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## **"Misfits" and the Celebration of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) Youth At a High School in the United States**

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### **Keywords**

LGBTQ, high school bullying, homonormativity, heteronormativity



## "MISFITS" AND THE CELEBRATION OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, AND QUEER (LGBTQ) YOUTH AT A HIGH SCHOOL IN THE UNITED STATES

Nathan N. Taylor, Robert Morris University

### Abstract

As part of a six-month case study, this article delineated the relationship between homonormativity and the victimization of students in a high school in the United States by investigating the strategies of policing, resistance, and queering. Not only do these strategies reappropriate practices inherent in homonormative practices, but these strategies also reconfigure practices associated with heteronormativity and homophobia. The undercurrent of this research highlights how schools marginalize identities in some spaces and elevate identities in other spaces, the socio-political readings of that positioning, and what educators can do to promote an inclusive environment for all students.

### Introduction

I think all of us have had at least one time in our lives where we didn't feel like we fit in so we are just a bunch of outcasts, and we all understand what it feels like to feel alone. I guess we never let someone here[Central High School] feel that way. —10th Grade Student Interview, Karen, 12/7/11

Nearly 82% of LGBT<sup>1</sup> (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) students experience verbal harassment at school and 63.5% feel unsafe because of their sexual orientation (GLSEN, 2011). Over 38% of students are physically harassed in schools, and nearly a third of LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning) students have skipped at least one day of school in the past month because of safety concerns (GLSEN, 2011). These numbers are not surprising to those that have studied LGBTQ experiences in schools. While a rallying cry for activists, scholars, and educators, these numbers only tell part of the story of school experiences for LGBTQ youth. The story often under-told, and what I will present in this article, is the story of strategies enacted at one U.S. high school to (de)construct the homonormative subject, while providing a safe, inclusive space for all of its students.

Researchers have studied the issue of bullying/victimization<sup>2</sup> of LGBTQ youth in schools at length in recent years. Topics within this corpus of research include the use of gay-straight alliances (Griffin, Lee, Waugh, & Beyer, 2003; Lee, 2002), anti-bullying school policies and homophobia (Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, & Koenig, 2008; Holmes & Cahill, 2004; Swearer, Turner, Givens, & Pollack, 2008), curricula inclusion (Marchman, 2002; Sumara & Davis, 1999; Robinson & Davies, 2008), pedagogical practices/programs (Cotton-Huston & Waite, 2000; Franck, 2002; Kumashiro, 2009), as well as masculinity in boys' lives (Martino, 2000; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003; McCready, 2010; Pascoe, 2005), and resistance to heteronormative practices (Blackburn, 2002/2003; Frank, Kehler, Lovell, & Davidson, 2003; Macintosh, 2007) among others. Each of these researchers has advanced the cause of social justice in their own way. Within this paper, I further this conversation of social justice by exploring topics that educational researchers have not yet addressed in depth, namely the interplay between homonormativity and victimization. I address the coaction of

these two constructs through the exploration of empirical evidence I gathered at one high school in the midwestern part of the United States.

The purpose of this study was to reflect on the role of homonormativity within the confines of the national discourse on bullying. Influenced by Lisa Duggan, Manalansan IV (2005) states, homonormativity is a chameleon-like ideology that purports to push for progressive causes such as rights to gay marriage and other 'activisms,' but at the same time it creates a depoliticizing effect on queer communities as it rhetorically remaps and recodes freedom and liberation in terms of privacy, domesticity, and consumption" (p. 142). As a result of gaining certain rights (e.g. right to marry, right to serve in the military, right to adopt, *inter alia*), certain segments of the LGBTQ communities are brought into the fold of a modern, neoliberal citizenry in exchange for "passively accepting alternative forms of inequality...." (Manalansan IV, 2005, p. 142).

While it is interesting to reflect on who is and who is not brought into this halcyonic haze of neoliberalism across the various LGBTQ communities, I will spend the majority of my time in this paper addressing how Central High School (CHS)<sup>3</sup> engages this concept of homonormativity and its relationship to victimization. To do this, I look at three strategies that CHS commonly uses in their school practices as they relate to homonormativity and victimization: policing, resistance, and queering. In brief, policing strategies are strategies that regulate bodies to norms of a particular discourse, in the case of CHS, a discourse of inclusion based on well-worn negotiated ideologies in the U.S. Policing, as a strategy, does not have to adhere to the dominant discourse (e.g. traditional education) that supports existing systems of oppression (e.g. racism, classism, heterosexism, among others). Instead, policing can regulate bodies in a manner that is resistant to dominant discourse and their correlating systems of oppression as is the case at CHS. At its core, regardless of the discourse, policing is a strategy to assimilate students into a particular mode of being. For example, eliminating the use of the term "faggot" by students and teachers from public spaces is a form of policing. While this form of policing counters a national discourse of treating LGBTQ people as lesser than non-LGBTQ people, it is still a form of regulating behavior to adhere to a certain norm.

A second strategy used at CHS is resistance. Resistance is rooted in the promotion of voice for the voiceless and eliminating the practice of erasure that is part of the project of subordination in various institutions. Resistance mainly operates as an opposition to something else. As Halperin (1995) notes, the heterosexual/homosexual binarism is itself a homophobic production, just as the man/woman binarism is a sexist production [same can be said for Black/White, able-bodied/disable bodied, rich/poor, masculine/feminine, etc.]. Each consists of two terms, the first of which is unmarked and unproblematic—it designates "the categories to which everyone is assumed to belong" (unless someone is specifically marked as different)—whereas the second term is marked and problematized: it designates a category of persons whom something differentiates from normal, unmarked people. The marked (or queer) term ultimately functions not as a means of denominating a real or determinate class of persons but as a means of delimiting and defining—by negation and opposition—the unmarked term. (p. 44).

Therefore, the work of binarism is to buttress and sustain the unmarked norm. Without the homosexual, there would be no heterosexual. It is out of this project of binarisms that a humanist imagining of systems of oppression exists. An example of this would be participating in a Day of Silence, a national anti-bullying program in the United States that calls attention to

bullying in schools. The Day of Silence brings awareness in schools across the U.S. to the silencing effect of victimization of LGBTQ youth. While a useful strategy in bringing attention to the plight of those historically marginalized, it has the potential to maintain existing binaries.

Queering as a strategy seeks to invert the use of binaries within public and private domains. Queering strategies questions not only heteronormative practices but homonormative practices as well. Queer strategies operate by working in, out, and through existing social structures. For instance, CHS's use of drag shows at their school is an example of transforming the existing female/male binary. With students, administrators, and teachers taking on the roles of drag kings, drag queens, lipstick lesbians, bull dykes, fags, and other counter-normative identities, CHS seeks to undercut the existing dyadic structures from the larger society.

CHS uses all three strategies in the (de)construction of the homonormative subject at CHS. This paper will render visible how CHS uses these strategies, their relationship to (de)constructing the homonormative subject and the implications of these practices on the larger national discourse on bullying. I delve into these concerns after a brief explanation of my queer theoretical framework and the post-queer, intersectionality methodology I adopted for this inquiry.

### **A Queer Theoretical Framework**

...to acquire the rules of the law, the management techniques, and also the morality, the ethos, the practice of the self. That will allow [them] to play these games of power with as little domination as possible

—Foucault, 1984/1997, p. 298

There are several ways of *getting at* theory. Researchers may use theory as an a priori instrument by which they deductively explain an empirically observed phenomenon, as seen often in positivist research (e.g. experimental research). Other researchers may use theory inductively to explain a phenomenon of interest as often seen in qualitative research (e.g. grounded theory). And, yet, still another more queer way to use theory, and the method by which I more closely align myself within this project, is to see the historical, political, and contested nature of knowing and theorizing; thereby, inductively expanding a theoretical construct or way of knowing within an epistemic milieu of deductive reasoning.

Borrowing from Foucault and his work on authorship, my use of theory, like authorship itself, relies heavily on the context in which it is uttered. Foucault (1969/1994) notes, “discourses are objects of appropriation” (p. 382). That is, discourse, of which theory is dependent on, is subsumed under particular “games of truth” (Foucault, 1984/1997, p. 289). As such, theories are malleable constructs, (not)easily appropriated through various networks of power and knowledge.

Moreover, and again borrowing from Foucault's work on authorship, like a theory, [t]he author is not an indefinite source of significations that fill a work; the author does not precede the works; he [*sic*] is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which impedes free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition decomposition, and recomposition of fiction (p. 390).

A theory, too, does not deductively nor inductively explain a phenomenon through its process of signification. Rather a theory, like an author, is dis/informed by the scientific norms of a particular time and place. Theories regulate and create what people can know as knowable knowledge. Moreover, the theory itself is but a vessel for the phenomenon it is seeking to

explain. The theory is not solely explaining the phenomenon; the phenomenon is explaining and expanding the theory.

As I posit an interpretation of the queer theory, not *the* interpretation of the queer theory, it is with this understanding of theory itself and the work it does in a society. In short, my deployment of the theory is not to elucidate some a priori assumptions about the workings of the social world. Rather, it is to use theory as a project by which to *tease out* different aspects of the social body in hopes of creating more socially just practices for educators, researchers, theorists, and activists.

### A Lay of Queerland

The fight for gay equality has taken a circuitous route in its demand for social change. But, according to Duggan (2002), [T]he fight for gay equality has since the emergence of the homophile movement in the 1950s been rocked by internal conflict over assimilationists versus confrontational tactics, the overall goals and directions of change have been relatively consistent: the expansion of a right to sexual privacy against the intrusive, investigatory labeling powers of the state, and the simultaneous expansion of gay public life through institution building and publicity (p. 180). In conjunction with Duggan's comments, my study paradoxically attempts to problematize the labeling power of the state, in this case through schools, while at the same time provide greater access to the citizenry through public institutions and national discourse.

With this particular socio-historical perspective, I suggest that there reside three spectral points by which queer politics has been informed. At one end are the assimilationists; those homonormative subjects such as Andrew Sullivan who posit an agenda that supports norms of Western society, without challenging racism, classism, and sexism among other systems of oppression (Duggan, 2002). In exchange for their tacit agreement to a neoliberal ideology, lesbians, and gays are able to assimilate into larger society through such institutions as marriage, adoption rights, and the military inter alia.

Queers reside at another spectral point. Queers can lean towards a gay perspective or a post-queer perspective. Kenji Yoshino (2006) provides a queer voice for this point of view. While he favors gay marriage and the right for lesbians and gays to openly serve in the military, Yoshino contends that these acts are in themselves ways to queer heterosexist institutions and practices. Additionally, queer activists (e.g. Queer Nation, ACT UP) have utilized an oppositional strategy as a way to create change in institutions, but they do not always challenge the existence of the institutions themselves. As Heckert (2010) notes, “[o]ppositional politics is based upon the same terms as that which it opposes. Thus it serves to maintain the definition of the situation imposed by its opposition” (as quoted in Jeppesen, 2010, p. 475). Anzaldúa (1987/2010) has also stated, “it is not enough to stand on the opposite river bank, shouting questions, challenging patriarchal, white conventions. A counterstance locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed; locked in mortal combat...” (p. 100).

To clarify, assimilationists seek legal and institutional recognition for lesbians and gays as a way to bring some into the larger, neoliberal fold and work within existing legal and political structures. Conversely, queers see legal and institutional recognition as a way to change prohibitive structures in society. Queer activists may work in opposition to legal and political structures; but, in their actions, may inadvertently maintain those structures.

There is a third position, what I call a post-queer position. This position includes such authors as Josè Esteban Muñoz, Jane Ward, Michael Warner, Martin Manalansan IV, and Jasbir Puar among others. Here there is a demand to queer all practices of normalization including

marriage, military service, state-sanctioned kinships, heterosexuality, capital, racism, sexism, and other systems of oppression. Post-queers see the abolition, or at least the radical transformation, of these institutions and practices as a way to eliminate the normalizing gaze and the inevitable inequitable practices of society. To explain these three spectral points further, I examine each of their political and tactical attributes. I note that there is considerable overlap and intermingling among these three positions though there are some very real distinctions as well. Table 1 is a guide rather than an unmovable demarcation of political constituencies and their practices.

	Gay	Queer	Post-queer
<b>Goal</b>	Assimilation	Assimilation/ Transformation	Transformation
<b>Epistemology/ Ontology</b>	Humanist/ biological	Humanist/post- modern bio/social	Post-modern/ social construction
<b>Tactic</b>	Within existing structures	Opposition to existing structures	in/out/ through existing structures
<b>Area of interest</b>	Sexuality	Sexuality, gender, sex	All forms of domination
<b>Area of critique</b>	Hetero- normativity/ homophobia	Hetero- normativity	Homo- normativity (heteronormativity)
<b>Locus of control</b>	Legal and political	Legal, political, norms	Legal, political, norms

Table 1. LGBT engagement with inequality

Assimilationists, or gay political efforts, focus on assimilation into the dominant society. That is, they seek to be part of the social body as it stands now without altering it except for their inclusion into it. There is a binary worldview emphasizing “us and them.” Society positions “us and them” as a construct through the deployment of other binaries such as Black/White, gender conforming/gender non-conforming, private/public, straight/gay, male/female, or a host of other normative and corporeal binaries that regulate bodies into unequal discourses throughout the social body. Gay political strategies work within the existing legal and political structures to deal with issues of representation in the dominant society. One concern over this approach is that it does not acknowledge other systems of oppression or their interlocking tendencies. Moreover, it portends that the gay movement is a monolithic entity; as a result, this point of view negates the inherent diversity of queer communities leading its power base in the hands most like the dominant society.

The next queer spectral point also adopts a binary worldview, but assimilation is not on the agenda. Instead, there is a demand for public acknowledgment of queer existence and the social body must change to allow for queer spaces. An example of this confrontational tactic can be seen in the “Kiss-ins where groups of gay couples invade straight bars or other public spaces

and scandalously make out" (Hennessey as quoted in Jeppesen, 2010, p. 464). Kiss-ins is an attempt to make public spaces "counter-public by their conflict with the norms and conflicts of their cultural environment" (Warner, as quoted in Jeppesen, 2010, p. 465). One of the dangers of this approach is that it can reify existing stereotypes or appear as though queers simply want a "gay" version of heteronormative lifestyle (e.g. to hold hands while shopping in a suburban shopping mall). Queers "counter" approach works from the outside and focuses on normative projects in addition to legal and political projects as previously seen with "gays." Queers challenge the composition of existing structures, but they do not challenge their very existence. A concern with a queer approach is that it favors a single-issue approach to equality, and sees heteronormativity as "temporally and spatially stable, uninflected, and transparent" (Puar, 2006, p. 71).

Post-queers seek to disrupt both heteronormativity and homonormativity by queering normative and material spaces beyond those that revolve around issues of sexuality. The post-queer approach represents multiple identities (e.g. race, class, gender, ability, among others), often overlooked by large national gay and lesbian organizations (Richardson, 2005; Ward, 2008). Post-queers also acknowledge the interlocking nature of systems of oppression and its dispersal throughout the entire social body beyond areas of sexuality. One concern theorists have with the practices in the post-queer camp is that its resources can diffuse as they work across multiple axes, increasing the likelihood of intragroup conflict (Chang & Culp, 2002/2003).

These three spectral points of political action correlate to the three strategies enacted at CHS: policing, resistance, and queering. A gay political agenda polices LGBTQ persons to assimilate into a dominant narrative; in this case, a liberal reading of diversity. A liberal understanding of diversity posits a worldview in which some LGBTQ people are co-opted into citizenry by adopting behaviors and ideologies that are most closely aligned to that of the dominant episteme. As stated earlier, the state grants certain rights such as marriage, non-discrimination laws, and adoption rights among others to those that participate in a neoliberal form of the citizenry. This participation maintains the status quo of the structures of neoliberalism, which advances existing forms of domination and inequity.

Queering as a political act and strategies of resistance enacted at CHS parallel each other in a similar fashion. However, where gay political actions seek to assimilate LGBTQ persons into citizenry as a form of political identity erasure, queer political action resists this approach in favor of maintaining the political power identity affords LGBTQ individuals and communities. That is, in a queer approach to equality, LGBTQ individuals and communities demand space in the political, social, and historical worlds as they are. Yes, legal rights are important, but legal recognition is a starting point, not an end. In addition to legal rights, norms and ideologies must create space for LGBTQ identities. These identities will not morph into a national identity (though some will), instead, new spaces must be created to allow for the full contribution of LGBTQ people and communities into the social, political, and historical fabric of social life.

Post-queer political acts correspond to the queer strategies at CHS. The transformational aspect of post-queer actions avoids the assimilation of gay political acts and the equalization promised in queer political acts. Post-queer political acts and its corresponding queer strategies at CHS support an approach that eradicates existing structures that promulgate domination and subordination. These acts attempt to create a collective humanity that acknowledges different identity structures, the ideologies, and structures that create them and processes that honor those identities without marginalizing some in favor of others. It is within these three approaches



(policing, resistance, and queering) that CHS tries to (re)negotiate what it means to be an LGBTQ student in the U.S. today.

### Methods

If identity is a necessary error, then the assertion of 'queer' will be incontrovertibly necessary, but that assertion will constitute only one part of 'politics'...It is equally necessary...to affirm the contingency of the term.

—Butler, 1993b, p. 21

Often theorists produce metaphoric renderings of concepts; even though, metaphors often limit concepts that should remain hazy, mobile, and malleable (Kwan 2002/2003). Crossroads (Crenshaw, 1989), axes (Yuval-Davis, 2006/2009) and a house of cards (Ehrenreich, 2002/2003) are just a few of the metaphors floating along the landscape of intersectionality. Rather than becoming a prisoner of metaphors as I seek to posit a post-queer, intersectionality methodology within this study, I deploy a methodology that works in the spaces between various metaphors and concepts most notably in the function and use of categories. Here are a few examples to help ground my approach to a post-queer intersectionality.

Gloria Anzaldúa (1987/2010) speaks of *la mestiza* constantly having to shift out of “convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by a movement away from set patterns and goals and toward[s]...one that includes rather than excludes” (P.255). Anzaldúa continues, the work of *mestiza* consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality...healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives....[it is] a massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, on our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war (p. 256).

The post-queer, intersectionality methodology that I set forth in this writing seeks to do the same. That is, by exploring the surfaces (i.e. lived experiences and regimes of practice), as “there are no hidden powers or entities” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000, p. 156), I can begin to read the spaces between those surfaces; particularly, as those surfaces engage such projects as categories and their binary attributes of determinism and agency, essentialism and relativism, normativities and materialities, and identities and systems of oppression to name just a few. These readings, grounded in intersectionality and influenced by queer theory, can provide richer interpretations of the practices and policies schools enact to support their students across multiple identity markers including race, class, gender, sexuality, ability and so forth.

Two, a particular methodology serves as a bridge between the theoretical framework and the methods adopted in a research project. According to Crotty (1998), a methodology is a “strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking the choice and use of methods to the desired outcomes” (p. 3). As such, by reading the spaces in between the surfaces I can begin to address how CHS uses policing, resistance, and queering strategies, the consequences of (de)constructing the homonormative subject, and the implications of these practices on the larger national discourse on bullying.

Three, since post-structuralism, and by default, my use of post-queer intersectionality, tends to be anti-methodological (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000, p. 156), the positing of intersectionality set forth here is intended as to be seen as faces on a multi-faceted crystal. One that is constantly shifting dependent on the light it encounters, or the

reader that engages this study. While I do ground my research on the material aspects of intersectionality, I do this out of the demand for empirical research. Though qualitative in scope, this research project falls within the purview of a positivist regime of scientific norms. As such, I use empirical data as a way to acquiesce to the demands of modern science. But, the materiality of my data should be understood within its own social construction.

Four, as an anchor for this section, Bowleg (2008) succinctly states, "...intersectionality researchers are charged with the responsibility of making the intersections between ethnicity, sex/gender, sexual orientation (to name just a few) and the social inequality related to these identities explicit" (p. 322). As I discuss intersectionality as a methodology, Bowleg provides a nice reminder of what intersectionality is and what intersectionality is not. This amalgamate methodological framework borrows from such theorists as McCall (2005), Butler (1990, 1993a, 1993b, 2004), Foucault (1969/1994, 1970, 1976/1980, 1977/1995, 1978/1990, 1978/1994) and others.

This framework has the following characteristics. 1) A post-queer, intersectional framework renders visible those identities often erased through various regimes of practice especially in the areas of legal rights, political considerations, and educational equity. 2) A post-queer, intersectionality framework notes not only the material aspects of identity and their corresponding systems of oppression; it also considers the normative aspects of the two as well. 3) Identities and systems of oppression are interlocking and mutually constitutive. 4) Identities are socially constructed and shift depending on the space and time they inhabit. 5) Post-queer intersectionality has a social justice directive. In the end, post-queer intersectionality work is "...charged with the responsibility of making the intersections between ethnicity, sex/gender, sexual orientation (to name just a few) and the social inequality related to these identities explicit" (Bowleg, 2008, p. 322).

### **Methods and Data Sources**

The various methods and sources of data I use in this paper I glean through a post-queer, intersectional methodological lens. Specifically, I examine aspects of my research design including participant observation, interviews, and document analysis. In that, intersectionality does not have methods that are distinctly its own, I co-opt common qualitative methods in this research project. As a caveat, this is not to say that researchers when conducting intersectionality research cannot use quantitative methods; however, due to my theoretical and research directives, I have chosen methods usually associated with qualitative research. Chiefly, my design is influenced by the work of Chang, R. & Culp, M. Jr. (2002/2003), McCall, L. (2005), Jeppesen, S. (2010) among others.

Participant observation is the first method used in constructing data for this research project. Post-queer, intersectional research, deriving from a constructionism epistemology, emphasizes a "transactional nature of inquiry...requir[ing] a dialogue between the investigator and the subject of the inquiry" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.110). As such, the process of co-constructing and reading data with my research participants was transactional as well.

Central High School is a small charter school located in an urban city located in the midwestern part of the United States, I visited the school an average of two times a week averaging two hours per visit over a six-month period. These visits included observing the following classes and activities: theatre classes, U.S. history, language arts, dance, the Gay-straight Alliance, as well as performance pieces including a social issues art performance performed for the entire high school, a drama performance given at a local middle school by

students at Central High, and a drag performance performed at Central High School for students, teachers, and parents.

Interviewing is another method I utilized in my pursuit of co-constructing data in this study. “Interviews are conversations where the outcome is a co-production of the interviewer and the subject” (Kvale, 1996, p. xvii). This stands in opposition to the more objectivist view that interviews should be “neutral, face-to-face ‘conversations with a purpose’ between strangers that ostensibly [produces] facts of experience...[that is] the interview [is] seen as a conduit for transporting experiential knowledge from the respondent...to the interviewer” (Gubrium & Holsten, 2003, p. 3). I conducted twenty rounds of interviews in person at CHS with 18 research participants (9 students, 3 administrators, 1 artist in residence, 1 parent, and 4 teachers). I had follow up interviews with two teachers. I transcribed and coded close to 13 hours of recorded interviews with the average interview lasting just over 38 minutes.

Document analysis is the final method I adopted in this study. The documents, or artifacts, I analyzed included web pages from CHS’s website, fliers advertising upcoming events at CHS, art pieces throughout the school building, students’ work, photographs in the building and on their website, lesson plans, a newspaper advertisement, inter alia. These documents not only triangulated my data; thereby assisting with the trustworthiness of my data, they also provided another source to enter into the lived experiences of the students, teachers, and administrators as it related to their identities, practices, and values while at CHS (see Glesne, 2006).

To conclude, I use a post-queer, intersectionality methodology as a theoretical, political, and legal construct. This reading provides an imagining of how post-queer intersectionality is a useful construct for those lives that had been erased by dominant members of society. This post-queer intersectionality not only examines the materiality of identities, categories, and systems of oppression as they relate to political and legal constructs, but it also examines the ideologies afflicting lives as well. Specifically, a post-queer, intersectionality, as I posit here, notes the materiality of identities and systems of oppression, their interconnectedness, the ideological aspects of the two projects, and the networks of power relations embedded within the two projects. It is under this methodology that I use the methods of participant observation, interviewing, and document analysis.

### Findings

Queer identities, even when oppositional or counter-identities, are identities too. So as is the case with any identity, they obscure particularities and cannot but work within the confines of power and normativity. The task of queer critique then is simply to do the work of imagining how norms and categories are deployed.

—Oswin, 2008, p. 96

The findings from my study identified key strategies enacted at CHS that (de)constructed the homonormative subject. First, policing strategies at CHS generally did not support the creation of a homonormative subject. That is, the policing that did occur at CHS revolved around taking care of one’s self and each other. Students were not allowed to denigrate themselves or other students at CHS. This challenges a key component of homonormativity that suggests that some are enveloped into the dominant social structure without regard to “others.”<sup>4</sup>

Second, the strategy of resistance did maintain a narrative of “us and them” at CHS. Since this is an aspect of homonormativity, the haves, and the have-nots, CHS failed to address this binary in earnest through various school policies and practices. Nonetheless, as my analysis

will show, a strategy of resistance is critical in creating social change as seen in civil rights, women's rights, LGBTQ rights, etc. Therefore, though resistance can create a false binary, it can also be useful in furthering the eventual goal of social equity.

Third, strategies of queering were present nominally in the practices and policies at CHS. However, when the school did use this strategy it had a large impact on deconstructing the homonormative subject. The school's drag show was successful in challenging a female/male binary, which is rampant in Western society. Moreover, it shows different ways of being in this world without succumbing to the dominant narrative of what it is to be a citizen in the U.S. Unfortunately, this was one of the few times CHS actively sought to deconstruct the homonormative subject.

The analysis presented here highlights the ways bullying policies in the U.S. must take into consideration the larger socio-political aspects of bullying. That is, simply targeting the bully or creating anti-bullying policies is not enough to eliminate bullying or inequities within schools and societies. Instead, teachers, administrators, and students need to adopt a critical lens to target bullying and inequities within schools. Victimization does not begin in schools and does not end in schools, much like a game of Whac-A-Mole, teachers, administrators, and students must address inequities wherever and whenever they arise in school while avoiding being co-opted into a neoliberal form of the citizenry. As a caveat, there is leakage among policing, resistance, and queer and queer strategies. In general, I align strategies of policing with policy matters, strategies of resistance with curriculum and pedagogy, and queer strategies with school norms due to the relevance of each strategy to their corresponding practice. The strategies demonstrate the varying influences that comprise one's intersectional position.

### **Policing Strategies**

The strategies of policing at CHS include the interview, addressing issues of victimization in a timely manner, the promotion of self-expression and diversity. While it has been widely noted that one problem victimized students face is the lack of concern by school administrators and teachers (GLSEN, 2011). At CHS, students, teachers, and administrators all reported that when victimization occurred at the school, people were quick to act to address the issue. This attentiveness not only protected students from being victimized, but it also sent a clear message to other students and teachers that these issues will be dealt with earnestly and swiftly.

The promotion of self-expression and identity was a touchstone for those working at CHS and those attending CHS. Through various activities such as the interview process (to be discussed in detail next), the drama class, the annual drag show, workshops and guest speakers the promotion of self-expression and acceptance was paramount to the official and unofficial curriculum at CHS. For this article, I focus on the interview. The interview is critical in policing new students and family members to the ethos of CHS.

### **The Interview**

Every student, before they enroll at CHS, goes through an interview process. The interview process begins with a phone interview telling the parent(s)/guardian(s) what they can expect at CHS with diversity being a large focus of the interview. An in-person interview with the school's director, Lori, occurs after the phone interview, which includes a tour of the school itself. While touring the school, visitors will see art created by students that depict gay pride, messages of anti-bullying, students in non-gender conforming clothing, and same-sex couples holding hands or images of same-sex couples attending school dances. As an aside, students actively seek out this school due to themselves being victims at their neighborhood schools for

refusing to conform to the norms of their school. The school has a reputation as a school for promoting diversity in all its iterations.

The school started because the school's director daughter was bullied in school. Within this context, Lori explains the story she tells the student and parent(s)/guardian(s) when they come in for an interview:

It's not right when a mother does everything to protect their child, to protect them and keep them safe, they don't expect to send them to school in the morning and come back damaged. And I was told by [a local middle school], '[Lori], no one's ever hurt your child.' "Really? Because I can't get her out of bed to go to school." My daughter enrolled herself when she was the age of twelve in the club in school for Japanese and she was in school every Saturday from 08:00 until 2:30. She's a voracious learner and she doesn't want to get out of bed now to go to your middle school. Don't tell me someone hasn't hurt my child. So you need to know where I'm coming from before your child comes here because we've only got three rules [kindness, respect for diversity, & academic excellence] and that's the hill I'll die on (Administration Interview, 3/19/2012).

At the outset, Lori tells potential students and parent(s)/guardian(s) about her passion for establishing an educational environment that ensures the safety of the students at CHS. As such, the interview process works along two main lines of intent. The first is to demonstrate, in an enumerated way, that the school values diversity and safety, with the second intent focused on weeding out students that would not fit into the school's ethos of caring and academic excellence.

As an example of the value placed on diversity, Lori further reflects on what she discusses in the interview with the parent(s)/guardian(s):

This is [shows a picture of a former student at CHS] because she has no legs and that's really [inaudible] to have no legs because she had something that came out and turned around, there was a foot at her hip bone. Her arms are in that shape. Now what you can't see is from here to her hip bone, it is compressed, it is shrunken. It's like this big. So she wore special baby clothes. But she had a normal sized head. And the reason she fit in the school is that she has an above average brain ... And she dated this young man, six-foot six. What you can't tell about this young man, this is [shows a picture of another student at CHS], is that he can't hold his body still. He has severe Tourette. And, what you really can't tell by looking at this picture, under two feet tall. She can't move hers. So when a six-foot six boy takes a two-foot girl [and] he can't hold his body still and she can't move hers. I can't imagine more diverse individuals and the fact that one's black and one's white is so *not* in this equation here. That's what I mean by diversity.

Any possible way two people could be different (Administration Interview, 3/19/2012).

Lori requires students to speak in the in-person interview. She wants to hear the words from their mouth about them understanding the role of diversity at CHS. These couple of passages shows the power of an enumerated policy of respect for diversity. An enumerated policy goes beyond simply saying "we don't bully at X school." Instead, it demonstrates to students and their guardians that CHS respects and values all classes of people, and that is a value that one must have to attend CHS. What is of interest, is the power of giving a concrete example of what is meant by diversity, a boy with Tourette's and a girl with no limbs; as well as, having the students explain what inclusion means and why they want to go to CHS. These steps of policing, talking to the students and guardians, giving concrete examples of diversity,

and having the students commit to this diversity magnify the importance placed on inclusion at CHS. This policing begins the conversation pertaining to structures and ideologies of domination, but it is geared towards assimilating students and caretakers into a particular discourse of diversity; a diversity of acceptance, however, not necessarily a transformational change of ideologies and structural injustice. The strategy of resistance furthers this cause.

### **Strategies of Resistance**

Resistance, as applied in this paper, is rooted in the promotion of voice for the voiceless, and eliminating the practice of erasure that is part of the project of subordination in various institutions. Moreover, resistance mainly operates as an opposition to something else. The practices enacted in the teachers' curriculum and pedagogical practices use such strategies of resistance.

### **Curriculum and Pedagogy**

An example of resistance in the curriculum and pedagogy at CHS is a program created by CHS to marry art in a multimedia format with social issues. The school brought in a young, openly gay Hollywood actor who has his own campaign that seeks to create possibilities for entertainers to be open about their sexual identity. Grantham states:

It's [his campaign] not just about me. It's about, there are lots of kind of young men and women out there in LA who need that voice. This is also about getting closeted actors and actresses to come and serve as role models to the gay youth out there, like the youth at this school who need a voice, who need people to stand up for them. (Artist in Residence Interview, 11/10/2011).

In collaboration with the drama teacher and others, Grantham supported students, in his one-week tenure as artist in residence, at CHS. At the end of the week, students performed their pieces of art for the entire school, parents, and staff.

The program, which I will call Pioneer, had clear ideas for the program itself. Approximately 50 students completed an application and the school accepted twenty-five students for the "week-long, creative workshop" (Pioneer Student Application). The application states that students will explore and identify issues of social justice that are important to them and their community, and then create an art project that will bring attention to the issue, with the belief that awareness of an issue can be the start of necessary change (Pioneer Student Application).

Topics in the program including addressing issues of teen suicide, girl-on-girl bullying, lack of access to nutritious foods, and gay equality inter alia. Students echoed this type of critical reflection and the need for social change when I interviewed them for this study. Karen states:

For me,...just making the art is a really good way of venting, but performing for people is like reassuring that other people, learning about the problem and that you're not the only one dealing with it because I know a lot of kids were crying. Well if I can affect you this way, I can help you in other ways too.... It was important to me, because, I mean, I know that and I've seen the statistics before how many kids even like consider [suicide] and how many people it is affecting. Because it doesn't just affect the person that commits suicide, it affects everyone that they know. It's just really, it's kind of close to home to me because I have friends that have committed suicide (Student Interview, 12/7/2011).

Renata, a 9<sup>th</sup>-grade student:

I was like ok, this works, using art to you know to give social issues that teachers or anything that really can't see and a lot of people are going to be there...People just using their art, using what they love to express, how they feel about social issues, and then even when I was up there dancing I almost cried. It's just the whole feeling of it (Student Interview, 1/12/2012).

Both these students found value in addressing social issues through art. But not only did these students and others find value in communicating about social issues through art, students learned about the issue through collaboration with teachers and their fellow students. The performance affected the audience as well. Speaking to some members of the audience I discovered I was not the only one crying during the performance. The power of these students to communicate issues affecting their lives resonated across the school.

This type of curriculum, born from the ground up (the topics originated from the students themselves) allows students to take responsibility for their own education and connect their lives to larger social issues. For some students, this was their own moment of conscientização (Freire, 1970/1984).

The strategy of resistance in this student-centered program created a space to articulate a host of identities and the way those identities must negotiate the terrain of dominant ideologies and structures. This oppositional approach has the potential to be transformational for those involved in creating the works of art and those witnessing it. However, without support for educating audience members, the works of art had the potential to further a narrative of "us and them" — a key component of resistance strategies. Nonetheless, this strategy of resistance advanced the cause of reconfiguring heteronormativity and other forms of domination.

### **Queer Strategies**

Queer strategies at CHS, though focused on gender norms in society, sought to transform existing structures and ideologies rather than be co-opted into them or resist them. As stated earlier, students, administrators, and teachers took on the roles of drag kings, drag queens, lipstick lesbians, bull dykes, fags and other counter-normative identities a school's production of a drag show. This counter-normative move was created from the ground up and attempted to disrupt binarisms that exist in society.

### **Drag**

On the National Day of Silence, a day in which LGBTQ students and their allies do not speak in an attempt to shed light on LGBTQ issues such as bullying in schools, CHS held their first annual drag fashion show. After school, about 22 students sat in a classroom listening to 3 drag queens and 1 drag king answer questions posited by a moderator from a local LGBTQ youth organization and members of the audience. Questions centered on how the performers began their lives as performers, the reactions from family and friends, and how it felt to perform. After the 45-minute discussion, about 12 students went with the performers into another room to prepare for their fashion show. The clothes were part of a clothing drive with a local drag king troupe donating many of the supplies (i.e. makeup, shoes, clothing, etc.).

Teachers helped set up the stage, the sound system, and lighting among other things in preparation for the event. There were approximately 40 people in attendance including parents, teachers, administrators, and local community members.

The school's safety coordinator/after school program coordinator, Alex, was the principal organizer of the event. When asked why he wanted to have the drag show, Alex responded:

Since taking this position in the fall, I have tried to foster conversations around gender, expression, and sexuality to broaden the scope of the students understanding of what these concepts are, how they interact with other social structures, and what the effects of those interactions are, both positive and negative. Then, a student asked me about doing drag at school. He wanted to feel comfortable and safe expressing himself, but he wasn't sure how to go about it, and he didn't feel as if he'd be safe in drag on the school bus. After a lengthy one-on-one conversation, we agreed to use CHS as his home base for exploration, and Lori (school director) and I discussed the idea of a Drag Closet. The Closet got so much positive attention that I began to want more; specifically, I thought about a celebration of the students' bravery, of the donors' charity, and of drag. I support my local performers at so many of their shows and have come to know a few, so I didn't think it would be difficult to get them in. After some light research, I realized what a groundbreaking event this could be and kicked it into hyperdrive. I called, emailed, visited, Facebook stalked, and everything else I could do to garner the support of the community. I was met with way more resistance than I expected, but it only made me want to succeed more. The students had begun to ask me daily when the drag event was happening, and the fear of disappointing them combined with the determination to prove that drag could happen in a high school setting pushed it to the finish line. Considering my high school experience, which could be likened to the polar opposite of CHS, I went into the LGBTQ world with little knowledge or understanding for how it works, whom it was comprised of, and what it meant. I felt like bringing drag out of the bars and shedding some overhead light on it might make it more accessible to the students as a positive exploration of gender and performance. Besides, if these kids are going to be painting their faces with mom's make-up, they should at least have some idea of how to go about it (Administration Interview, 5/3/2012).

Alex's reflection on the drag fashion show centers on three main themes. First, Alex felt it was his responsibility to attend to the needs of his students; a moment of caring rather than a typical focus on domination or competition. Second, Alex wanted to assist students in exploring their identities and how those identities are interwoven with social structures; an example of critical inquiry. Finally, Alex relied on help from his colleagues in and outside of the school; thereby, developing a community in this effort. These norms of caring, critique, and community mirror the norms of the larger school and counter the attributes of a homonormative subject.

While Butler (1990) notes that drag in and of its self will not break down the gender norms embodied in a heterosexual matrix, she does suggest that drag and other gender non-confirmative acts can show the gaps and fissures within a heterosexual matrix of power. That is, these acts can expose the instability of gender; thereby, displacing the power behind gender.

Policing, resistance, and queer strategies all are needed at CHS to deconstruct the homonormative subject. Yes, there are moments where the strategies CHS adopts reifies the homonormative subject, nevertheless, all these strategies work in concert with one another to ameliorate the negative impact of existing structures and ideologies on those historically marginalized in the U.S.



### Implications

There's a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious—makes you so sick at heart—that you can't take part. You can't even passively take part. And you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop. And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all.

— Mario Savio, December 2, 1964

Savio, though utilizing the machine as a metaphor for the hierarchical, oppressive administration at the University of California Berkley in the 1960s still serves a purpose in the 21st century. Even though Savio presented the machine as a top-down univocal practice that marginalizes the masses under the direction of an elite class; today, educators can reappropriate the imagery of the machine to crystallize the complex power relations within the social body that supports a system of domination — a system of domination that occurs within and across various processes (education, economics, law, media, inter alia). Strategies enacted at CHS address different relationships of power, which mirror the political agendas of various LGBTQ communities.

Implications for students, educators, and communities gained from this study focuses on five areas, which includes an “ethic of caring,” critical inquiry, social justice, curriculum, and policies. These five categories fluctuate across the three strategies enacted at CHS (policing, resistance, and queering). That is, there are times that an ethic of caring can be a strategy of policing or a strategy of resistance. The other four categories operate in a similar manner. What is of importance is how these practices enacted and that they do not reside in a vacuum. Those adopting practices of inclusion must consider how they relate to one another, and the holistic impact on students, teachers, administrators, and communities.

Though the following is not an exhaustive account of the practices adopted by CHS to provide an inclusive environment for its students, it does provide actionable steps that educators can undertake to promote a more hospitable, equitable educational experience for students of diverse backgrounds. Moreover, these practices cannot only combat issues of homophobia, if enacted strategically; they can negotiate the larger issues of heteronormativity and homonormativity.

#### **Ethic of caring**

CHS actively promotes an “ethic of caring” at its school; this ethic of caring responds to the needs of the students as well as the staff at CHS. Noddings (1988) emphasizes that an ethic of caring serves as a counterbalance to the moral certitude as proffered by Kant. That is, an ethic of caring reverses the Kantian moral ethics by espousing a relational care, rather than a morality based on duty to conform to a particular episteme (in the case of Kant, Christianity, and entrepreneurship). Noddings (1988) notes that “modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation” (p. 222) all must be present to ensure an “ethic of caring” within education. While I do not explore Noddings’ work in detail here, her four cornerstones, modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation, are all present at CHS.

At its core, the school promotes an “ethic of caring” by unequivocally demanding respect, inclusion, and community when the parent(s)/guardian(s) and students first make contact with the school’s director at CHS. The school director does not speak of inclusion as a platitude, she gives concrete examples of what inclusion means at CHS by providing examples from the student body. She buttresses these examples with an enumerated discussion of what

future students can expect to encounter at CHS; such as, people with different abilities, men in traditional female attire, and transgender students.

In addition to the school's director impassioned call for inclusion, the teachers and administrators act on this clarion call. They do so by not tolerating unkindness by their students against other students or the students on themselves. Instead, the teachers and administrators seek community rather than individualism and support of one another rather than competition with one another. Though CHS may appear to be a school devoted to the individual concept as it relates to self-expression, the school seeks unity and community through this idea of self-expression. This stands in contrast to a school that may try to build community through conformity. In short, the school's promotion of community through self-expression allows for the honoring of students like themselves, rather than honoring the students for some ideal representation of what society expects of its youth.

CHS furthers this sense of community by utilizing community resources in the area. Housing the local LGBTQ youth center within the school itself brings not only space for diversity to occur but also connects students to the larger community outside of the school's walls. The school also promotes an "ethic of caring" among its staff. Openly gay administrators feel safe to express who they are in the school. In other settings, this comfort level may have not been possible. Not only are these administrators role models for the LGBTQ students, but they also serve as role models for all students, usurping negative images that students may have about LGBTQ people from the media, religious organizations, family, and previous school experiences. The teachers feel protected by the school this allows teachers to tackle controversial topics without fear of backlash from the administrators. This is critical insofar as it allows them to, critically, address issues within their classrooms; the next topic I address in this section.

### **Critical inquiry**

Kumashiro (2009) notes, the result was not a student who learned the right things, but a student who both learned what mattered in school and society and unlearned or critically examined what was being learned, how it was being learned, and why it was being learned (p. 28). CHS teachers and administrators utilize a *Kumashirian* approach to education when teachers examine critically the role of the individual/community in today's world, the effect it has on marginalized populations, and how the process of marginalization operates, historically and in its contemporary iterations. The teachers, rather than policing language in an arbitrary manner to promote inclusion, the teachers spend time explaining the contentious nature of language, how it is socially construed, and the implications for those centered in a halcyonic haze of privilege and those left at the margins of society. This often requires teachers to go *off script* and explore topics outside the state standards and guidelines.

Because of this critical inquiry, students are able to have a deeper reading of the world and their place in it. Moreover, critical inquiry has the potential to lift students beyond mere objects of the "machine" (Savio, 1964) to active participants in changing the social body to a place of respect, diversity, and equality. This critical inquiry is a foundational piece to promoting social justice and agency.

### **Social justice**

By having a critical worldview, students are able to promote social justice within their own work. In the Pioneer project workshop, students take their critical knowledge and implement it in their work. This work, when shown to audiences, can transform the students as well as the audience members themselves. The social justice imperative at CHS is an important

aspect of CHS's model of inclusion. This aspect allows students to not only have knowledge of the world around them, but it also shows them as empowered beings that can create change in an effort to create a more just society for all; a worthy goal in the pursuit of a democratic citizenry.

Specifically, the Pioneer project allowed students to create their own stories and narratives as they related to social issues. The students did this by investigating their own role in the matrixes of power within society. By empowering students to investigate, their own social issues and how it has affected them, students are better able to relate to the topic resulting in work that was impactful for students and audience members. Tethered to this work, was research conducted by the students to provide a critically reading of the social body. The curriculum, writ large, includes a social justice imperative as well as a promotion of critical inquiry.

### **Curriculum**

The formal and informal moments of the curriculum at CHS seeks to move marginalized populations from the margins of education to the center of education. As mentioned previously, the inclusion of diverse populations does not simply call for the infusion of disparate groups; it calls for the critical reflection on the social construction of difference. In a formal classroom setting, this required teachers to go beyond the state-sanctioned curriculum to investigate topics of diversity on their own. Teachers had to do extra work including reading beyond the curriculum and creating lesson plans that would address the needs of all their students. This did not seem a hardship, as the teachers, I interviewed for this study had a passion for their fields, and are avid learners who embrace learning from a wide range of perspectives. As Robby an English teacher at CHS noted,

I like to know how people live because I don't think there is one right way to live...I just watch films, read about it, and I've always been an open person interested in the ideas of others. So, I think it's just an intrinsic thing it came from me quite frankly... I came to the conclusion that truth is perspective. And, if the truth is perspective...it's important that we see as many perspectives as possible (Teacher Interview, 3/5/12).

Teachers at CHS have a passion for their respective fields and often go beyond the official curriculum to ensure they are educating their students in a manner that is important to the students. As Lori reflected, the students run the school at CHS (Administration Interview, 3/9/12). While, perhaps a bit of hyperbole, this comment by the school's director does demonstrate the attention given to the students by teachers and administrators when making curricular decisions. Moreover, the teachers know they have the support of the administrators when making those decisions. In short, the administrators at CHS respect the teachers and their decisions, which provide them with a passion to pursue a just education for their students.

In addition to these formal moments in the curriculum, the school provides a wealth of educational experiences during informal moments at CHS to try to reach their students. These experiences include a GSA, the drag fashion show, guest speakers from diverse backgrounds, and workshops on issues of identity and social justice among many others. Not only do these informal moments provide a connection with the students, but it also allows teachers to pursue topics that they may not get to address in their regular classes. These formal and informal curricula practices strengthen the policies at CHS.

### **Policies**

Policies at CHS are straightforward in their meanings — no victimization of yourself or others, respect, community, the value in self-expression, academic achievement, and valuing

diversity. What is not as straightforward is how the school goes about ensuring that students and staff adhere to these policies. First, the school presents an enumerated no bullying policy to their students. An enumerated policy grounds these lofty ideas in concrete, real-life examples. This allows students and staff to know where the school stands on ensuring an equitable education for all. Without a clear understanding of this policy, students and teachers would be ambivalent in implementing and adhering to the policy itself. Without this form of policing, there would be no clear demarcation as to what is acceptable or not at CHS. If this was the only approach CHS took to creating an inclusive space for its students, it would be problematic. This type of policing needs to be married with strategies of resistance and queering. Otherwise, these policies would reify the existing binary of “us and them.”

Second, since, teachers, staff, and students clearly understand the scope of the policies at CHS, they are able to implement them in a timely manner. This lack of ambiguity of policy creates the possibility for action to ensure an inclusive educational experience for their students.

The school implements these policies by using strategies of policing, resistance, and queering. Policing strategies are not top-down, hierarchical directives from the administration; instead, policing occurs at multiple levels and in multiple ways. For example, there is self-policing, student-to-student policing, along with the more common teacher and administration policing. However, the teacher and administration policing do not occur within a vacuum. Instead, the policing by teachers and administration police through such practices as critical inquiry, an “ethic of caring,” and connecting policing with a social justice imperative.

Strategies of resistance promulgate policies as tools to ensure the school does not marginalize minority populations within the curriculum or the school itself. The strategy of resistance counters the normative gaze of dominant society by critically reflecting on the social processes that marginalize populations and by giving a voice to diverse populations within CHS.

Using the queer strategies to support the policies at CHS revolve around the practices of normative attributes of socialization within society. That is CHS queers identity and the matrixes of power relations that support a binary worldview. CHS seeks to achieve this through such practices as producing a drag fashion show that shows the gaps and fissures within this a “heterosexual matrix” (Butler, 1990). The drag fashion show demonstrates the performative aspect of identity and its fluid construction within society. Moreover, using queer strategies decenters the ideal student from that of a White, heterosexual, middle class, able-bodied male to a student that is marked by difference; albeit, a difference that is socially constructed.

In sum, implications for educators, students, and communities center on an educational experience that focuses on an “ethic of caring”, the promotion of critical inquiry, an imperative of social justice, a curriculum that challenges the practices of domination, and policies that favor inclusion over exclusion. Not only do these implications serve to empower the students and reach their full potential, but the implications also provide teachers with greater respect and trust; as well as, a greater demand to go beyond state-mandated guidelines. As noted earlier, these practices cannot only combat issues of homophobia, if enacted strategically; they can negotiate the larger issues of heteronormativity and homonormativity.

### **Conclusion**

Grinning from ear to ear, a parent of a student that attends the high school where I conducted my study tells me that the school is made up of “a bunch of misfits,” and is not that great —Parent Interview, 3/1/12

The director started CHS as a space that was inclusive and free of victimization for its students. Though no school is perfect, CHS has made considerable strides to create such a space. They made these strides by developing an ethos of equity and relentlessly adhering to the needs of that ethos in their policies and practices. The results of this study have shown with the use of queer theory and intersectionality that CHS builds a community of learners through the celebration of differences rather than demanding students conform to the values and demands of the dominant society. This is not to say that the dominant culture is not at play at CHS, it is. However, based on findings, the school seeks to allow the students “to acquire the rules of the law, the management techniques, and also the morality, the ethos, the practice of the self. That will allow [them] to play these games of power with as little domination as possible (Foucault, 1984/1997, p. 298).

The school attempts to allow the students to play these games of power by promoting critical inquiry. An inquiry that is positioned vis-à-vis strategies of policing, resistance and queering within the school. The practices include an "ethic of caring", the promotion of critical inquiry, an imperative of social justice, a curriculum that challenges the practices of domination, and policies that favor inclusion over exclusion. The "misfits" at CHS have found a space where they are free to create themselves and explore other aspects of the world without concern for their safety. They have built a community centered on respect and concern for each other rather than competition and a normalizing gaze often found in other schools. The "misfits" have built a space where being a "misfit" is honored and new knowledge can take root.

Moving forward, researchers may consider how location influences the various curricula choices, instructional strategies and policing occurs based on different locational factors such as rural and suburban, socioeconomic positions of the students, English learners, among other attributes of the students and the students' environment. A longitudinal study would be ideal to see what impact this type of inclusiveness has on students identities at various points throughout their lives.

#### **Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup>LGBTQ is used most often in this study. I am cognizant of the issues surrounding categories, but considering the topic of this paper, namely bullying in education and its engagement with “other” identities, it seemed more applicable than perhaps the more politically expedient term queer. Moreover, LGBTQ is inclusive of people that may not self-identify as queer; whereas, queer may not resonate with, or accurately reflect, people that identify as LGBT. Second, I use queer as an identity category in this study, but I also use it as a political construct

<sup>2</sup>At times throughout this paper I use the euphemism bullying due to its frequent use in modern educational discourse. However, victimization is a more apt word to describe the experiences many LGBTQ students have in a K-12 setting.

<sup>3</sup>Pseudonyms are used throughout the paper to protect the privacy of the research participants.

<sup>4</sup>“Others” and Queer: Usually, by “others” and/or queer, I am referring to “dykes, fags, bisexuals, radical feminists, and other subversive heterosexuals, transvestites, transsexuals, poor queers, Black queers, Asian-American queers, Latino queers, homos, drag queens, leather queens and dykes, muscle queens, lipstick lesbians, bull dykes, gay women” among other counter-normative individuals” (Rosenblum, 1994, p. 91).

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