gender experiences at Oakwood from Angela, whose performance of a normative gender identity precipitated “Muffin Top” harassment by her classmates, to the gender non-conforming Kendrick who was harassed as a “fag” during class, to Caleb who openly identified as gay and was frequently violently threatened as a “mo” or “homo.”

In each of these vignettes, as well as the others shared in Chapter III, the gendered subject possibilities for the children in question were highly contrived and necessarily violent in their rejection of those outside the norm. These cases illustrate the superior

status of dominant gender performances like that of Olivia as she criticized Sophia's girlhood on the internet and the public marking of the Other as the target of violence and degradation.

Tales of gender harassment of students like Elizabeth, Angela, and Sophia highlight the power imbalance between femininity and masculinity at Oakwood. Where Elizabeth is attacked as a sexual deviant for enacting socially prescribed masculine performances, Angela becomes a heterosexist target as the failed beauty object, and Sophia is marked on MySpace with an array of feminized subordinate qualities.

These early cases only hint at the physical violence pervasive in enforcing gender norms which comes to bear when Julius and Marcos wield a knife to flirt and play with their subordinate female and male sex objects Cheryl and Peter. The interpersonal violence inherent in Othering the lesser subject of the gender male /female binary is examined in the repeated kicking and ultimate knife "shanking" of Cheryl. And this same normative violence comes to bear on Peter and later Kendrick as lesser subject of the homo / heterosexual binary, as in the vignette in which Kendrick is regularly attacked in class.

This domination of subordinate subjects, which in fact produces these subordinate subjects through the domination, is shown to be a fundamental element of performing dominant gender and sexuality. Kendrick, Jerrod, Teddy, and earlier Elizabeth are all quite literally marked or made LGBTQ against their own will by their peers in public displays of heterosexual masculinity and dominance.

Finally the two vignettes in which youth proclaim an Other identity, Sandra and Caleb, illustrate the pervasive sexuality and gender hostility LGBTQ youth experience

while at school (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; 2008). It should come as no surprise as Caleb runs for his life and Sandra stops attending class altogether that students who are marked by the heteronormative gender discourse as the Other flee the public education system to preserve their humanity and sometimes quite simply to stay alive (Just the Facts Coalition, Turner-Vorbeck, 2008).

Student experiences of gendering within an uncritical and uneducated heteronormative binary at Oakwood are not markedly different from those of the average middle school student anywhere in the United States. The gender discourse regarding curriculum within vast majority of teacher education programs (Kumashiro, 2002), the relative invisibility of gender discourse within current national curriculum dialogues (Lugg, 2003) , and lack of significant critical discourse regarding the gendering of schooling itself (Blount & Anahita, 2004) leave teachers and administrators uneducated regarding gender power and difference within their own schools.

Without teachers and administrators aware of let alone teaching within their schools about gender inequality, gender diversity, and sexuality inequality and sexuality diversity the (re)production of such limited and limiting subject nodes seems inevitable. And the violence of this gender and sexuality naming and norming in the classrooms, hallways, and even virtual spaces of schools will continue to dehumanize children, emotionally and psychologically damage lives and all too often result in physical violence.

Partial identities: Intersections of gender/sexuality with other identity discourses. A second theme considered in the analysis of the gendering of Oakwood students was that of how additional normative identity discourses impact the gender and

sexuality identity possibilities for students. In each of the cases considered for this section of the analysis racial, social-class, able bodied and religious discourses were analyzed in relation to the heteronormative discourse of gender and sexuality.

Race/ethnicity. As noted by scholars like Pascoe (2007), Blackburn (2007), Banks (Banks, 2005), Connell (1999), and Kimmel (2004) racial discourse or white supremacy and heteronormative discourses meet up on the bodies of students like Marcos and Julius as these students publically negotiate masculinity. When Mr. Clark considered these young brown boys academic careers in review, he noted his predominately white female teachers expressed fear and loathing toward these boys early on in their lives at Oakwood. “When I look at the downward track of Julius, there has been so much discipline so many referrals. He has been watched with concern by his teachers since his first experiences here in sixth grade. So that now they can say, see, I was always afraid he would do that to me (*threaten me with a weapon*), I won’t have him back in my classroom ever.”

The heavily managed and regulated masculinity of boys of color was reflected in the racial imbalance of disciplinary referrals as well as subsequent expulsion hearings. In instances where masculine domination involved public acts of verbal and physical intimidation race was inextricably associated with professional and peer interpretations of intention, intelligence, and emotional capacity. Where white males like Cameron frequently were given the opportunity to explain themselves and justify their position, students of color like Rodrigo were frequently given a written educational record as violent and disciplined for their actions.

Racial discourses were prevalent in teacher and student discussions of heteronormative masculinity, as in this study's analysis of race, sports, and status within The Eighth Grade Boys clique. Here teachers and faculty often commented on the racial diversity of popular boys and would immediately link this to athletic abilities as in this comment by the school counselor, "You'll see that a lot of the most popular boys at Oakwood are black and Latino. Of course they've been the top players on the sports teams for years now."

In considering feminine norms this study found an absence of a racial discourse within in the unquestioned whiteness of dominant femininity. The Mean Girls clique, for example, was a central group of students referenced by students, parents, and staff when considering gender and femininity at Oakwood. Yet while the remarkably clothing and hair similarities between these girls were often noted when they were discussed, the fact that they were racially white was not noted with any interest. Given the mixed race makeup of Oakwood, this exclusive whiteness was not noted or considered as a feminine beauty standard even as it stood in contrast to the racially diverse membership of The Eighth Grade Boys group. Oakwood's student gender experiences offer an array of examples of divergent norms of heteronormative masculinity and femininity as this discourse intersections with racial and ethnic discourses (Connell, 1999).

Social class. This racial heteronormative discourse of gender making was further complicated by social class discourses which center on the invisible middle class experience. As Julie Bettie (2003) noted in her study at Waretown High, "Girls performed different versions of femininity that were integrally linked to and inseparable from their *class* and racial/ethnic performances" (p. 5). Stories of gender production at

Oakwood reflected this same variation in peer and professional interpretations of student gender, both male and female, as closely related to assumptions about or knowledge of a student social class (Lareau, 1987).

The intersection of social class identity with the institutional sanctioning of heteronormative gender performances was frequently highlighted by the experiences of the affluent students in the magnet program I have called the Elite Academy. In the heteronormative gendering of dominant gender subjects, EA students like Cameron and Chad and the entire Mean Girl clique were given extra educational supports and their parents were allowed to direct the school on managing these students when they abused and violated their peers. In contrast, perceived or known lower income youth like Jackson, Marcos, Alex who enacted masculine dominance through heterosexist or homophobic acts were investigated, interrogated, and discipline was assigned prior to even contacting parents. As Julie Bettie noted in the above quote, when social class discourses entered into these moments of heteronormative gender production and when racial discourse ended is impossible to calculate.

I could not definitively say which discourses were most related to the fact that Alex was expelled from Oakwood after chasing and threatening Logan. But the case offers a glimpse into how heteronormativity, social class and race operated in relation to discipline at Oakwood. Both boys were racial minorities, but where Alex came from a working class household, Logan came from affluence and white collar parenting and a family heavily involved in the schooling of their son. In considering the boys fight it was clear to the faculty that both boys asserted a masculine power to physically dominate the other, both were claimed to have employed homophobia to emasculate the other, and

there was a history of aggression and problem behavior on the part of both students. Yet in the end the administration documented Alex as violent and a danger to his peers and had him removed while Logan was handed off to his father for parental supervision and the school kept no record of his heteronormative interactions.

Conversely in considering how social class is to be related to heteronormative Othering of non-normative youth, this study does not suggest to unlock a definitive understanding of diverse gender possibilities at Oakwood. It is not possible to separate a student like Elizabeth's "skaterboy" identity as a lower status working class youth identity from what was seen by the faculty as a non-normative gender performance. In contrast to Elizabeth, EA students Sandra and Caleb were members of an upper class community which at times offered some language and conception of sexual minorities. The short lived Gay Straight Alliance was founded by members of the EA and the vast majority of students participating in the GSA were students from the EA. Thus this community had an expanded discourse to interpret gender and sexuality in which Caleb could announce himself as gay and Sandra could identify as bisexual.

In contrast Elizabeth was structurally segregated into the "regular" educational track peopled with the vast majority of lower class students and sought identity language through her re-crafted skater discourse. I would then suggest that social class did play into how each of these three youth performed or interpreted their gender and sexuality, offering Sandra and Caleb a more concrete language for themselves than Elizabeth possessed from within her working class experiences. Yet as each student's personal narrative revealed, social class did not perceivably protect Sandra, Caleb, or Elizabeth from the violence of sexual and gender Othering at Oakwood.

What is clear is that at Oakwood social class sanctioned an array of abusive heteronormative performances on the part of the perceived elite and penalized those same performances on the part of the lower class. Yet when lower class performances of heteronormative violence were penalized, they were not specifically named, professionally discussed, or documented for the educational record. And so it could be suggested that these actions against lower class students were as much sanctions based upon their class status as they were sanctions based upon an institutional intolerance for homophobic or heterosexist harassment.

Able bodies. The embodiment of gender through both an education system with a feminized beauty discourse (Lalik & Oliver, 2005) as well as a masculine athletic discourse (Davison, 2000) presumed a particular gendered body norm (Shuttleworth, 2007). The lack of a discourse of sexuality and gender for students outside the able bodied norm could be seen most clearly in the moments of sexual harassment of Noah, the boy with Asperger's Syndrome.

Able bodied discourses remained at the center of hegemonic masculinity throughout this study and sports were frequently used as a proxy for heteronormative masculine power. In the moments when Cameron threatened to physically attack Riley, a classmate rumored to be gay, the link between athletic status, masculinity and violence was made clear (Davison, 2000). Even as any awareness of the ablest discourse remained deeply buried beneath any public discussions at Oakwood, the constant privileging of male athleticism could be seen in public discourses about teams, players, and start of each sport season (Messner, 2002c).

Yet with this ableism and tolerance for masculine physical domination couched as supporting male interests, “football keeps those boys in school” there was no open professional dialogue about physical domination and intimidation among boys based upon body size, type, or ability (Messner, 2002b). Thus, when Mr. Martin questioned eighth grade boys Eli, Ricky, and Ryan about threatening Jessie and Dillon, two sixth grade boys half their size, Eli responded, “They should know better than to think we were going to hurt them.” This statement was not negated by Mr. Martin as a ridiculous given the general environment of masculine competition and domination based upon size and strength. Mr. Martin did not have the discourse to respond to Eli because there was no critical educational discourse about heteronormativity and embodiment that had captured and labeled the physical violence embedded within the ablest masculinity of the sports world at Oakwood.

By contrast feminine embodiment, which also presumed able bodies, functioned within a beauty discourse which bordered upon starvation (Paechter, 1998). The most telling moment of this discourse within this study was when after weeks of observing The Mean Girls non-eating public ritual I asked a variety of faculty and students about this behavior. While nearly any random student could tell me about the dieting habits and uniform thinness and of Oakwood’s most popular girls, faculty reported being unaware of this same behavior. And while students could quickly tell me “muffin top” was a cruel nickname for a girl, “who wasn’t even fat” the faculty did not know the term, and did not comprehend it’s gendering power when informed about its use. Once again there was a void of educational discourse about ongoing heteronormative embodiment performance which was clearly unhealthy and dangerous to the students of Oakwood.

Clearly I have only skimmed the surface of how discourses of ableism and embodiment intersect with heteronormative gendering in the lives of adolescents. This study included only one case illustrating the erasure of gender and sexuality of students with disabilities (Shuttleworth, 2007). Yet there were multiple examples of violently overpowering and managing the physical embodiment of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity in everything from attacking smaller and less athletic or able bodied males to the body weight and breast incidents directed at female embodiment of gender. Throughout discourses deeply impact the gender experiences of all children (Fine, 2002; Lalik & Oliver, 2005; Savran, 1998).

Religion. Finally religious identity discourses (Blumenfeld, 2009) regularly intersected with heteronormative performances of gender. Here students and families frequently laid claim to presumed heterosexual religious identities with proclaimed moral superiority to sexual minority students. These intersections of religious discourse and heteronormativity relied upon a patriarchal religious heritage which conflates gender performances with sexuality.

Religious discourse associated with the sexual Othering of youth arose repeatedly in everything from a student like Caleb announcing that his “Christian” stepfather would beat him and disown him if he discovered that Caleb was gay to Mrs. Stewart explaining that as a Christian her son Cameron could not be expected to sit by someone they believed to be gay. Mr. Elm asserted a religious discourse of identity when explaining that calling his son Logan a “homosexual” was intolerable because of “who we are as a Christian family.” At all points of manifestation the religious discourse operated to shore

up the heteronormative Othering of gender difference or perceived sexual orientation difference (Lugg, 2003, 2004).

Yet as noted earlier in the analysis, both teachers and administrators remained relatively silent to the use of religious discourse to dehumanize students at Oakwood. While a teacher like Mrs. Fleming expressed what historically has been suggested to be religious tolerance on the part of schools when she explained, “I mean I don’t agree with them but I am not going to start questioning people’s religious beliefs and values.” Yet as Blumenthal and others have noted religious discourse has never been even handed within the U.S. public education system. A particular discourse of Christian Nationalism has historically and currently continues to remain at the center of public school education institutions in relation to values and morality.

On each occasion this religious discourse of identity intersected with notions of normative gender and sexuality to silence any humanist position regarding non-normative youth. At Oakwood the religious discourse all too frequently acted to shore up violence done to sexual and gender minority youth. Thus in cases where the heteronormative gendering at Oakwood resulted in visible and measurable harm to those outside of the norms, religious discourses were used to justify this harm. Actions which would otherwise have been interpreted as wounding and morally wrong were recovered through a religious discourse which silenced claims of human rights for LGBTQ and non-normative youth.

The heteronormative gendering of Oakwood youth and this processes intersection with other identity discourses went forward uninterrupted. Race, social class, able body, and religious discourses all intersected with and shored up the heteronormative discourse

at Oakwood partially due to the fact that the faculty of Oakwood remained poorly educated and thus poor educators with regard to social inequality within the United States and the inequality embedded within all of these social discourses of identity.

Professional investment in heteronormativity. As was noted in the previous section, the professional community at Oakwood lacked a substantial critical awareness of a variety of identity discourses in relation to the material experiences of inequality among the diverse students at Oakwood.

The faculty members were little versed in racial discourse or in the racial imbalance of experiences and opportunities for youth in U.S. public schools (Bettie, 2003). The use of social class discourses which privilege middle class identities were pervasive among the faculty who were themselves the products and purveyors of middle class system of cultural capital (Lareau, 2003). The faculty operated from within ableist educational discourse which institutionally marginalize and limit the lives of students with learning and physical disabilities while privileging and rewarding physical and mental domination over peers (Shuttleworth, 2007). And a professional silence surrounded the discourse of religious morality which centered on the beliefs and values of a particular Christian Nationalist experience (Blumenfeld, 2009). In all of these discourses of social identity the faculty were notably inarticulate and ill informed on the material and institutional power embedded within the presumed central subject space of each discourse.

And in returning to the central analytic tool of this study, heteronormativity, each vignette in Chapter III as well as in all of the remaining cases within this study highlights moments of ignorance on the part of the Oakwood faculty with regard to gender

oppression, gender domination, sexual orientation oppression, and sexual orientation domination (Blount, 1996; Epstein & Johnson, 1998). To put it plainly, the teachers of Oakwood are not adequately prepared to interpret let alone to critically address heteronormative incidents at Oakwood. And the teacher education system as well as the sociopolitical systems of our society, which prepare and inform future teachers embrace patriarchal norms (Vavrus, 2009) which gravely limit the development of any extensive gender or sexuality educational discourse.

As Michael Vavrus (2009) suggested in his work on a critical pedagogy of teacher education regarding heteronormativity:

The result of *this*⁴⁴ patriarchal discourse for future teachers and their students is a normative teacher education that excludes meaningful sexuality and gender education from its curriculum. Teachers are apt to report a lack of preparation to engage in such topics with their students. (p. 384)

And this lack of preparation, along with a lack of a fundamental professional knowledge of gender in relation to power in the United States in general or U.S. schools (Sadker & Sadker, 1995) in particular all contribute to Oakwood teachers inability to identify and address heteronormativity.

When considering all of the silences documented here by teachers like Mrs. Fleming, Mrs. Schmeting, Ms. Murphy, Mr. Reed, and Mrs. Price, I have a particularly vivid memory of Mrs. Fleming's exasperation as she said to me, "I just didn't know what to say so I didn't say anything." She as a professional educator responded with silence to Cameron's statement that he planned to physically assault Riley on the football field

⁴⁴ The word "this" is in reference to Vavrus earlier argument that public school teachers across the United States are overwhelmingly silent with regard to issues related to students' gender and sexuality. As he explains, "Public school teachers daily enact curricula that tend to sublimate students' sexuality and gender identification concerns to school hallways, Internet chat rooms, or dreaded and embarrassed silences" (p. 383).

because he thought Riley was gay. This same silence served Mrs. Price who would blink past the shouts of “Muffin top” during her lessons even after I discussed with her the history of the term and the purpose of its use in her classroom. She quite simply didn’t know what to say, and thus pretended heteronormative events were not happening and moved on with her lessons.

And even self proclaimed social justice educators like Ms. Lopez and Mr. Martin struggled to identify and determine appropriate educational responses to moments of sexist or gendered harassment within Oakwood. As in the pick-pocketing case in which Tori was groped by Drew in Ms. Lopez’s classroom and then forced by both Mr. Martin and Ms. Lopez to justify her response and thus experienced further gender and sexuality marginalization and shaming.

The punishment of Tori for lashing out and cursing reveal Mr. Martin’s professional desire to mete out “justice” which in this instance came from the educational discourse of “zero tolerance.” As discussed in Chapter III, this contemporary zero tolerance educational discourse has been developed devoid a cultural context and thus disproportionately penalizes those on the subordinate side of nearly all identity discourses (Stein, 2003). When considering the events between Drew and Tori, Mr. Martin was more interested in discrete acts than in the context of those acts and thus did not incorporate any meaningful discourse of gender and sexuality inequality into his response. He simply determined it was necessary to punish both Tori and Drew equally for breaking school rules.

An educational discourse that recognized the power imbalance within these public identities may have resulted in different outcomes for many of the students at Oakwood.

An educational discourse that could articulate this power imbalance could have offered the faculty complex responses to parent social class and religious assertions of their child's right to not be sanctioned by the school staff for destructive actions. However lacking a critical discourse relate to power and identity, faculty actions and responses frequently reproduced the power imbalance by privileging the experiences of dominant groups and penalizing the experiences of marginalized groups (Blount & Anahita, 2004; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Epstein et al., 2003a; Lugg, 2003; Thorne, 2004).

Professional lack of skills to identify or address heteronormative violence. As the professional educational discourse was very limited with regard to the articulation of social power, it was also greatly limited in identifying moments of violence. As noted above, the discourse of student management at Oakwood heavily relied upon the national educational discourses related to bullying and zero tolerance policies (Stein, 2003). Both the professional educational discourses of bullying and that of zero tolerance policies have been tightly focused on discrete behaviors without regard for social context.

Thus, terms like sexual harassment or racial harassment are not used to label particular forms of intimidation or harassment that are associated with this element of a child's identity and instead the term bullying is commonly used for this form of peer to peer abuse. Students who were interrogated about abusive interactions with peers and asked to explain what rule they had broken were consistently unable to respond to this question. Was it respect? Responsibility? Students did not have a language of gender and sexuality rights to assert or to acknowledge even though the student handbook explicitly identified sexual and gendered harassment as code of conduct violations.

Teachers also lacked a language or skill set to identify particular actions as heteronormative violence, in fact even terms like homophobia or sexism were seldom used to categorize actions which were explicitly directed toward the gender or sexuality of the target student (Meyer, 2009; Stein, 2002). When Mr. Clark and other staff members repeatedly asked me to define what I might consider homophobia and I turned this question back around asking what they felt constituted homophobia.

For example in the case in which Timothy used YouTube as a social media to portray Bobby as gay, I asked Mr. Clark if he considered this event homophobic. He responded, “Well, everybody knows Bobby isn’t gay so it was really just about popularity in that situation.” This professional gender and sexuality discourse suggested that heteronormative gendering or what the handbook labeled “harassment based on sexual orientation or gender identity” was only problematic if the target was known to be gay. And at Oakwood as in schools across the United States, no child was presumed to be gay (Epstein et al., 2003a). Thus, there was rarely a professional occasion to label and address an act as heteronormative violence.

Instead explicit moments of homophobia like the forging of gay love notes and the posting of YouTube coming out videos were generalized as bullying, brought to parent meetings as bullying problems. And explicit moments of misogynistic harassment like the MySpace page attacking Sophie were called “cyber bullying” and again brought to the professionals and parents of the community as discussions that were scrubbed clean of a great deal of the sex, gender and power discourses embedded in the attacks and counter attacks.

And less explicit and sometimes coded moments like the drawings of muffins on the dry board, the classroom nicknaming of a girl Trevor, the breast pocket gum theft of Tori, the tackling of Kendrick during class, and the creek assault on Jessie and Dillon were not identified by faculty as heteronormative or related to gender and sexuality whatsoever. And as such the gender and sexuality issues of power and domination imbedded within these events were not discussed or addressed in relation to either the victims or the perpetrators of this normative violence.

Instead the violent gendering which privileged masculine power over feminine or heterosexuality over ambiguous or queer sexualities operated in these educational moments uninterrupted. Students were left to presume that it was normal and natural for a group of boys to harass a female peer about her body weight, that it was unacceptable for a girl to slap a boy who had his hand against her breast, and so forth. Whether the professional silence was ignorance of these heteronormative acts, ignorance of an appropriate response, or an explicit support for the heteronormative domination the effect was support for Heteronormativity.

Professional failure to articulate a democratic gender standard or to maintain a record to address gender and sexual harassment. Finally, in considering the heteronormative gendering of students at Oakwood, the cases in this study point to a professional failure to articulate a democratic standard of human rights for all students across the range of genders and sexualities. A distressing moment arose for me as a researcher when I began to understand that the targets of heteronormativity at Oakwood had come to accept that they had fewer educational rights than their peers.

The day Elizabeth explained to me that there was no point in reporting all the harassment directed at her, I initially concluded that she was disappointed in the school for not protecting her. But she went on to explain to me that,

This school is way better than my last school. And really it's just the way I am and nobody can do much about that. I just look like a guy. No, Oakwood isn't a bad school just because of this stuff (*ongoing sexist and homophobic harassment toward her*). The teachers do a good job, and you just can't help that some students don't like the way I am.

Elizabeth couldn't see herself as having the same gender rights as her peers, and unsurprisingly neither could a student like Olivia who was stunned that anyone would question her right to post a series of sexist critiques of Sophia on MySpace. The student of Oakwood consistently presumed that certain gender performance and performances of heterosexuality would be give preference by the faculty at Oakwood. And that other gender and sexuality performance might be tolerated, but were certainly not entitled to the same treatment. And Oakwood's recent history of the rise and fall of a school Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) as discussed in the cases of Sandra and Caleb was a strong indication that the teachers also presumed an inequality among students based upon gender identity and sexuality. As more than one teacher explained to me, "those kids" were asking too much of their peers by being out at Oakwood.

And in the face of this marginalization, there was no record for faculty or students of Oakwood to reach to in order to counter the claim that there was "no homophobia at Oakwood." For disciplinary referrals did not track the discourse behind bullying and harassment incidents. And the administration and teachers rarely discussed student incidents which were primarily addressed at the administrative level. Thus heteronormativity could be at the center of an ongoing conflict like that of Elizabeth, it

may then be unearthed during an investigation by Mr. Martin, this would then be recorded nowhere, and would finally not be discussed with the faculty. There was no way to accrue any institutional knowledge of the wealth of incidents related to sexist gender norms and sexual orientation biases.

Therefore when a student like Julius expressed violent homophobic impulses and wielded a knife at the neck of Peter, no one asked if Julius had been using anti-gay slurs, no one was aware of his history of violence toward an array of smaller and less masculine boys, and no one suggested it was important for the faculty to begin to consider how gender and sexuality were operating at Oakwood. Instead the case became one of “zero tolerance” Julius affluent mother was called in to decide what to do with him, and he was released to her supervision. Even as the school counselor explained with little irony, “Someone will take his place any day now. I expect Cameron is already taking on the role as king.”

Having considered the gendering of students at Oakwood in Chapter III, I went on in this study to analyze another series of events that could highlight the erasure and silencing which are fundamental to any normative discourse.

Silence and Erasure of Heteronormative Gender (Re)Production

Invisible Lives and Incoherent Experiences

My research at Oakwood was deeply informed by the work of Eric Rofes (2004) among a great number other educational theorists concerned with the lives of LGBTQ youth. In Rofes essay *Martyr-Target-Victim*, he critiqued the (re)production of a constrained narrative of LGBTQ lives. He then argued for expanding LGBTQ

educational studies beyond narratives of persecution and suffering among queer youth. He was concerned with these studies reifying this victim position of the queer youth and argued for affirmative images and narratives of the queer experience. Having read a great deal of literature regarding LGBTQ youth I too felt that reproducing a limited narrative of the queer youth (Rasmussen, 2006) was troubling. And throughout my time at Oakwood the idea of presenting the school's queer youth as victims has persistently gnawed upon my thoughts as I analyzed my data on heteronormativity and began drawing my conclusions.

As a result of this concern, I frequently found myself during observations Oakwood and in subsequent analysis placing the schools queer youth in negative space artistically speaking. During my research I pictured my study like the work of art work where the queer subject was primarily a silhouette or outline and all of the detailed images were instead of the room surrounding and encompassing these youth. I sought to look around the targets of heteronormativity and document the world that touched and attempted to define their edges. I tried to focus my analytic lens on the school as a space and context in which heteronormativity takes place without being drawn into the individual stories of the targets, martyrs, and victims of this form of discursive violence⁴⁵. In effect, in this research I sometimes willfully erased the personal lives of marginalized youth in an attempt to instead tell this as a story of marginalization.

And yet, the stories of these children and their individual experiences of harassment, violence, and dehumanizing heteronormative discourses (Kosciw et al.,

⁴⁵ It is important here to once again affirm with clarity the statement that LGBTQ youth are empirically nearly uniformly the targets and victims of heteronormativity. GLSEN's most recent school safety report finds that 9 of 10 LGBTQ youth report being verbally harassed at school on a regular basis (Kosciw, Greytak et al., 2010).

2010) quite simply refused to disappear from my conscience. Even as I pushed back and attempted to know more and more about the perpetrators of heteronormative aggression, the targets resistant, resilient, and fully human lives were constantly materializing in the data and in my conscience.

Ironically, these same students and their abusive experiences of heteronormative gendering, silencing, and erasure were generally scarcely if at all visible to the community at Oakwood. The silencing and erasure of these lives and experiences then became the focus of the fourth chapter of analysis for this study. How could it be that what I had to intentionally will myself to look past, the repeated and abusive victimization of particular non-normative students, was so seldom seen or accounted for by the education professionals at Oakwood? What made the social violence of heteronormativity and the public assaults on students like Kendrick, Elizabeth, Rebecca, Tori, and others imperceptible to the faculty at Oakwood? What made the verbal abuse, physical hostility, and peer alienation of “out” students like Sandra and Caleb undetectable to the faculty of Oakwood? I was invited to report on my research at a staff meeting in which one exasperated teacher said in frustration; “I don’t even know what I’m not seeing. I mean I really want to do something, but I don’t even know what I’m looking for here!”

Within the analysis of the silencing and erasure of heteronormativity at Oakwood I offered five key themes to consider in naturalizing the gender and sexuality domination inherent within a male/female gender binary and a heterosexual/homosexual binary. In this final chapter of vignettes I considered five more cases of Heteronormativity. Whereas in Chapter III I focused on the gendering of youth within the vignettes

presented, in Chapter IV I turned my focus to the silencing and erasure of experiences of gender and sexuality that were outside of the norm at Oakwood. To quickly recap these cases, Chapter IV brought us the following stories: the story of Tori's breast being groped by a gum thief; the story of the two sixth grade boys who were physically threatened after they saw a bigger boy peeing in a ditch; the story of Cameron who refused to *sit by a fag*; and Logan who was *not no homosexual*; and finally Mr. Wilson who worried, *Do I look gay to you?*

From these stories I considered the following themes: illegible lives and experiences of Othering; the missing discourse at Oakwood regarding sexuality and gender in relation to power and oppression; the silence of the targets of Heteronormativity; and gap in educational discourses with regard to gender and sexuality; and the lack of a structural means to track and historicize heteronormativity. Not surprisingly these themes run parallel to those regarding the heteronormative gendering of students at Oakwood. I will here simply briefly touch on how these cases illustrate the silencing and erasure of normative violence by recalling highlights from some of the cases from Chapter IV.

Illegible lives and experiences. Each case within this section of the analysis offers us a subject whose experiences of Heteronormativity remained for the most part unseen by the faculty at Oakwood. Everyone from Tori the physically developed girl (Summers-Effler, 2004) who reacted to a boy touching her breast with a slap to Mr. Wilson who worried that students would now think he was if he advocated for gays (Rofes, 2002) experienced and in some cases enacted the violence of heteronormativity. Yet all of the heteronormative events which took place throughout this chapter were

either silenced or remained invisible to the staff at Oakwood (Epstein et al., 2003b). I have argued here that due to the limited educational discourse of gender and sexuality at Oakwood and throughout U.S. public education experiences of heteronormativity are simply discursively illegible. By this I mean to suggest that there are very limited concepts and language available through which educators may interpret and document heteronormative events taking place at school. Non-normative lives and experiences are quite simply illegible to educators.

For example, although there is a substantial amount of contemporary educational research regarding ongoing homophobic bullying and harassment which is pervasive in schools (Kosciw & Diaz, 2006; 2008; 2010) there is also a well documented void in teacher education programs with regard to this same phenomena (Birden, 2005; Epstein et al., 2003a; Rofes, 2005). Therefore, even as Mrs. Fleming could on some level recognize that Cameron's homophobic threats toward Riley were problematic she was yet unable to name them as homophobic bullying and address them as unacceptable behavior within the school context. In fact, Mrs. Fleming did not recognize a myriad of hostile interactions within her classroom as heteronormative or homophobic and instead focused on establishing the heterosexuality of Riley.

Mrs. Riley, like Mr. Martin, Mr. Clark and others on staff premised the notion of any heteronormative violence at Oakwood upon the presence of a known homosexual youth. And given an educational context in which all children were heterosexual (Birden, 2005) it thus became discursively impossible to identify a myriad of interactions as heteronormative or homophobic. Ironically in each of these cases explicit heteronormative discourses were offered by students to justify behaviors. For example

Logan claimed that Alex had called him a homosexual in the past, Cameron stated that he would not sit by a *fag*, and Eli, Ryan, and Ricky tossed a chain of homophobic slurs toward Jessie and Dillon. Yet in all of these instances the faculty failed to interpret this as an instance of discursive domination and harassment and instead each of these incidents was labeled a fight and treated as a mutual disagreement.

This shift of focus away from the discursive presence of domination and subjugation toward an individualistic narrative of dispute and interpersonal disagreement operated to erase the ongoing pattern of heteronormative domination and violence at Oakwood. By focusing explicitly on why Alex didn't like Logan and on why Logan was such an annoying person, the staff avoided a discussion about the rumors that Alex was bi-sexual, the question of why Alex's past complaints about Logan had been ignored, the question how to address Logan if he was in fact flirting with Alex and so forth.

Avoiding any educational discourse that might offer a normative possibility of queer youth by keeping LGBTQ youth in the margins (Rasmussen, 2004) left the lives of queer youth illegible to the Oakwood faculty. And lacking an educational discourse that reflected a critical awareness of gender and sexuality as disputed fields of identity (Paechter, 1998) the faculty at Oakwood was unable to interpret interpersonal conflicts through a sex and gender lens that could have informed them about the operation of heteronormativity at Oakwood.

A missing discourse on sexuality, gender and power and oppression. In *Keeping Gender on the Blackboard* (Hoffman, Hidalgo, & Siber, 2000), the editors present overwhelming evidence that, “With very few exceptions, gender has been out of radar range in primary and secondary school teaching, and remains so today” (p. 6). And

with gender and the corrosive educational effects of a patriarchal discourse (AAUW, 2002; Lipson, 2001) given so little emphasis within the educational community today, along with the fact that the professional field of education is highly gendered and heteronormative (Blount, 1996; Blount & Anahita, 2004) it should come as no surprise that there is also a highly constrained heteronormative educational discourse of gender and sexuality with regard to students (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Epstein, O'Flynn, & Telford, 2003b). It is safe to say that any wide spread educational discourse regarding gender, sexuality, power and oppression has been relegated to the back burner for the present time (Paechter, 1998).

And where there is a limited professional discourse regarding instances of interpersonal violence related to normative gender and sexuality, Oakwood like many schools in the U.S. does offer a professional discourse to address power and oppression as well as a discourse to address violence. In accounting for peer power and oppression related to gender and sexuality the most prevalent discourse within contemporary education is the *bully discourse*. And when considering interpersonal school violence and school safety, the last two decades have seen a fine tuning of a discourse of *zero tolerance*.

The vignettes throughout this study indicate that these two discourses, the *bully discourse* and the *zero tolerance discourse*, were the closest approximation to any professional discussion of gender and sexuality oppression at Oakwood. In the introductory case of Elizabeth and Jackson, Jackson was immediately marked as a bully by the administration and by his teachers when it was revealed that he was harassing Elizabeth with regard to her gender and sexuality in all of their classes. Olivia, the

notorious Mean Girl who created a misogynistic slam page about Sophie was also labeled a bully. As were Cameron, Julius, and Rodrigo all of whom used homophobic slurs while physically intimidating and attacking classmates they believed were gay. In each of these instances the behavior was identified as bullying and where the student was disciplined, the discipline was for bullying.

Across this study, in case after case, the faculty applied an educational discourse of bullying to address homophobic and heterosexists attacks on students. Yet this bullying discourse was devoid of any critical discourse with regard to the way power and oppression were related to gender and sexuality in all of these cases. Nan Stein (2003) noted when considering bullying discourses, “sometimes egregious behaviors are framed by school personnel as bullying, when in fact they may constitute illegal sexual or gender harassment or even criminal hazing or assault” (p.790). The cases at Oakwood illustrate this very point with little to nothing being said about the heteronormative discourse which was fundamental to each of these students attacks upon his or her peers.

In the cases in which verbal and psychological attacks were coupled with physical attacks, the discourse of bullying was passed over by a discourse of zero tolerance in offering an expedited solution to the situation. The obsessive search for the knife used by Marcos and Julius in that case was centered on the length of the knife blade based upon the district’s zero tolerance policy. These boys were ultimately removed from campus strictly because of the presence of a knife on campus, yet extensive interviews with these boys’ peers revealed each had exhibited persistent verbal, mental, and physical intimidation of peers based upon gender and sexuality. However these highly public heteronormative behaviors were not documented, discussed in any depth, or addressed by

the faculty at Oakwood. Instead the focus was placed upon the presence of a knife on campus, with teachers themselves stating that they could legally not be forced to teach anyone who had brought a weapon to campus.

Again, Stein considered this disciplinary discourse with relation to sexual and gendered harassment in schools. She noted:

The development and implementation of (zero tolerance) policies within this framing of school safety tends to draw attention to the most extreme, least pervasive threat to school safety—violent crime. This construction of school safety eclipses other more pervasive aspects of school safety, including daily threats to psychological and social safety. (p. 792)

Silent and inarticulate targets of heteronormativity. One of the more unpleasant experiences I had as an observer during my year at Oakwood was in those moments in which a teacher or administrator looked shrewdly at a child who was the target of heteronormativity and shook her head proclaiming, “Why didn’t you just tell me what was going on in the first place?!” Tragically observations and interviews reveal that in fact many of these victims did tell teachers what was going on in the first place, it was only many places further down the road that they gave up on reporting heteronormative abuse to teachers and administrators.

In considering the silencing these student voices of protest or complaint, I noted in Chapter IV the danger a student like Tori faced when she became closely identified with misogynistic discourses (Summers-Effler, 2004). In that case, Tori did not initially reveal to Ms. Lopez or Mr. Martin that Drew had in fact been touching her breast when he was stealing her possessions. An in the analysis of that moment I noted that Tori’s silence has been suggested by theorists like Summers-Effler to potentially operate as both a form of resistance as well as well as a moment of interpolation into a subordinate

heteronormative subjectivity. Tori was potentially resisting the potential of being marked as the sex object of a gender binary, even as she was potentially accommodating the physical and social power of masculinity over her female body. Yet Summer-Effler notes, this resistance or accommodation is deeply rooted in the pervasive heteronormative environment in which Tori was placed. Years of experience within a heteronormative school system would leave her no reason to believe asserting her gender or sexuality rights would be heard or accepted in the moments of questioning by the two faculty members.

A later case of discursive silence on the part of Jessie and Dillon notes that the taken-for-granted educational discourse of gender perpetuated norms including the physical dominance of normative masculinity (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 2006) and a ubiquitous homophobic discourse of masculinity (Pascoe, 2007; 1999, 2001) in schools. And so when Mr. Martin expressed frustration that the boys did not “tell him in the first place” about the homophobic and gendered slurs directed at them their responses registered some surprise that this would be news to Mr. Martin in the first place. As Jessie explained, “Well sure they said that stuff, but we didn’t know that was what you were asking about when you said *inappropriate*. We thought you were talking about the sticks and who hit who and stuff like that.” Here the inarticulate boys did not initially interpret heteronormative behavior as problematic and then once they were expressly told it was problematic, they refused to say aloud any of the shaming homophobic or sexist terms they were called during the altercation. Like Tori, they did not wish to be associated with the gender and sexuality discourse which would suggest they were less than fully human.

The final case of this chapter illustrates depths of the heteronormative discursive strangle hold on voicing and affirming sexual and gender difference within the school setting. In that case, Mr. Wilson articulated a range of heterosexual accommodations he was willing to undergo to avoid being perceived as homosexual. Mr. Wilson's fundamental desire to avoid being read as queer reflects an institutional homophobia and heterosexism within the education profession (Blount & Anahita, 2004). His suggestion that as an authority figure he still planned to do a variety of things to affirm his heterosexuality offered a tragic illustration of the widespread danger of being perceived to be the Other of heterosexuality at Oakwood.

Thus the silence of the victims of heteronormative discourses could be interpreted as a resistance to be interpolated as the Other even as it could also be seen as interpolation into this subordinate space. It can be argued that this silence is also associated with a discursive void in which students do not even possess the idea that one has sexual or gendered rights regardless of their difference. It is manifest out of an abject experience of difference like that of Elizabeth who could not articulate her gender and therefore could not articulate a violation of her gender rights. And in a case like Mr. Wilson's it manifests out of institutional terror that to be marked as the other is to lose the self, to lose all social power and all credibility. Given the discursive weight of articulating difference within a heteronormative discourse, it is a wonder the silence is not uniform on the part of the targets of heteronormative marginalization.

The break in educational discourses on gender and sexuality. In reconsidering the educational discourses available on gender and sexuality, one sees a binary gender discourse of heteronormativity (Epstein et al., 2003a; Thorne, 2004), a sexual binary

heteronormative discourse of adolescent sexuality (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Epstein et al., 2003b), and a marginalizing discourse of tolerance and safety for the Others of heterosexuality (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008; Rasmussen, 2004).

These discourses of gender and sexuality intersect but quite often operate at cross purposes. And while they all on some level address gender and sexual orientation norms, none of them explicitly take into account the daily material and ideological effects of heteronormativity upon individual students or upon the student body as a whole. For example an educational gender discourse that naturalizes masculine physical aggression like the sports educational discourse (Messner, 2002c) is not called forth to offer an account when three eighth grade boys dominate and physically threaten two sixth grade boys. Nor can Mrs. Fleming see past the masculinity and sports discourse of necessary violence when Cameron suggests he will use football practice to do bodily harm Riley specifically because he thinks Riley is gay.

In addition the highly constrained patriarchal gender and sexuality discourse of abstinence only sex education (Fisher, 2009) is not interrogated when Mrs. Fleming is considering the Cameron's violent homophobic harassment of Riley. This is the same patriarchal gender identity and sexuality discourse which shored up teacher rumors that Elizabeth was passing love notes to Laura and underwrote Jackson's assertions that Elizabeth was a lesbian. Yet the constrained patriarchal sexuality educational discourse of gender identity and sexuality offers no response to Jackson's proclamation, "Maybe what we did (*harassing Elizabeth*) protected others." In fact, as could be seen in that case, the Oakwood faculty themselves were concerned with *protecting others* from Elizabeth's gender identity and the resultant perceived homosexuality.

And finally many teachers at Oakwood note with little irony that the schools Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) “went down in flames” because the students “weren’t prepared” to deal with knowledge of their gay or lesbian classmates. In this story the gaping holes in the discourse of safe spaces (Rasmussen, 2004) are exposed. Where Oakwood offered no comprehensive educational discourse about the construction gender and sexuality, the administration did temporarily offer a civil rights discourse regarding sexuality through which students could readily be marked as the Other. The establishment of a school GSA created a discourse through which students could openly express the binary opposing homosexuality be officially offered a “safe space” to congregate. Yet ultimately these same students were blamed when other student’s harassed them about their gender and sexuality differences. And the harassment was interpreted through the standard heteronormative lens regarding sexuality as inevitable and not related to the fact that the school did not educate all students about the social construction of gender and sexuality.

The lack of a structural means to track and historicize heteronormativity.

Finally the analysis of heteronormative silence and erasure also revealed that the faculty of Oakwood lacked any structural means to track and historicize heteronormativity. The vignettes of this final chapter of analysis involved four physical assaults related to gender identity and sexual orientation. Yet in each case there was no written record of the motivation for each assault, no record of the gendered and/or sexual nature of the physical aggression, no discussion among the professional staff at Oakwood regarding the gendered and sexual nature of these many incidents, and no opportunity to review any of these incident in relation to the overall heteronormative environment at Oakwood.

As far as the disciplinary records and professional disciplinary procedures at Oakwood are concerned none of the cases discussed in Chapter IV would indicate to an outside observer that the school is either experiencing or addressing homophobia and heterosexism among the student body. This pattern of heteronormative erasure through disciplinary records and practices holds true to the earlier cases of Chapter II and Chapter III as well. And as a result there is little opportunity for the faculty to accumulate a working knowledge of the hostile climate at Oakwood in relation to gender identity and sexual orientation. There is also little opportunity for the professionals to reflect on the current and past practices with regard to this issue in an effort to improve their practices.

In considering the erasure of these events from the disciplinary record at Oakwood a fundamental concern I regularly brought up to Mr. Martin is that there is no structural means to maintain a written record of the heteronormative motivation for these assaults and attacks. As you may recall Mr. Martin responded to my repeated questions about how homophobic and heterosexist violence is documented, “We just call harassment, harassment. We don’t have another name for it.” The problem with this practice of generalizing harassment and bullying is explained by Elizabeth Meyer (2009):

The main weakness in the current trend of bullying studies is that they fail to explore and acknowledge the influences of larger social forces such as sexism, homophobia, and transphobia in understanding the relationship of power and dominance in peer groups. (p. 17)

And thus the box marked harassment could include racial harassment, social class harassment, disability harassment, etc.

And in fact, none of the incidents discussed in Chapter IV were even identified in writing as harassment. Instead the final documentation, for those incidents that were

documented at all, categorized the event under any one of the following discipline behavior codes: fighting, disrespect, and weapons.

Also lacking in the disciplinary records at Oakwood was any record of the gendered and/or sexual nature of the physical aggression. Thus even though the events which initiated a police call were directly related to Jessie and Dillon being attacked as fags, sissies, and girls none of that language was put into any record regarding this incident. Similarly the fact that Drew touched Tori's breast during class was not recorded, nor was the series of homophobic claims made by Logan Elm and his father nor the homophobic assertions of Cameron and his mother. In these many cases there was no documentation kept regarding the sexist and gendered language, physical touch, and the social domination and humiliation of these many heteronormative events. Sadly, Ms. Lopez expressed disappointment in Tori for not telling her that she had been groped, yet within moments of the revelation the heterosexist act was already forgotten in a zero tolerance discourse regarding Tori's striking out at Drew. No record of this sexual assault was written, and no further discussion transpired about gender, bodies, and safety in the classroom.

What is more there was no ongoing or comprehensive discussion among the professional staff at Oakwood regarding the gendered and sexual nature of these many campus incidents. This should perhaps come as no surprise given that there was no record of incidents to be concerned about. However, given the national discourse regarding school safety and the intense local Positive Behavior System (PBS) discourse (discussed in Chapter III) regarding student behavior and discipline, the lack of a professional

discussion regarding incidents of homophobia and heterosexism stands out as a significant silence.

Finally born of the written and oral professional silence regarding the professional management of these many heteronormative incidents there was no opportunity to review any of these incidents in relation to best practices on improving the school climate (2002, 2004) or in relation to the overall heteronormative environment of U.S. public schools (2006; 2008; Kosciw et al., 2010).

So What Can Be Done?

This project of mapping of the violent (re)production of heteronormative gender and the silencing and erasure of difference paints a fairly bleak picture of life for the public school youth of today. A picture unfortunately backed up by an array of disturbing statistics with regard to queer youth (Kosciw et al., 2010).

This study also suggests that the category of “perceived homosexual” puts every single child in schools at risk for this form of violence. And the close relationship between heteronormativity and patriarchy reminds us that all girls are also at risk of gender and sexuality domination and subordination (AAUW, 2002; Lipson, 2001). In the simplest terms, no one is going to be safe until everyone is safe.

The most common question I have been asked by teacher after teacher from the moment I began my research was, “What are we supposed to do?” Here I will attempt to offer five incremental steps toward an education system which fosters gender and sexuality equity for all students. Each of these steps has been suggested by researchers before and several have already shown promising trends at reducing school violence and

improving school climate with regard to gender identity and sexual orientation. None of these steps will eradicate heteronormativity, yet each of them may help to expand and elasticize the borders of normative gender and sexual orientation in ways which are both democratic and humane.

Teacher Training and Administrative Training on Gender and Sexuality:

Improving the Knowledge Base Within Educational Discourse on Gender and Sexuality

Both teacher education and education leadership programs premise the professional ideas regarding both students and faculty upon heteronormative standards of gender and sexuality (Birden, 2005; Lugg, 2003). Teachers who are steeped in a heteronormative framework and immersed in a heteronormative profession are not likely to be skilled in interpreting or addressing normative gender or sexuality violence within their schools (Vavrus, 2009).

Restructuring professional educational training to acknowledge and address the sociocultural context of schooling would offer a critical paradigm shift in the way educators identify and address gender and sexuality issues within the school system (Kumashiro, 2002; Straut & Sapon-Shevin, 2002). Teachers and administrators must be required to study contemporary knowledge about the social construction of gender identity and sexuality as well as the inherent inequity embedded within this identity construction. With a critical educational knowledge of the arbitrary and destructive production of gender identity and sexuality in binary oppositions educators may begin to look past a rudimentary conception of heteronormative discourses as located on the bodies of queer youth.

With a more nuanced and educated analysis of the sociocultural aspects of gender identity and sexual orientation perhaps teachers and administrators would be less inclined to make statements like, “I wouldn’t call that homophobic because Billy isn’t gay.” Instead they might begin to address and educate students about the production of hostile ideas about gender identity and sexuality within the school setting.

Incorporating into the Curriculum Contemporary Knowledge and a Critical Awareness Regarding Gender Identity and Sexuality

In *Educating the Other*, Paechter (1998) lamented the past decades education profession’s drift further and further away from addressing gender inequality within our schools. It has been argued that in the decades following the civil rights era and the passage of Title IX the emphasis on gender inequality in education has lost what little social and political capital it gained during this movement (Hoffman et al., 2000). And in a professional space where theoretical concepts like “patriarchy” are contested even in the face of overwhelming material statistics regarding gender inequality, it should not be surprising that the curriculum does little to address sexual orientation or the marginalizing of sexual minorities.

In the last decade however, a budding group of curriculum theorist within the field of teacher education have begun to both theorize and implement curriculum which addresses heteronormativity from a wide range of curricular spaces (Birden, 2005; Kissen, 2002; Kumashiro, 2002; Lipkin, 2003). Whether from a multicultural framework (Killoran & Jimenez, 2007), an early childhood framework (Robinson & Diaz, 2006), a family and society framework (Turner-Vorbeck, 2008), infusion of curriculum into traditional subjects (Atkinson & DePalma, 2010), a sports and health framework (Epstein

et al., 2003b; Larsson, Fagrell, & Redelius, 2009), or a safe schools framework (Meyer, 2009) an array of curriculum are being theorized, developed and implemented to combat the violent subjugation of heteronormative discourses in schools.

This curricular work however is spotty across the United States and by no means has the practice of addressing social discourses been incorporated as a contemporary educational standard. The current study among others would suggest educators must directly teach students about the social production of gender identity and sexuality (heteronormativity), as well as the inequitable and violent outcomes of this rigid discourse (Kumashiro, 2002; Pascoe, 2007; Thorne, 2004) . Only through establishing a yet undeveloped discourse regarding gender identity and sexual orientation with their students can teachers and administrators expect to stop contributing to the (re)production of homophobic and heterosexist violence taking place in schools (Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz, 2009; Lipkin, 2003).

Institutionally Support LGBTQ Youth and Intentionally Highlight Diverse Stories of Difference with Regard to Gender and Sexuality

As I discussed earlier in this chapter, I too am concerned with the consistent (re)production of narratives in which LGBTQ youth are represented as the martyrs, targets and victims of heteronormativity (Rofes, 2004). I believe these narratives are accurate to the individuals, demand to be addressed, and illustrate incompetence upon the part of the education system. However these narratives also portray LGBTQ youth through a very limited lens of possible selves within the school context (Rasmussen, 2006). In addition the preponderance of evidence as to the “at risk” status of LGBTQ youth indicate the necessity for institutional supports for the success of these students.

Therefore as a recommendation of this study I would ask that educators consider incorporating a diverse array of narratives into the curriculum with regard to queer lives (Lipkin, 2003). Rather than introducing the conceptions of gender identity and sexual diversity only with regard to marginalization or discrimination or worse in relation to diseases like HIV, it would serve the education community better if gender identity and sexual orientation were first decoupled and then considered as aspects of every human's life.

In addition inclusive schools must recognize the pervasive presence of heteronormativity and provide leadership to this marginalized group by providing safe spaces, mentorship, and professional interventions to counter the homophobic culture and climate for students while at school (Kumashiro, 2002).

Professionally Performing and Privileging Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Diversity

Education literature reveals a history of gender and sexuality oppression within the education profession (Blount, 1996; Blount & Anahita, 2004). Educational literature also notes that environments in which there are “out” LGBT faculty members are safer spaces for gender identity and sexual orientation differences among students (Kissen & Phillips, 2002; Lipkin, 2003). Schools and systems which highlight and normalize gender identity and sexual orientation within the professional faculty are through public acts of inclusion and acceptance able to foster safer spaces for gender and sexuality difference among students. While this practice runs the risk simply establishing a “token” LGBTQ faculty member, leadership which offered meaningful and publically visible inclusive

language and practices among the faculty could go far beyond the simple token employee status.

For example, one could imagine a school community in which the lesbian teacher and her partner were openly visible as both a homosexual couple and as community leaders. This spousal visibility is not at all uncommon with regard to heterosexual faculty where it is quite commonplace for students to know the marital status and or relationship status of the majority of their heterosexual teachers. Research suggests the same visibility among sexual minority and gender identity minority staff would reduce homophobia, harassment, and bullying as well as offering a structural counter to many of the negative impacts⁴⁶ of heteronormativity on sexual minority youth (Biegel & Kuehl, 2010; Turner-Vorbeck, 2008).

Establish and Enforce Anti-Bullying Policies and Safe Schools Acts that Identify Gender and Sexuality Based Harassment

Finally a series of studies has shown that schools with anti-bullying policies or safe schools acts which identify gender identity and sexual orientation as protected from bullying and harassment are safer educational spaces for all students (Kosciw et al., 2010; Kumashiro, 2002).

A preponderance of school safety research indicates that bullying and harassment policies which specifically address identity based bullying including sexual orientation and gender identity based bullying reduce school violence and increase student perceptions of safety. Approximately a quarter of the states in the U.S. have passed anti-

⁴⁶ In their social lives queer youth encounter higher rates of sexual abuse, physical verbal and psychological harassment, familial rejection, and homelessness. On an individual level, queer youth experience, on average, higher rates of suicide, depression, substance abuse, and school drop-out status in contrast to their heterosexual peers.

bullying legislation which requires public schools provide a policy and procedure for addressing harassment related to sexual orientation or gender identity. There is also currently a bill before the U.S. Congress to identify heteronormative discourses within the context of bullying and harassment (Vavrus, 2009).

Passage of inclusive anti-bullying and harassment “safe schools” policies which include comprehensive professional training for faculty, policies and procedures for addressing harassment, and curricular expectations to address identity based harassment would inhibit the heteronormative discourse which was pervasive at Oakwood.

I have saved this final recommendation for last because it is overly optimistic to suggest that simply passing safe schools policies will reduce heteronormative domination and violence in schools. The state in which this study took place has a safe schools law which identifies sexual orientation and gender identity. And as discussed in the research analysis of earlier chapters, the district of this study also has comprehensive policies regarding the bullying related to sexual orientation and gender identity. Unfortunately, as the cases here illustrate, if the faculty are not educated with regard to heteronormative discourses, and the students are not educated in relation to their sexual and gender rights, the safe schools discourse can exist on paper only and be of little impact on the lives of youth.

Once again I wish to return to the central questions as I close on this project. Five years ago I began to consider deeply how it is that professional educators and educational policies can unwittingly perpetuate the social violence of heteronormativity even as schools attempt through policy and practice to address this very same phenomena. Over the course of this study it became clear to me that educators lack adequate knowledge of

the social constructs of gender and of sexuality and in fact rely upon a heteronormative professional training with regards to the gender and sexuality of their future students. This ignorance on the part of our educators is passed along to the student body who are not taught fundamental concepts with regard to the social construction of gender identity or sexual orientation, even as they are quite frequently intentionally taught heteronormative gender and sexuality performances.

From this morass of ignorance guised as a natural order both students and faculty fail to identify discursive violence even as the unnamable violence is brutalizing the lives of everyone within the education community. Therefore, the concluding recommendations of this study must be considered in the order in which they appear in this text. There must be reforms in teacher education programs addressing this critical competency gap in teacher knowledge of social identities and identity development for professional practices to move beyond a heteronormative frame. There must also be curricular interventions in order for youth to begin to identify and articulate heteronormative experiences in order to seek redress. Without the queering of teacher education and curriculum studies there is little hope that schools will ever be able to identify let alone interpret and reduce gendered and homophobic violence.

And yet simultaneously there must be institutionally supported systems set in place to address the current state of hostility toward the Other of heteronormativity. Students and faculty currently marginalized by the Othering of heteronormativity must be supported by the dominant community in order to expand the borders of identity and possibility within our schools. And systems must be put into place to literally capture and name heteronormativity within the amorphous category of 'harassment.' This

material archives will aid schools in moving beyond an ahistorical treatment of heteronormative incidents and practices by establishing a knowledge base regarding the contested construction of gender and sexuality.

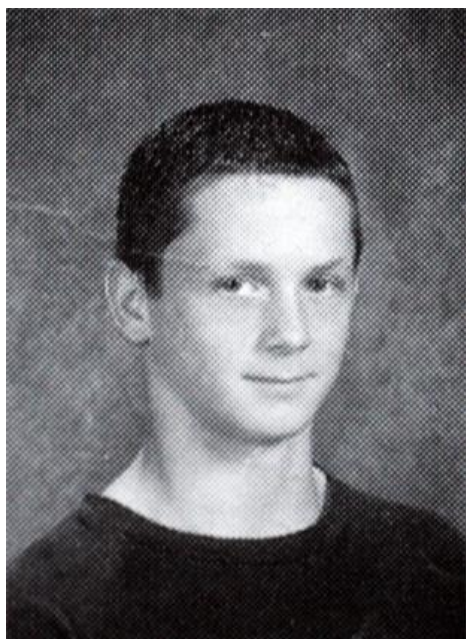
Unfortunately current professional practices in this area mirror those at Oakwood. Schools that do address heteronormativity simply create policies banning hate speech and allow marginalized students to form their own support systems. And as this study evidences, a hate speech or bullying policy is meaningless if students cannot identify the fundamental terms of heteronormative of hate. And a safe space temporarily established by the despised Other and benignly ignored by the authority of the school in fact systemically organizes further marginalization within the community. Educators must become critically informed and must act as intentional advocates in order to disrupt this social violence if we hope to one day make our schools safer for ever single gendered human being.

APPENDIX A

PHOTOS



Lawrence King



Brandon McInerney

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL - ADULT

Introduction

- The following introductory paragraph will be read and explained: Educational researchers and people who work in schools are aware of ongoing conflicts among students over issues of what it means to be a boy or a girl. These kinds of conflicts are sometimes called bullying, sometimes times called homophobia, and sometimes called sexual harassment. The conflicts can look like the teasing of a particular person who is seen as not following or fitting into locally constructed gender rules or gender “norms” – for example suggesting a boy’s hair is too long etc. Or they can look like an attack on a particular activity – as in suggesting that writing for the student paper is “so gay.” They can also look like physical aggression toward certain students or teachers, as in bumping into or grabbing a particular person on a regular basis. And they can look like the silencing or shutting out of a particular person or idea, as in we don’t want her in our group – I don’t want to be his partner etc.

It seems that these conflicts over what it means to be a boy or a girl are a constant part of kids’ experiences in school, but they seldom come to the attention of the school faculty until a major incident occurs. This interview and the study I am conducting is designed to gain a better understanding of how these conflicts go on daily and as well as what happens when these conflicts become issues of school discipline or intervention on the part of a teacher or administrator.

I am hoping to better understand how kids win, lose, or draw in battles over who will be seen as a cool “boy” or “girl,” who gets considered gay, and where the “blame” gets placed in this negotiation.

This research is not about collecting the names of students or faculty who are either the victims or perpetrators of homophobic or sexist bullying or harassment. If you wish to report such problems, I will assist you in contacting the school administrator who can take action. During this interview I will often ask you to refrain from naming names, and I will not share the direct content of this interview with the faculty of Oakwood Middle School. Again, I can help you contact an administrator to assist in addressing bullying and harassment outside of this interview process.

The questions and study are also designed to get at how adults like teachers, administrators, and parents become involved in these negotiations and conflicts. So some of my questions will be about your experiences with students and some will be about your experiences with adults in relation to this issue.

- In this conversation I hope we can discuss some of the following things:
- What is considered a “normal” boy or girl at Oakwood Middle School
- How one must act to be considered a “normal” boy or girl
- What you believe, have heard, have experienced, or have seen happen to boys who don’t “act like” boys or girls who don’t “act like” girls
- Why you feel that certain behaviors or people are targeted for gender and sexual orientation harassment

- How adults at school directly or indirectly teach girls to act like girls and boys act like boys – teach gender appropriate behaviors
- Other ways adults at school show beliefs or values about gender roles
- QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS OVERVIEW....
- Requisite description of rights of interviewee. Consent form signed if not already signed.
- Inform interviewee that researcher is a mandatory reporter in cases of child abuse.
- Brief overview of the protocol—highlight the topics covered, the possibly redundant nature of questions, and the reason for this. Encourage respondent to depart from protocol as they see fit. It is intended to start a conversation, not limit it (“I am here to listen to you; you are not here to listen to me.”) Affirm that Researcher will take responsibility for returning to various topics if there is a need to do so.
- Any questions before we start?

Please state your name and association with the school: (ex. Seventh grade English teacher)

How are you connected to Oakwood?

- How long has the connection existed/when did you start working here?

What was your professional experience in education prior to working at Oakwood?

- If you were to pick a metaphor for your life here at Oakwood what would it be?
Explain... (like a rocket at lift off, like a bird in a cage, a test-tube bubbling over.... ☺)
- Has your experience at Oakwood changed over time? For the better or worse, in your opinion?

I want to hear more about what you know, think, and feel about the culture and attitudes at the school in relation to “normal” masculine and feminine – boy/girl – behaviors. And about gay/straight “normal” gender relations.

I am going to start by asking some questions about what it means at Oakwood to be a boy or girl in general. I will follow this with some questions about how being seen as feminine or masculine --- straight or gay can affect a person’s life here at Oakwood. I will then ask about incidents or conflicts that have occurred over these terms. I will follow this with some questions about discipline and how the school handles this problem. And finally I’ll ask you how you would handle this problem if you were in charge. If you don’t have any thoughts or know anything about a particular question, just say so, and we’ll move on to the next question. If a question makes you uncomfortable or you do not wish to talk about something, just say pass and we will move on. And finally if you decide you do not want to complete the interview, just say so and we will stop the process.

Feminine Girls/Masculine Boys and the straight/gay connection

To get a sense of the topic I'd like to ask you for your opinions and observations about what it means to be masculine or feminine and how that might relate to whether a person is thought to be gay or straight.

- I'd like you to think of two specific girls - one who you might consider the symbol for feminine and one who does not fit feminine norms. These can be real people or people from fiction. Without naming names (girl A and girl B), would you take a few minutes to describe each of them and explain what makes one a normal or typical girl and the other exceptional.
- (my examples as a potential starter - Girl A: Gabriella Girl B: Lisa Simpson)
 - What if anything about their masculine/feminine behavior might be associated with being straight /or/gay? Thoughts...
- Think of two specific boys - one who is the symbol for a masculine boy and one who does not fit masculine norms. These can be real people or people from fiction. Without naming names (boy A and boy B), would you take a few minutes to describe each of them and explain what makes one a normal or typical boy and the other exceptional.

(my examples - Boy A: Troy Boy B: Neville Longbottom)
 - What if anything about their masculine/feminine behavior might be associate with being straight /or/gay? Thoughts...
- Think of two specific teachers, coach, etc. One who is the epitome of "normal" adult and one who does not fit gender/sexual orientation norms for adults. These

can be real people or people from fiction. Without naming names, would you take a few minutes to describe each of them and explain what makes one a normal person and the other exceptional.

- Type A: Incredible Hulk Type B: Dr. Bruce Banner
- Mrs. Weasley Professor McGonnigol
 - Is there anything about their masculine/feminine behavior that people associate with being straight/or/gay? Thoughts...
- Describe yourself based on the following statement – “in comparison to other women (men) at Oakwood I am really ...
- Where would you put yourself in terms of meeting the social ideal for women /or/ men
 - Picking up on interviewees responses ask which items he/she thinks of as “natural” as in just part of my nature and which he/she considers “choices’
 - How do family, religious, or other personal values help you think about or decide what it means for you to be a “normal” man/woman?

Feminine/Masculine Gay/Straight language used in other contexts

The next few questions focus on the use of words associated with masculinity or femininity and sexuality within other contexts. These words sometimes come up in relation to activities that are really like or dislike. They sometimes come up in relation to a person acting in what is seen as a gender opposite manner, so this is when a boy is seen as acting like a girl or vice versa. And they sometimes come up in relation to some object that is strongly liked or disliked.

- Can you think of some times when words that are generally used to define boy or male characteristics are used for describing people, actions, or activities? Tell me about this...

ex. dude, one of the guys, buff, has balls, pimping, other power strength words

- Can you think of some times when words that are generally used to define girl or female characteristics are used for describing people, actions, or activities? Tell me about this...

ex. such a girl, like a girl, bitch, ho and other “sleazy” words..., beauty words...

- Can you think of some times when words that are generally used to define gay or homosexual characteristics are used for describing people, actions, or activities? Tell me about this...

ex. sissy, wimpy, gay, queer, fag

Experiences with gender or sexual orientation conflicts within the school setting

The next question focus on peer conflicts sometimes called harassment or bullying that are associated with gender or sexual orientation.

- I am interested in gaining a better understanding the types of conflicts that come about related to issues of masculinity, femininity, and perceived sexual orientation (‘gayness’). I would like you to tell me about your experience of conflicts among

kids or harassment directed at a particular kid that is related to his/her not acting like a “normal” boy/girl. And can you talk about teasing or a conflict when his or her actions are perceived as being gay. You don’t need to name any names while sharing this story.

- You may tell this as a personal story, or simply something you witnessed, or a story you heard about. Please share the story as you remember it... (you don’t need to include names in the who you can just describe the people involved) what, where, when, why, how

Teacher, authority and gender harassment and sexual orientation harassment

- I would like to gain a better understanding the ways teachers and other adults at school are involved in the ways kids talk, tease, and harass each other about masculinity, femininity, and perceived sexual orientation (“gayness” for youth interviews).
- I would like to hear about both the things adults say or do when boys and girls are being targeted as not masculine or feminine enough, and the occasions where they are silently present during tense or harassing moments. I am interested in hearing about adults you agree with and those you do not agree with.
 - If you are having a hard time understanding what I am talking about for this part of the interview – think back to the last time you heard a student (or teacher/adult) call another student gay, fag, or tell a boy he was acting like a girl or vice versa -- in a classroom or within hearing distance of a teacher... I would like to learn more about what the teacher said, did, etc.

- Without naming names can you tell me about a teacher or adult at Oakwood who participates in gendered or homophobic teasing? What, when, where, how, why?

- In what other ways do teachers/adults address unexpected - “abnormal” gender behavior (ex. boys wearing nail polish or make up, girls “ganging up” and intimidating boys...)

- Without naming names, can you tell me about a teacher/adult who enforces discipline for gendered or sexual harassment among students? What is done, where, when, how, why?

- Without naming names, are there any teachers or adults who are known for expressing “different” gender or sexual orientation attitudes? Does this change the way students interact around those teachers?

- *In thinking about the principal and assistant principal as the “police” of school rules can you tell me what your sense is of how they address gendered harassment or homophobic harassment? Can you think of any example or reason why you think of them in this way? Does this change the way students interact around those them?*

Rules & Discipline for gender harassment or sexual orientation bullying

- In this final portion of the interview I would like to ask you about how school rules and discipline are related to the situation we have been talking about. I am interested in knowing what the school rules are in relation to gendered and homophobic harassment. I am interested in what the consequences are for harassing students because they aren't acting male/female enough or straight enough. Along with learning about what the consequences are for the person who was the victim of harassment.
- Can you tell me what if any school rules apply to this kind of conflict between students? How did you learn about these rules?
 - Can you tell me who is supposed to enforce these school rules and how they are informed about this type of conflict?
 - If the conflict is between a student and a teacher/adult then who if anyone addresses the conflict?
- In your experience... when there is a conflict about gender or sexual orientation... how do teachers find out about it?
 - What difference does it make who told/"ratted" on the situation?
 - Does anyone "get in trouble" with the school?
 - What kind of trouble?
 - Do you think that is fair – why/why not?
 - Do you think that makes the school a better place to be – why/why not?
 - How do "most kids" feel about the conflict afterwards?
 - Who do they side with and why?

- How do “most faculty” feel about the conflict afterwards?
- Who do they side with and why?
- In general do you think this kind of conflict is handled right or wrong at Oakwood and why?
- In your opinion, how do any kind of harassment or bullying rules about gender and sexual orientation affect day-to-day student behavior?
- In your opinion, how does any kind of public punishment for this kind of harassment affect day-to-day student behavior?
- Is there less gender and sexual orientation teasing around certain teachers -- more around certain teachers? What do you attribute this to?
- When would you intervene when someone was harassing a targeted boy or girl? Why?

Closer

We are coming to the end of the interview... I really want to thank you for your thoughtful responses. You have given me a great deal to work with and your insights will be very helpful in attempts to better address student needs at Oakwood. Before we end this interview I'd like to just ask you a few general questions about your insights on this topic.

- If you ran the school... what would you do differently than now, what would you keep the same?
- If you ran the classroom, gym, hallways, school - what would you do to stop gendered and homophobic harassment and bullying?

- ❑ What would be your advice to a new teacher coming to Oakwood with regard to harassment, bullying, and homophobia?
- ❑ What would be your advice be to the present or to a new administrator at Oakwood?
- ❑ What are your greatest fears and hopes for the students at Oakwood in relation to this topic?
- ❑ What do you think will be different with regard to this topic 10 years from now?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL - YOUTH

Introduction

- The following introductory paragraph will be read and explained: Educational researchers and people who work in schools are aware of ongoing conflicts among students over issues of what it means within a community to be a boy or a girl. These kinds of conflicts are sometimes called bullying, sometimes times called homophobia, and sometimes called sexual harassment. The conflicts can look like the teasing of a particular person who is seen as not following or fitting into gender rules or norms – as in his hair is too long etc. Or they can look like an attack on a particular activity – as in writing for the student paper is “so gay.” They can also look like physical aggression toward certain students or teachers, as in bumping into or grabbing a particular person on a regular basis. And they can look like the silencing or shutting out of a particular person or idea, as in “we don’t want her in our group” – “I don’t want to be his partner” etc.
- It seems that these conflicts over what it means to be a boy or a girl are a constant part of kids’ experiences in school, but they seldom come to the attention of the school faculty until a major incident occurs. This interview and the study I am conducting is designed to gain a better understanding of how these conflicts go on daily and as well as what happens when these conflicts become issues of school discipline or intervention on the part of a teacher or administrator.

- I am hoping to better understand how kids win, lose, or draw in battles over who will be seen as a cool or “normal” boy or girl, who gets considered gay, and where the “blame” gets placed in this negotiation.
- This research is not about collecting the names of students or faculty who are either the victims or perpetrators of homophobic or sexist bullying or harassment. If you wish to report such problems, I will assist you in contacting the school administrator who can take action. During this interview I will often ask you to refrain from naming names, and I will not share the direct content of this interview with the faculty of Oakwood. Again, I can help you contact an administrator to assist in addressing bullying and harassment outside of this interview process.
- The questions and study are also designed to get at how adults like teachers, administrators, and parents become involved in these conflicts. So some of my questions will be about your experiences with kids and some will be about your experiences with adults in relation to this issue.
- In this conversation I hope we can discuss some of the following things:
 - What is considered a normal boy or girl at Oakwood
 - How one must act to be considered a “normal” boy or girl
 - What you believe, have heard, have experienced, or have seen happen to boys who don’t “act like” boys or girls who don’t “act like” girls “should” act
 - Why certain behaviors or people are targeted for gender and sexual orientation harassment

- How adults at school either directly or indirectly teach girls to “act like” girls and boys “act like” boys – how they teach gender appropriate behavior
- Other ways adults at school show beliefs or values about gender roles

- QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS OVERVIEW....
- Requisite description of rights of interviewee. Consent form signed if not already signed.
- Inform interviewee that researcher is a mandatory reporter in cases of child abuse.
- Brief overview of the protocol—highlight the topics covered, the possibly redundant nature of questions, and the reason for this. Encourage respondent to depart from protocol as they see fit. It is intended to start a conversation, not limit it (“I am here to listen to you; you are not here to listen to me.”) Affirm that Researcher will take responsibility for returning to various topics if there is a need to do so.
- Any questions before we start?

Please state your name and grade: (ex. Seventh grader)

How are you connected to Oakwood?

- How long has the connection existed/when did you start school here?

Did you attend an elementary school that feed into Oakwood?

- How many friends have you maintained from elementary to middle school?
- If you were to pick a metaphor for your life here at Oakwood what would it be?
Explain... (like a rocket at lift off, like a bird in a cage, a test-tube bubbling over.... 😊)
- Has your experience as a student at Oakwood changed over time? For the better or worse, in your opinion?

I want to hear more about what you know, think, and feel about the culture and attitudes at the school in relation to “normal” masculine and feminine – boy/girl – behaviors. And about gay/straight “normal” gender relations.

I am going to start by asking some questions about what it means here at Oakwood to be a boy or girl in general. I will follow this with some questions about how being seen as feminine or masculine --- straight or gay can affect your life here at Oakwood. I will then ask about conflicts that have occurred over these ideas. I will follow this with some questions about discipline and how the school handles this topic. And finally I’ll ask you how you would handle this problem if you were in charge. If you don’t have any thoughts or know anything about a particular question, just say so, and we’ll move on to the next question. If a question makes you uncomfortable or you do not wish to talk about something, just say pass and we will move on. And finally if you decide you do not want to complete the interview, just say so and we will stop the process.

Feminine Girls/Masculine Boys and the straight/gay connection

To get a sense of the topic I'd like to ask you for your opinions and observations about what it means to be masculine or feminine and how that might relate to whether a person is thought to be gay or straight

- Can you think of two specific kinds of girls - one who you would consider the symbol for feminine and one who does not fit feminine norms? These can be real people or people from fiction. Without naming names (let's say girl A and girl B), would you take a few minutes to describe each of them and explain what makes one a "normal" or typical girl and the other exceptional.
- (my examples as a potential starter - Girl A: Gabriella Girl B: Lisa Simpson)
 - What if anything about their masculine/feminine behavior might make people think they are straight /or/gay? Thoughts...
- Think of two specific kinds of boys - one who you would consider the symbol for a masculine boy and one who does not fit masculine norms. These can be real people or people from fiction. Without naming names (let's call them boy A and boy B), would you take a few minutes to describe each of them and explain what makes one a "normal" or typical boy and the other exceptional.
(my examples - Boy A: Troy Boy B: Neville Longbottom)
 - What if anything about their masculine/feminine behavior might make people think they are straight /or/gay? Thoughts...
- Think of two teachers, coach, etc. One who is the epitome of "normal" adult and

one who does not fit gender/sexual orientation norms for adults. These can be real people or people from fiction. Without naming names, would you take a few minutes to describe each of them and explain what makes one a normal person and the other exceptional.

- Type A: Incredible Hulk Type B: Dr. Bruce Banner
- Mrs. Weasley Professor McGonnigol
 - Does anything about their masculine/feminine behavior make people think they are straight/or/gay? Thoughts...
- Describe yourself based on the following statement – “in comparison to other girls (boys) in my class I am really
- Where would you put yourself in terms of meeting the social ideal for girls /or/ boys
 - Picking up on interviewees responses ask which items he/she thinks of as “natural” as in just part of my nature and which he/she considers “choices’
 - How do family, religious, or other personal values help you think about or decide what it means for you to be a “normal” girl/boy (man/woman)?

Feminine/Masculine Gay/Straight language used in other contexts

The next few questions focus on the use of words associated with masculinity or femininity and sexuality within other contexts. These words sometimes come up in relation to activities that are really like or dislike. They sometimes come up in relation to a person acting in what is seen as a gender opposite manner, so this is when a boy is seen

as acting like a girl or vice versa. And they sometimes come up in relation to some object that is strongly liked or disliked.

- Can you think of some times when words that are generally used to define boy or male characteristics are used for describing people, actions, or activities. Tell me about this...
- ex. dude, one of the guys, buff, has balls, pimping, other male physical or sexual adjectives
- Can you think of some times when words that are generally used to define girl or female characteristics are used for describing people, actions, or activities? Tell me about this...
- ex. such a girl, like a girl, bitch, ho and other “sleazy” or female sexual adjectives..., female beauty adjectives...
- Can you think of some times when words that are generally used to define gay or homosexual characteristics are used for describing people, actions, or activities? Tell me about this...
- ex. sissy, wimpy, gay, queer, fag

Experiences with gender or sexual orientation conflicts within the school setting

The next question focus on peer conflicts sometimes called harassment or bullying that are associated with gender or sexual orientation.

- I am interested in gaining a better understanding the types of conflicts that come about related to issues of masculinity, femininity, and perceived sexual orientation (“gayness” for youth interviews.) I would like you to tell me about your

experience of conflicts among kids or harassment directed at a particular kid that is related to his/her not acting like a “normal” or typical boy or girl. And can you talk about teasing or a conflict when a student’s actions were perceived as being gay. You don’t need to name any names while sharing this story – you can simply describe the people involved.

- You may tell this as a personal story, or simply something you witnessed, or a story you heard about. Please share the story as you remember it...who – without names, what, where, when, why, how

Teacher, authority and gender harassment and sexual orientation harassment

- I would like to gain a better understanding of the ways teachers and other adults at school are involved in the ways kids talk, tease, and harass each other about masculinity, femininity, and perceived sexual orientation or “gayness”.
- I would like to hear about both the things adults say or do when boys and girls being targeted as not masculine or feminine enough, and the occasions where they are present during tense or harassing moments and say nothing. I am interested in hearing about adults you agree with and those you do not agree with.
 - If you are having a hard time understanding what I am talking about for this part of the interview – think back to the last time you heard a student (or teacher/adult) call another student gay, fag, or tell a boy he was acting like a girl or vice versa -- in a classroom or within hearing distance of a teacher... I would like to learn more about what the teacher said, did, etc.
- Without naming names can you tell me about a teacher or adult at Oakwood who

- participates in gendered or homophobic teasing? What, when, where, how, why?
- In what other ways do teachers/adults address unexpected - “abnormal” gender behavior (ex. boys wearing nail polish or make up, girls “ganging up” and intimidating boys...)
 - Without naming names, can you tell me about a teacher/adult who enforces discipline for gendered or sexual harassment among students? What is done, where, when, how, why?
 - Without naming names, are there any teachers or adults who are known for expressing “different” gender or sexual orientation attitudes? Does this change the way students interact around those teachers?
 - *In thinking about the principal and assistant principal as the “police” of school rules can you tell me what your sense is of how they address gendered harassment or homophobic harassment? Can you think of any example or reason why you think of them in this way? Does this change the way students interact around them?*

Rules & Discipline for gender harassment or sexual orientation bullying

- In this final portion of the interview I would like to ask you about how school rules and discipline are related to the problems we have been talking about. I am interested in knowing what the school rules are in relation to gendered and homophobic harassment. I am interested in what the consequences are for harassing students because they aren’t acting male/female enough or straight enough. Along with learning about what the consequences are for the person who

was the victim of harassment.

- Can you tell me what if any school rules apply to this kind of conflict between students? How do you learn about these rules?
 - Can you tell me who is supposed to enforce these school rules and how they are informed about this type of conflict?
 - If the conflict is between a student and a teacher/adult then who if anyone addresses the conflict?
- In your experience... when there is a conflict about gender or sexual orientation... how do teachers find out about it?
 - What difference does it make who told/ratted on the situation?
 - Does anyone “get in trouble” with the school?
 - What kind of trouble?
 - Do you think that is fair – why/why not?
 - Do you think that makes the school a better place to be – why/why not?
 - How do “most kids” feel about the conflict afterwards?
 - Who do they side with and why?
- In general do you think this kind of conflict is handled right or wrong at Oakwood and why?
- In your opinion, how do any kind of harassment or bullying rules about gender and sexual orientation affect day-to-day student behavior?
- In your opinion, how does any kind of public punishment for this kind of harassment affect day-to-day student behavior?
- Is there less gender and sexual orientation teasing around certain teachers -- more

around certain teachers? What do you attribute this to?

- Would you tell on someone for harassing a targeted boy or girl? Why or why not?

Closer

We are coming to the end of the interview... I really want to thank you for your thoughtful responses. You have given me a great deal to work with and your insights will be very helpful in attempts to better address student needs at Oakwood. Before we end this interview I'd like to just ask you a few general questions about your insights on this topic.

- If you ran the school... what would you do differently than now, what would you keep the same?
- If you ran the classroom, gym, hallways, and school - what would you do to stop gendered and homophobic harassment and bullying?
- What would be your advice to a fifth grade boy/girl coming to Oakwood with regard to "acting like" a boy/girl?
- What would be your advice to Oakwood teachers or administrators?
- What are your greatest fears and hopes for high school in relation to this topic?
- What do you think will be different when you are an adult? (or for adults/10 years from now)

Observation Protocol: Researcher Observational Questions

1. Describe performances of normative gender throughout the room. Note who is aware of/observing/reacting to normative gender and how does this awareness manifest itself?

- 1a. Male
- 1b. Female
2. What counter-normative gender performances are going on within the room? Who is aware of/observing/reacting to these counter normative performances of gender and how?
 - 2a. Male
 - 2b. Female
3. Describe performances of heteronormative sexuality visible within the room. (i.e. flirting, posturing, cross talk about dating, marital/relationship disclosures of teacher) Who is aware of/observing/reacting to heteronormative performances and how?
4. Describe counter normative sexuality performances visible within the room (depending upon the salience of heterosexuality within the space, asexuality may or may not fall within this category) who is aware of/observing/reacting to non-normative sexuality performances and how?
5. Identify a central point of social power (here I mean a dominant and persistent public voice/s) within the room (this may be the teacher – it may be a dominant student – it may be a dominant clique of students). Describe the gender and sexuality performances this person or group is engaged in?
6. Look around this person or group and describe how others in the room are experiencing and relating to this performance.

7. How is the teacher/adult in the room engaged in student heteronormative performances? How is the adult participating in, silent, or absent from the discourse within the room...?
8. Describe the normative gender and heteronormative elements to the teacher's practices for correcting or redirecting social behaviors.
9. How does the central student respond to correction and redirection?
10. How do peripheral students respond to correction?

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