Unexpected Bodies and Pleasures: Sexuality and Gender in Schools

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Abstract

In this article, I argue that schools are public spaces for the public they serve—the students of that school. Access to public space and the public forum is necessary for diverse groups to create justice in a pluralistic society (Jacobs, 1961; Young, 1990). This participatory action research project examined the language and behaviors that circulate in schools about sexuality and gender, and visualized the ways those discourses manifested in the spaces of schools and impacted bodies. To this end, I used a mapping exercise to allow the youth researchers to show how discourses of sexuality and gender appeared in their school setting and the ways they resisted the limitations of dominant gender and sexuality identities. Three major themes emerged upon describing and discussing the maps: school spaces are sexualized as well as gendered, spaces where sexuality and gender can be spoken allow students to examine their desires and pleasures, and adults can create a public forum for justice about sexuality and gender identity. Spatial studies such as this one give researchers access to new understandings of LGBTQ+ youth use of embodied and discursive resources to create spaces in schools in which to explore their identities and pleasures.

Keywords: LGBTQ+ youth; schools; public space; sexuality; gender

Introduction

This article explores the meanings of public spaces and public forums, in particular in the ways scholars have theorized that gender, sexuality, and safety are created or regulated in public spaces and public discourses. This frames the discussion of the spatial distribution and significance of sexuality and gender in maps that student researchers created of sexuality, gender, and gender transgressing behavior and discourses in their school buildings. Access to public space and the public forum is necessary for diverse groups to attain justice in a pluralistic society (Jacobs, 1961; Young, 1990). Hegemonic discourses have remained uncontested by denying certain bodies and voices access to public spaces (Katz, 2006; Spain, 1992). It is therefore important to examine not only the language and behaviors that circulate in schools about sexuality and gender, but also to visualize the ways the discourses manifest in the spaces of schools and impact the movement of bodies.

In a youth participatory action research (YPAR) group (Cammarota & Fine, 2008) with lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth, a spatial and conceptual mapping exercise (Low, 2000; Tuck

et al., 2009) allowed the youth researchers to show one another, and me, the ways the discourses we had talked about appeared in their school setting. Youth researchers were asked to draw and describe their "Gay School," or spaces in the school where sexuality and gender could be expressed in ways that did not conform to heterosexual or binary gender expectations. These maps took the form of outlines of rooms and floors, or sometimes isolated closets and bathrooms, with notations about bodies that inhabit and desires that could be spoken in those locations. Research questions that guided this inquiry were: a) What are the discourses of sexuality and gender that circulate in schools? and b) Do youth redeploy discourses in order to create spaces of resistance? Three major themes emerged upon describing the maps for one another and discussing as a group what we saw represented: school spaces are sexualized as well as gendered, spaces where sexuality and gender can be spoken allow students to examine their desires and pleasures, and adults can create a public forum for justice about sexuality and gender identity. In these maps the youth researchers and I began to see, in embodied ways, students' resistance to negative hegemonic discourses in schools, their strategic use of supports and role models, and the creative ways young people enact their desires in school spaces. In this paper I use lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and questioning plus (LGBTQ+) to designate a comprehensive community that the literature examines, unless a more specific group is being discussed. Although issues of gender and sexuality are not perfectly aligned, and the needs for trans students may not be the same as the needs for LGBQ students, because of the ways that youth in this project talked about gender as central to the way that they present themselves as non-heterosexual, the discussions are intertwined in this paper.

In the public spaces of schools, some discourses of heterosexuality are designated as age-appropriate and innocent (Lesko, 2001; Pascoe, 2007), and some discourses of sexuality and gender and gender expression, often including homosexuality and trans expressions, are considered inappropriate, dangerous, or off-topic, and so are censored (Fields, 2008). For example, Pascoe (2007) shows how teacher talk in the classroom often references heterosexual couples in both academic examples and informal bantering. On the other hand, states have enacted laws, called no-promo-homo laws, that interdict mentioning non-heterosexuality in classrooms, even sex education classrooms (McGovern, 2012). This censoring of discourse in the public space renders some bodies unspeakable, and therefore misunderstood (McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell, 2010), discriminated against and silenced in the public arena of the school community (Heck, Poteat, & Goodenow, 2016; Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016). Discrimination may result in punishment for public displays of affection and gender transgressions that become dress code violations. Students who protest discrimination are often blamed for their own victimization (Snapp, Hoenig, Fields, & Russell, 2015). Students also recognize that discourses circulating in school spaces about sexuality and gender may increase the likelihood of LGBTQ+ and gender non-conforming students becoming the target of bullying and violence (Goodenow, Watson, Adjei, Homma, & Saewyc, 2016). These discourses can have an inhibiting effect on LGBTQ+ youth participation in school spaces. In the next section, I situate this research in literature concerned with public space and the spaces of public schools.

Public Spaces and Schools as Public Space

The value of public spaces presented in social theory is in providing areas in which people from different social locations can gather together (Delaney, 2003; Jacobs, 1961) and ideas can circulate (Burrington, 1998; Katz, 2006; Young, 1990). These spaces are designed to offer

free, open access to everyone, without requiring an invitation, an entrance fee, a schedule, or an introduction (Young, 1990). All members of the community can access and use the space, and no groups' entrance is barred based on their group identity. Additionally, there is no required activity for using the space. For example, access is available to a park, even for people who are not playing basketball. In fact, many activities can take place simultaneously in the park. That is not to suggest that behavior is not controlled within the public space, indeed certain behaviors are discouraged, others are encouraged by the arrangement and messages of the space (Conlon, 2004). The public space user is interpellated by signage, lists of rules, unspoken etiquette transmitted by other users, and the presence of many other people with expectations of what will happen in the public space (Spain, 1992). These "eyes" (Delaney, 2003; Jacobs, 1961) on the public space are what make public spaces safe in large, urban areas, such as New York City.

Within public spaces, strangers may meet one another and share brief encounters of spontaneous help or friendliness which make the community feel less anonymous and isolating (Delaney, 2003). Delaney calls these exchanges "contact" moments, unplanned encounters that arise from the situation presented, and they are characterized by their lack of self-interest. In public spaces and in these contact moments, residents of a city may meet others who are not like them in terms of class, race, profession, ethnicity, religion, gender and sexuality, and have the opportunity to interact without prejudice. Although not all random encounters have such beneficent consequences, they offer the possibility of pleasures (Delaney, 2003; Young, 1990). They are vital to the project of living in multicultural areas and getting along, rather than retreating into closed enclaves of sameness (Ruddick, 1996).

Public spaces also serve as a forum for ideas. The ideal of the right of free speech guarantees the rights of the populace to hear ideas presented and to evaluate them in a public forum. Ideas that find believers or backers have the opportunity to become values, beliefs, and systems. Ideas that can be kept out of the public forum, isolated as fringe, private, or immoral, cannot receive a public hearing and remain silenced. Speakers of silenced topics must breach the rules of polite conversation, pushing forward their agenda against formidable, if unspoken, opposition (Burrington, 1998). Keeping certain ideas out of public space effectively isolates their speakers as extreme. The reasons articulated for the interdictions on speaking certain topics may be framed as less about keeping certain persons out of power, and more about appropriateness, however, "spatial segregation is one of the mechanisms by which a group with greater power can maintain its advantage over a group with less power" (Spain, 1992, p. 15). For example, by labeling homosexuality as always referring to sexual acts, discussions of homosexuality are often framed as inappropriate for school, especially among younger children (Boas, 2012). The issues may also be framed as a discussion about keeping irresponsible and dangerous bodies out of spaces. Communities often say that they wish to keep homosexuals away from children, to keep children safe from being recruited into an immoral lifestyle. These discourses that label conversations about or the bodily presence of LGBTQ+ people as dangerous further marginalize young people engaged in identifying their sexuality and gender.

Iris Marion Young (1990) advocated that public forums are required in order to allow dialogue on contentious issues. "In such public spaces people encounter other people, meanings, expressions, and issues which they may not understand or with which they do not identify" (p. 240). For Young, this constitutes the realm of politics, which must be available to all groups in order for society to work toward a form of justice that allows for differences among strangers. I use these ideas of public space, public forums, and politics to think about the ways students, teachers and administrators of various identities can exist together in schools and the kinds of

political activism and shared knowledge that must occur in order to create institutional or educational justice for all students. As spaces that engage in social as well as political structuring of society, schools are the public spaces in which LGBTQ+ youth contest the limitations on their speech and actions, to speak and perform their identities and their desires.

School as Public Space

School is not a public space in the strictest sense, but can function as a public space for its public, the students and teachers who belong to the school community. In this community forum, some interactions are scripted, through lesson plans and curricular goals, but some interactions, both in classrooms and in the more casual spaces of the school such as the cafeteria, the halls and after school clubs, allow for more spontaneous contact. In particular, public school spaces become places where students and teachers from various backgrounds and educational expectations come together to learn to work with one another. In highly tracked schools students may be kept mostly segregated by class or race during the curricular day, but may interact between classes, during lunch, or after school (Galletta & Cross Jr., 2007). In these moments schools can fulfill the function of teaching students to live in a diverse society.

Schools are thought of as incubators of culture (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), where students' sense of civic engagement and political involvement are learned (Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004; Rasmussen, 2006; Russell, 2002). In this structure, students learn to engage politically while they are in school (elementary, secondary and tertiary institutions), to petition for their rights, to argue their points, to understand the history and social structures of the culture and engage within them (Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004). This civic engagement encompasses persons engaged in the workings of the institutions that affect their lives, responsible to others in the community they belong to and active for rights and liberties of others and self (Noddings, 2013). This is a noble goal for education, and one that is not always or even often achieved, especially for poor students and students of color. However, imagining schools as a space that *should* be working to teach these skills and entitlements to students, it becomes necessary to create spaces in which LGBTQ+ youth and adults can "exist as part of the public landscape upon which citizenship is enacted, to circulate in public life freely and unmolested, and to be granted the same standing or status, recognition and respect as our peers" (Burrington, 1998, p. 129). As Burrington suggests in her analysis of the public discourse around student activism to start a gay-straight alliance in a Salt Lake City high school, students in the school and LGBTQ+ adults in the city were denied access to civic engagement and agency by being denied access to public life when they were constructed as different and dangerous. "Both access to public discourse and access to public spaces create the territory within which a political geography of citizenship can be written" (p. 130). Again, if we imagine that the role, called citizen by Burrington, should be equally available to all students in schools, then access to public discourse and public spaces must also be available to them.

If bodies are not allowed in spaces, either because of rules or because of harassing interactions, then the perspectives, knowledge, and views from people who inhabit those bodies are not allowed either. Using this framing, this project asked youth researchers, high school students, to document the spaces in their schools and students' uses of those spaces. It looks at the suppressed discourses and the promoted discourses, and the ways that students act to challenge and subvert the limitations placed on their identities within schools.

Gay Straight Alliances as Queer Space

Within schools gay-straight alliances (GSAs—also called gay-straight-trans alliances, GSTAs, or gender-sexuality alliances) may provide access to the public space for students who claim the identities represented by the GSA. Mayo (2004) finds in her analysis of the impacts of GSAs on both school cultures and student subjectivities that,

> …as they are working together, these students are more aware of how different identities potentially clash with one another. Additionally, as they face obstacles within the school setting, they become more aware of the political stakes in improving the school climate for others. Because these alliances require difference, they maintain their ties through an ethical curiosity, not only of what others who are different might be like, but what it might mean to be different than one is at the present. (pp. 27-28)

In her conception of the GSA's importance, she identifies several positive outcomes for both LGBTQ+ students and the school community. GSAs provide spaces in which students can organize for political activism within the school and their larger community for LGBTQ+ rights, and safe spaces in which they can challenge one another's definitions of LGBTQ+ identities and their stated political goals. In other words, these spaces provide opportunities for non-heterosexual or gender non-conforming students to speak to one another about the primacy of sexuality or gender or both in their own sense of subjectivity, and to work together toward political goals identified by the group—to present a united political front to the school and larger community. Mayo also describes the GSAs with which she worked as spaces of contested definitions of sexuality and gender, as well as other identifications. Students in these spaces ally across differences to find common political ground and define political goals that will create greater justice for their members in schools.

However, other researchers on GSAs have questioned the ability of these groups to engage with differences (McCready, 2004), and have also criticized the marginalization within the larger school community that GSAs sometimes represent (Rasmussen, 2006). Spaces in school may exclude LGBTQ+ students based on the assumptions that other students make about them. Also, students who are non-heterosexual and gender-nonconforming, but who do not conform to the standards of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer identities may be excluded from the spaces that are created by schools to protect them.

Race is another way that GSAs may divide rather than support students and advocate for them in schools. Although Mayo's research shows that students may become critical about racism and the work of race in schools when engaged in the work of the GSA, McCready (2004) points out that in schools with students from many racial backgrounds students of color may feel that belonging to a GSA would separate them from their racial identity group. For the students McCready interviewed, the space of the GSA was racialized as White and the spaces of color or Blackness were sexualized as heterosexual. Many students chose to belong in the heterosexual spaces of color, rather than in the White non-heterosexual spaces.

Although GSAs offer spaces for non-heterosexual bodies and gender non-conforming bodies, and offer support for LGBTQ+ students, they may not be equally available for all students who want to access them, and they may not challenge the hetero- and cis-sexism present in many other spaces in the school. They may function as a private space, in which members do not have a forum to speak publicly. This section has outlined the literature on public space, how

LGBTQ+ identities are allowed to be visible and spoken about, and how GSAs contribute to this function within schools. Next, I explain how queer theory helped the youth researchers and me reimagine the uses of spaces in schools.

Theoretical Reimaginings

Queer theory has been used in education research to counter these spatial enforcements that students may encounter in schools. One argument against spatial segregation of LGBTQ+ students is that it requires an essential definition of sexuality for students. In other words, essentialist identity politics has at its roots an assumption that students who are LGBTQ+ are different in a way that they cannot change—they are born that way or otherwise essentially gay and Other (Rasmussen, 2004). The qualification for protection by schools from harassment, bullying and name-calling often requires that students must claim the naturalness of their queerness (Rasmussen, 2006). Schools reflect the belief that young people do not have sexual subjectivity, dismissing student desires as either inappropriate displays of sexuality or inevitable and something that the student cannot help being. However, it is possible to imagine heterotopic spaces as "a place where the subversion of normalization can occur" (Burrington, 1998, p. 130). This is how Mayo (2004) imagines the political work of GSAs as well, as places where students can form alliances regardless of their exact location on sexuality or gender continua, or even if they refuse to locate themselves, to ask questions about the intersections of identity and work to make schools more welcoming to all students. Burrington (1998) reminds us, as well,

> It is one thing for marginalized groups to fashion a space in the world in which to empower themselves and create a sense of community together, but it is quite another for the marginalized to be forced into the periphery of public life. (p. 130)

Youth may counter these marginalizations through organizing and asking to be included and accepted, but they may also subvert the norms and work to upset the expectations around sexuality and gender. Negative stereotypes or images that adhere to youth in some settings are simultaneously countered, resisted, and reformed by youth in their self-understandings and identifications (Kehily & Nayak, 1996; Nayak & Kehily, 2014). As a group, the youth researchers and I kept this in mind as we read the maps of school spaces created by the youth researchers. We also remembered that LGBTQ+ students must be served by the school in some way, because they cannot *be* otherwise (Butler, 2004), meaning they must be recognized as legitimate students and eligible actors in the political landscape of the school.

Methodology

This qualitative youth participatory action research project asked youth to examine the experience of being lesbian, gay, and bisexual, and sometimes gender nonconforming, within their New York City high schools. I recruited youth to participate through word-of-mouth by reaching out to New York City librarians, youth education and leadership program mentors, and other adults working with LGBTQ+ youth and distributing a recruitment flyer to them. Youth then contacted me, filled out an application, provided assent and got parental consent, and began coming to weekly meetings. In one case I met with a parent before the young person was allowed to attend.

Context

The Resisting Regulation Research Group met for one year to document and analyze the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and questioning youth in New York City high schools. I was a graduate student who identifies as a White lesbian. I was the principal investigator on the project, and I also secured the funding for the group, and provided research methodological expertise, and connections to agencies and teachers interested in making schools more welcoming for LGBTQ+ youth. At the time the eight youth researchers identified as two gay boys, two lesbians, three bisexual girls, and one bisexual boy. None of the participants were trans. Racially, ethnically, or culturally they claimed Afghan, African, African American and Brazilian, Barbadian, Dominican and French Canadian, Haitian, Puerto Rican, and White as identifying labels. Socioeconomically, they came from poor to middle class homes. They all lived in New York City, and six attended NYC public schools. One student attended a Catholic school, and one a private school. Research questions that guided this inquiry were: a) What are the discourses of sexuality and gender that circulate in schools? and b) Do youth redeploy discourses in order to create spaces of resistance? This paper documents the spaces of resistance that youth described in their schools, and the ways that they were invited or able to inhabit those spaces.

Mapping Spaces as Method

The mapping exercise was completed with the youth researchers after working together for five months, participating in research meetings, discussing social theories, and conducting data gathering with other teens. Five youth researchers completed maps, and all five of the maps are presented in this essay. Creating maps of the school spaces in which members of the research team existed daily excited the researchers from the beginning. Because they all attended different schools, they connected strongly with the idea of visually showing one another what their schools were like, as a contrast to the writing, reading, and talking we had done during the first several months. I introduced the idea of mapping by describing the identity maps students had made to describe their identity as Muslim-Americans (Fine & Sirin, 2007; Zaal, Salah, & Fine, 2007), mapping of the central square to understand the ways urban residents use public spaces (Low, 2000), and educational maps (Tuck et al., 2009). We were also inspired by work done by Hersker and Leap (1996), in which researchers asked gay men in Washington D.C. to map the "gay city" by showing the routes that took them to important gay landmarks and community events and Patricia Krueger-Henney's mapping of the school-prison nexus (Krueger, 2010).

The youth researchers were very excited to show one another where they sat, ate, made out, flirted, felt good, hid, found time to talk and felt uneasy in their schools. They also thought about their movements through the school and talked to one another about how they navigated the different spaces. Rather than draw maps at the beginning, we decided to save it until the end of the process—in this way we would work to identify and classify the discourses, then, with them in mind, the youth researchers could draw more detailed visual representations of the schools. The maps created a more concrete representation of the discourses circulating in the schools, the locations for freedom and the locations of danger in the schools, and provided a new lens through which we could see the material impact of these discourses on the bodies of students. They also provide a lens for us to examine the effectiveness of policies and their enactment in spaces in order to provide emotional and physical safety for students.

The youth researchers and I decided the drawings would represent the "Gay School," or spaces in the school where sexuality and gender could be expressed in ways that did not conform to heterosexual or binary gender expectations as determined by adolescent peer culture and popular media that typically dominated their school spaces. Although gender transgression is not necessarily non-heterosexual, and the boundaries of sexuality and gender identity or expression do not fully overlap, youth researchers felt that gender boundary-pushing, such as girls wearing clothing designated as for boys, or boys wearing makeup, constituted part of what identified some students in their schools as non-heterosexual. Because of the ways that they played with gender and assessed others on their gender presentation, they thought spaces that allowed gender transgression were important in their schools.

Each youth researcher was given a large sheet of paper and a set of markers, a pencil, and pen. No code was established before the drawing began, in part because we thought that the experiences and discourses at the different schools would be diverse enough that we should not standardize the representation. Youth researchers drew pictures of hallways, classrooms, bathrooms, stairs, closets, locker rooms, auditoriums, and entrances and exits. Within these spaces students marked spaces where their own sexuality and gender identity found expression and affirmation, and where they noticed others demonstrating expressions of non-heterosexual and gender-expanding identities. Youth researchers then narrated the maps to the rest of the research group, and told how the discourses in the spaces affected their bodily movements through and within the school. Below I describe the maps and discuss the meanings that the youth researchers and I made of these representations.

"Gay School" Maps

In this section I will narrate the drawings and labels in the photographs of each of the maps and then "read" them as the youth researchers and I analyzed them together in our research meetings. This will give the full context of the maps as they were described by their creators and discussed in our analysis meetings. In the next section, I will elaborate on the themes found across the maps about school spaces, sex in schools, and the roles of adults in schools to teach about sexuality, gender, relationships and identity and connect these with other data.

Figure 5.1: My Gay School by Sally

Narration of Sally's Map

The picture shows three floors of a school with a student standing outside. Sally, the bisexual girl student is labeled "Me" and "Only pro-gay outside of school." Inside school, she has labeled the security guards, a security desk, a metal detector, the main office and auditorium. The security guards are labeled, "angry security guards" and "no gay 4 u." On the second floor, the cafeteria takes up the right end, the counselors and C staircase are in the middle and "My dance class" is at the left end. The cafeteria says "no gay" but that has been crossed out and replaced with "neutral." A note has been added that clarifies that students "make fun of gay people" here. In the dance class the student is smiling. On the third floor, Sally show us three classes, "My Art Class" with an "angry art teacher," "My History Class" with an "angry history teacher" and the admonition, "Don't be gay." Past "Other random classes that don't include me" she shows "My French Class."

Analytic Discussion of Sally's Map

The drawing first looks very chaotic, filled with overlapping colors, big writing, hallways headed off in several directions and many teachers marked as angry. In fact, Sally's school is very chaotic and she does not feel that she fits in it very well. She identifies as bisexual and outside of school is very vocal about her identity. She almost always dresses in very feminine clothing, with makeup and her hair done, but she makes a point of letting people know that she is not heterosexual. She complains about the burden of being read as a straight girl. In school, however, this misperception serves her. Sally does not feel safe being known as bisexual at school, even though her school, like many others, allows for tacit acceptance of bisexual girls as long as they date boys at school. In her school, Sally allows herself to be read as heterosexual in order to avoid the exoticizing gaze that would single her out as a "freaky" girl if her bisexuality were known. She feels because of her small size and the lack of support system in her school – she is new there and doesn't have a large group of friends—she would be exposing herself to too much attention. The chaos of the large school, with a sometimes violent reputation, makes her wary, too. She has not identified any teacher or principal who would stick up for her if she felt herself in danger due to sexual harassment or heterosexist verbal or physical violence. She does not see any LGBTQ+ roles models among her teachers, and hears some of them participate in anti-LGBTQ+ slurs and jokes.

Figure 5.2: My Gay School by Mikey

Narration of Mikey's Map

Mikey has identified only areas in his school where gender and sexuality are noted or contested. On the right side he marked his English teacher's classroom. It is labeled "Teacher help start GSA." Lower, he labeled the Principal/Dean's office, depicted with smiling faces. Other classrooms, the hallway and stairs, are not labeled. On the other side of the map, Mikey has labeled the cafeteria and the gym. In his school, these rooms are on another floor. There are no notes on the cafeteria, but in the gym, Mikey has noted, "Looking at other boys in locker room is GAY," "Not playing sports is GAY," "GAY is not good," "If a girl plays sports she's a LESBIAN." At the entrance to the school, Mikey has labeled the map, "Pass GO. Collect $200." Outside of the gym, between it and the cafeteria, are the words, "Go to jail. Do not pass Go. Do not collect $200."

Analytic Discussion of Mikey's Map

Mikey labeled only rooms where he feels comfortable, or where gender and sexuality are at the forefront of conversations. The English teacher's classroom is an important site of contestation because she helped start the GSA last year, and even though it was not successful, she remains a source of support for non-heterosexual and gender non-conforming students. The dean is very supportive of Mikey, and takes time to recognize him and his gay identity. She comments on his clothing, eyeliner and hairstyles, letting him know that he is seen in the school by an adult figure in a positive way. Rather than just tolerating him, she actually accepts him on the terms in which he presents himself.

The gym represents the most overtly gendered and sexualized space in Mikey's school. Here boys openly taunt one another with words like "fag," "homo" and "bitch." Boys police one another's gaze, assuming attraction and even sexual overtures from "fags" if gazes linger too long on another's body. This is the location where fights might start, when other boys' harassing language leads Mikey or another gay boy to retaliate with words or fists. Gender is regulated very strictly in this gym, whether by other students or by the teachers. Both girls and boys are expected to fulfill gendered roles by not playing or playing sports.

Mikey reported that the school climate is not always as hostile as the locker room portrayal above. He describes an LGBTQ+ student's experiences in his school as "depending on the day you get there." Some days the student body seems indifferent or even welcoming of him and the small group of students who identify as non-heterosexual or gender non-conforming. The LGBTQ+ students are not outcasts in the school, and the group of harassers may be as small as the group of students who regularly gets harassed. However, some days there is outright bigotry about sexual and gender conformity, and Mikey, as well as other LGBTQ+ students, must measure the climate each day when they arrive at school, monitoring the safety situation for themselves and their friends.
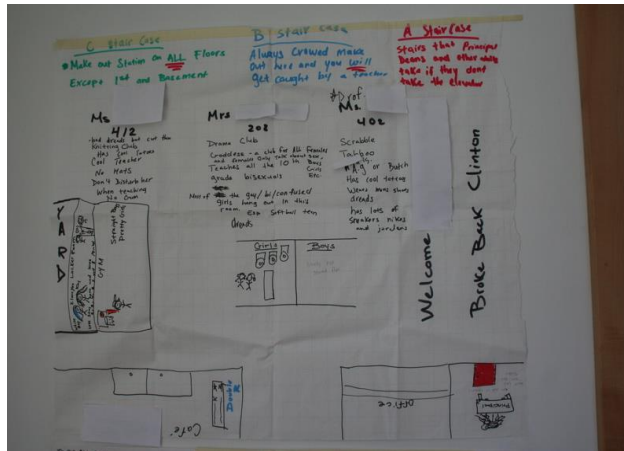
Figure 5.3: Welcome to Broke Back Clinton by Sankofa

Narration of Sankofa's Map

Sankofa drew some of the spaces of her school, but uses much of her map space to detail the people and uses of the spaces. On the right side of the map she welcomes the viewers to her school, which she and her friends call Broke Back Clinton. At the top of the map she tells us about each of the staircases in the small school—A Staircase, B Staircase, and C Staircase. A Staircase is the "stairs that the Principal, other Deans and other adults take when they do not take the elevator." B Staircase is "always crowded—make out here and you *will* get caught by a teacher." C Staircase is a "make out station on *all* floors except 1st and Basement." The center of the map shows the girls' bathroom and the boys' bathroom. In the girls' bathroom two girls are shown kissing. The boys' bathroom is labeled "smelly pee-stained floor." On the left side of the map are the gym, locker rooms, and yard. In the gym are "straight boys and pretty girls" and a basketball hoop. Off to the side of the gym are a "white boy" and a girl. The boy says, "I love you Kay. Let's stay here and kiss 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 period." In the girls' locker room girls are shown kissing. At the bottom of the map are the cafeteria and the principal's office. In the cafeteria Sankofa shows the table where she and her friends sit. The principal's office is labeled "not safe in general – don't get your hat taken." Above the girls' and boys' bathrooms in the center of the map Sankofa lists three women teachers in the school—Ms. 412, Mrs. 208 and Prof. 402.

- Ms. 412 "had dreads but cut them, [started a] knitting club, has cool tattoos, [is a] cool teacher, no hats, don't disturb her when teaching, no gum."
- Mrs. 208 is in charge of the "drama club and Goddess—a club for all females and females only. Talk about sex, boys, girls, etc." She "teaches all the 10th grade [English]." "Most of the gay/bi/confused girls hang out in this room, especially the softball team." She wears dreads.
- Prof. 402 has "Scrabble, Taboo" in her room for students to play. She is "AG or butch, has cool tattoos, wears men's shoes, dreads, has lots of sneakers, Nikes, and Jordans."

Analytic Discussion of Sankofa's Map

Sankofa and her friends call the school Broke Back Clinton for the perception among the students that there are so many lesbian, bisexual and curious or questioning girl students who attend. Girls can be seen kissing in several of the more hidden, or students-only, spaces in the school, such as the bathroom and locker room. However, gender norms may be transgressed in any area of the school, publicly or privately. Sankofa's group, made up of AG girls,[1] are called the Double Rs—for Riding Rainbows, a group name they chose for themselves that references the popular use of rainbows to signify gayness. She and her friends are out AGs who get lots of attention from the bisexual, curious and questioning girls, and who are very popular with other students and with teachers.

Gender performance is part of Sankofa's narrative, and she details butch presentation by teachers as well as other students. These performances are important ways that students recognize one another as non-heterosexual, and can serve as the announcement that someone is newly identifying as lesbian. Students recognize gender fluidity in one another and understand that there is pressure to be legible as lesbian (Martin, 1996), but that not all lesbian students will continue to present as butch. This visibility, however, makes the non-heterosexual presence at the school noticeable to all students.

The focus of teachers and students in this school is less about heterosexism and more about sexism and girls' empowerment. In addition, most girls feel supported by these three teachers, who demonstrate a variety of gender expressions. The teachers' gender transgressing dress and expressed out sexuality in the case of Prof. 402 are welcoming signals for girls who dress in gender non-conforming ways and have non-heterosexual sexual identities. The fact that these teachers are African-American, and most of the students are people of color (as is typical in New York City high schools) helps students reconcile their sexuality, gender expression, and racial belonging.

Sankofa's presentation confirms that sexual acts, where they happen in the school, need to be hidden from teachers eyes no matter who is participating. Teachers address sexuality in many forms, and although there are teachers who openly disapprove of non-heterosexual sexuality, their voices do not dominate the spaces.
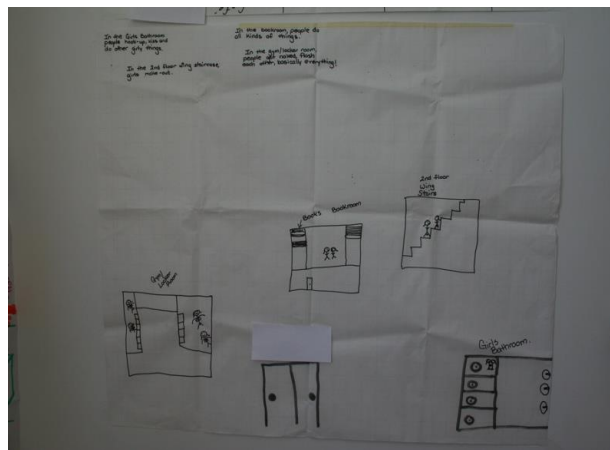

Figure 5.4: Untitled by Tayla

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1. AG is short for aggressive, a term used by butch, or more masculine presenting, lesbians in some communities of color. AG was the term used by Sankofa, for her teacher and for herself.

Narration of Tayla's Map

Tayla's map shows the front doors of the school, the girls' locker room, the bookroom, the second floor wing stairs and the girls' bathroom. In each of these enclosed spaces, girls are shown kissing one another. The rest of the space is left empty, except for the description she provides at the top. Tayla wrote, at the top of her map, "In the girls' bathroom people hook-up, kiss, and do other girly things." "In the 2nd floor wing staircase, girls make-out." "In the bookroom, people do all kinds of things." In the gym/locker room, people get naked, flash each other, basically everything!"

Analytic Discussion of Tayla's Map

Tayla is a bisexual girl who attends an all-girl Catholic school. In her map of the sexual and gendered spaces of school, she showed only enclosed spaces where students escape the eyes of the adults. In this school, Tayla tells that even though many of the girls are experimenting sexually with one another, very few girls claim the identity labels bisexual or lesbian, and her fellow students may be very discriminatory about girls who have claimed these labels. Even from fellow students, with all of the sexual activity portrayed here and all of the bi-curiosity in the school, there is much disapproval of the students who claim to be lesbian or bisexual, rather than just experimenting or fooling around. Girls "fool around" with other girls, but do not assume that their sexual experimentation means anything about them or that it would put them in the same category as the morally suspicious girls who claim non-heterosexuality. In this school, prevalent attitudes define homosexuality as a sin, say that gay people will not go to heaven, and claim that young women should not be sexual beings. Tayla said, "They hate you if you gay." Conversations in this school about sexuality and gender are very traditional. Gender roles for girls are expected to conform to very traditionally feminine. No teacher or adult in the school gives recognition to girls' sexual experimentation except to condemn it. Homosexuality and gender nonconformity are not up for discussion in classes, and no sex education beyond abstinence as the only choice is offered.

Figure 5.5: Yajaira's High School

Narration of Yajaira's Map

Yajaira's school shows two hallways, one marked blue and one marked red. The key she created for the map shows that green areas are places it's "okay to be gay," blue places "hell no" one cannot show non-conforming gender or sexuality there, and red means it's "sometimes okay." The hallway on the left of the map is colored blue, where one teacher's room in the corner and the small main office are also blue. The other hallway is marked in red for "sometimes okay." Other spaces marked red include the principal's office, the computer lab, 9th grade science and 10th grade math. Green spaces, or places where it is "okay to be gay" include: the stairways, the girls' bathroom, Yajaira's advisory, the elevator, the art room, and the school store.

Analytic Discussion of Yajaira's Map

Yajaira's school, although full of color like Sally's, does not exhibit the same chaos. Yajaira is able to clearly locate spaces in her school where she feels comfortable and finds support and where she does not. The discourses and contests in this school are overt rather than covert. Adrienne, the teacher in the blue corner, is very disapproving of the gay students in the school, and she will "make a scene" if she catches two girls kissing or two boys holding hands in that hallway. Red spaces show where students find at least somewhat supportive teachers or the principal, and where other students' language and behavior toward LGBTQ+ students will be monitored and regulated.

In green spaces, students feel free to show their affection for their same-gender girlfriend or boyfriend by holding hands and kissing. The teachers in these spaces are known by the students to be gay or lesbian or allies, and their openness in talking with the students about the relationship choices they make creates an atmosphere in which students enjoy discussing their personal decisions within the context of national and community debates about sexuality and gender expression.

Some of these spaces are "student only" spaces, like the girls' bathroom and the stairways. In these spaces, out of the eyes of teachers, students sometimes perform sexual activities beyond hand-holding and kissing. However, these activities are not isolated in private spaces in the same way in this school as they are in the previous school. At Yajaira's school, students know they can go to other students or a teacher for advice or help if the situation feels out of their control. Teachers have intervened for students being harassed in the school, and the principal has also made a public statement to the school community that he would not tolerate students exhibiting bias toward one another in the school. Yajaira reports on the principal's interactions with a student, Melvin, who was spreading rumors about Yajaira and her girlfriend last year,

> No, he had a talk with him. And then, I guess Melvin told [other students]…" Oh, yeah, they took me in the office and then [the principal] said this and that, this and that." [The principal] was gonna suspend him, cause he felt that you shouldn't have to be in the school if you feel like…We shouldn't have to be in the school like trying to hide your identity, basically.

The principal supported the assertion that the public forum of school belonged to LGBTQ+ students' as much as it belonged to the harassers, and therefore protected their right to exist and speak in the public spaces of the school.

Where Our Maps Lead Us

Students resist the limiting identities endorsed and ascribed by schools in many ways. In terms of sexuality and gender identity, they resist normative categories with the presence of their bodies that transgress, overlap, and spill outside the lines of categories that are approved of or taught about. The maps above demonstrate the ways that young people find spaces of freedom and room to explore relationships, bodies, and pleasures at school.

Sex in School Spaces

Sex happens in school spaces. Since at least the turn of the twentieth century, schools have been sites of regulation of sexuality and gender expression among students (Lesko, 2001). In social activities, classes on hygiene, and later, sex education classes, students have been encouraged to engage in appropriate dating activities that will lead to socially sanctioned marriages and children, as a part of their healthy sexual identity construction (Blount, 2005; Luschen & Bogad, 2003; Zimmerman, 2002). "It has been well-documented that sex, though only one facet of social life, is crucial in the construction of identity" (Hubbard, 2002, p. 365). Schools are recognized by young people and adults as places where teens experience attractions, experiment with flirting, acknowledge desires in themselves and others, and begin dating.

Sexual activities often considered age-appropriate for adolescents, such as flirting, holding hands, kissing, and hugging between youth of the opposite gender may be allowed or encouraged in school spaces or in after-school, school-based social activities. However, these same activities may not be allowed between students of the same gender, or may or may not be allowed based on the religious and cultural values of the community. Also, other sexual activities are forbidden in schools and often considered inappropriate among adolescents, such as touching of one another's genitals, arousing one another to the point of orgasm, oral sex, intercourse, and masturbation. These sexual activities are considered private, and young people who engage in them, either in schools or outside of schools, are often labeled immoral, psychologically damaged, physically at-risk, or at least misbehaving (Tolman, 1994, 2006; Tolman, Striepe, & Harmon, 2003).

From the maps we can see that sexual behavior often happens in schools where students can steal a moment of privacy within the public spaces of the school building. Adolescents often have very little private space or time they can claim, and so carve privacy out of public spaces – in cars, in parks, in restrooms and in school stairwells and closets. In the schools depicted in the maps, students have found privacy for sexual exploration in stairwells, under the bleachers in the gym, in the locker rooms, in the bathrooms, in the book room, and in the school store (a large closet out of which school supplies are sold). In these spaces, consensual sexual activities – mostly kissing and some touching—happen, and these private spaces in public provide opportunities for young people to explore the boundaries of their desires. In gender segregated spaces, for example, girls experiment with their desire for and desirability to other girls, when they flash one another, kiss and flirt in the girls' locker room and bathroom, or in the all-girls school. Girls and boys also may kiss in the public spaces of the school.

Non-consensual sexual activity also happens in school spaces, though, and often in the public spaces. These activities are not always noted or responded to by teachers. Students reported regular touching, commenting on and suggestion of sex activities between girls and boys as a regular part of the passing periods in the school hallways. Sometimes teachers, security

guards, and other adults participate in the sexualized talk aimed at girl students (Krueger-Henney, 2013). This sexual activity is seen as normal, expected and what girls, or boys who are viewed as gay or not masculine enough, just have to deal with on the streets and also within the public spaces of the school building (Pascoe, 2007). Heteronormativity allows for the sexualized behavior of straight boys toward girls, especially where the boys are not otherwise Othered, or racialized as different.

In her "normative ideal of city life," Young (1990) suggests that public spaces offer four virtues of social relations, including "social differentiation without exclusion," "variety," "eroticism," and "publicity" (pp. 238-240). The erotic is defined "in the wide sense of an attraction to the other, the pleasure and excitement of being drawn out of one's secure routine to encounter the novel, strange, and surprising" (p. 239). This element of the erotic also exists in schools, where students meet others different from themselves, who come from different neighborhoods and have different backgrounds. In schools, students can explore many pleasures, including the new pleasures of sexual desire and desirability. These pleasures are not limited to the sexual, however, and students of all sexual identities may also enjoy the pleasures of gender expression, social interactions, academic engagement, and many others as they are subjected to and also resist the discourses of adolescence (Foucault, 1978; McWhorter, 1999).

Spaces in which to Explore Desires and Pleasures

Two maps stand out as representing schools where sexuality and gender can be and are spoken about. Sexuality and gender become part of the public forum in Yajaira's and Sankofa's schools where sexism, discrimination, intersectionality of identities, and safety in relationships are topics that students engage. In Sankofa's school, the Double Rs claim space in the cafeteria, they flirt with girls who show interest in the gender expression and sexual experiences they claim, and they find older students at their school who recognize them and mentor them through the coming-out process as they name their sexuality and gender expression. These spaces at Sankofa's school provide guidance for younger or less experienced girls who express a desire to date a girl or dress in a non-feminine way in which they find a supportive community and positive feedback for their choices.

Students also offer one another an education in the politics and history of the social category homosexuality. Students in Sankofa's school engage in political and historical discussions of race and class groups in the United States and in New York City. They actively pursue academic and leadership programs that focus on issues of gender inequalities and social revolutions. Within this setting, students feel empowered to ask for their rights to present their identities in school and to challenge normative practices and policies. Sankofa chose for her English final research paper the place of homosexuality in the Black community. Although her English teacher did not agree with Sankofa's argument that the discrimination non-heterosexual identified people face is equal to racial discrimination, Sankofa pursued her line of argument and drew on her experiences as an activist in other settings to educate herself and other students about the history of sexual identity categories and their intersections with racial identity categories.

In Yajaira's school, students know their rights to exist in the spaces of the school and so feel empowered to claim their spaces. Although last year the school was a much less friendly social climate for LGBTQ+ youth, and some students were ridiculed and told they were "disgusting" for being suspected of or claiming LGBTQ+ identities, the situation changed dramatically in the past year. Several students spoke up and initiated a Diversity Club. The group meets

weekly during lunch and loosely follows a discussion of topics brainstormed by the students. Teachers were enlisted as sponsors for the club, but the agenda is guided by the interests and needs of the student members. LGBTQ+ students also complained to the principal about experiencing harassment from a particular group of other students. The LGBTQ+ students' demand for redress for the ostracizing moves of their harassers brought a response from the principal, which reinforced the LGBTQ+ students' feeling of belonging and political power within the school community. Rather than organizing only around identity, students organized around a precipitating injustice to demand justice for themselves and their peers. Students in Sankofa's and Yajaira's schools changed the discourse about LGBTQ+ youth, from problem or disruption in academic spaces to an important addition (Nayak & Kehily, 2014). LGBTQ+ students claim their identities in these schools as positive attributes that give them insights into social justice and provide commonalities around which they can organize and demand safer, more inclusive school spaces.

Sally and Mikey do not encounter these supports in their schools, and seek outside of school for information, community, and political agency. Mikey finds recognition for his gender expression and sexuality from the dean, but it does not translate into spaces in which students can challenge heteronormativity in the school community. Instead, he searches in the public library and online for stories, both fiction and nonfiction, that resonate with the way he understands his identity and help him define the communities that he wants to align himself with. Likewise, he and Sally find others who share their ideas and support their identities in online communities. Sally in particular searches for essays, stories and other texts that explore the meaning of bisexuality and uses her own writing to engage the ideas she finds. She actively struggles with definitions of bisexuality that demean it in relation to gay or lesbian identities and construe bisexuals as confused or in transition. Mikey and Sally, already friends outside the research team, support one another in their explorations of what it means to claim a gay or bisexual identity, who they want to be within that identity, and how they will express it.

Teachers and Spaces in Schools

The youth researchers identified, where available, teachers who recognized the issues important in the lives of students and educated students to be critical thinkers about gender roles, sexual behavior, racism and culture. The critical nature of classroom and casual discussions in the schools makes space for students to introduce questions about how sexuality and gender expression fit into the school community's discussions of identity and justice. Spaces in the school where students' questions can be asked and answered in a respectful way invite students to initiate discussions of ethical behavior and practical concern. Teachers' classrooms in which non-heterosexual and gender non-conforming bodies are welcomed and not scrutinized send powerful messages that these bodies are a legitimate part of the school community and have as much right to be within the space and to advocate politically as any student. This is aided by the inclusion and participation that adults and other students expect from non-heterosexual and gender non-conforming students, who are viewed in these spaces as belonging to many interest groups, not just those related to sexuality and gender expression. Students are viewed as having complex identities not limited to "victim," or "pathological." Teachers' bodies that represent non-normative gender expressions or signal non-heterosexuality also visually represent that those identities have authority and voice in the school. Similar to the discourse-changing work done by student groups, LGBTQ+ teacher bodies challenge discourses that describe queer as

dangerous in schools, and help to define positive contributions of LGBTQ+ people (Nayak & Kehily, 2014).

Another ideal of public life offered by Young (1990) is "social differentiation without exclusion…[in which] groups will differentiate by affinities but the borders will be undecidable, and there will be much overlap and intermingling" (pp. 246-247). Birden (2005) described a school using Young's structure for affinity grouping in schools for sexual identity organizing, and suggests that Young's ideal offers groups within schools opportunities to organize to make changes without claiming an essential or permanent identity or affiliation. The groups can be contingent and local, created in response to the needs of a group of students or an event that happens during a school year. Having groups with porous boundaries, such as the groups of girls that hang out in Ms. 208's room (Sankofa's map) without having to declare a sexual identity, but where issues of sexuality and gender get discussed, helps create the opportunities for the group to rally to respond if issues arise about sexuality or gender identity in the school.

Likewise, in Yajaira's school, a group called the Diversity Club has formed. In addition to the advisories, where students are assigned to teachers for academic and social advising all school year, the Diversity Club offers students a chance to particularly discuss issues about identity and discrimination. It has been used to talk about incidents of racism and sexism, and is also the space in which LGBTQ+ students come to assert new identities and get support for speaking their identity publicly in school and outside of school. Because the group focuses broadly on diversity, students feel free to bring their whole selves, not just sexuality or gender identity to the group, and they educate one another about many issues of diversity, making them ready to respond politically to any discrimination that might arise in the school.

Social theorists describe how hegemonic discourses remain uncontested by denying certain bodies and voices access to public spaces (Katz, 2006; Spain, 1992). It is therefore important to examine not only the language and behaviors that circulate in schools about sexuality and gender, but also to visualize the ways the discourses manifest in the spaces of schools and impact the movement of bodies. Mapping allows LGBTQ+ youth to visually represent their bodily existence in schools. Examining spaces through mapping allows students to explore the possibilities for public expressions of their identities within these "public spaces" or social spaces that exist in schools. The youth researchers and I were able to understand the moves youth make to resist dominant discourses or narratives about sexuality and gender identity in schools.

Conclusion

This project asked young LGBTQ+ people about the discourses circulating in the school about sexuality and gender identities, and the ways that students act to challenge and subvert the limitations placed on their identities within schools. In a sexually just education, sexuality would not be impelled to assimilate to heterosexist norms, nor would non-heterosexual students have to renounce sexual behaviors (Rasmussen, 2006). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ+) student relationships would not necessarily have to follow the dating/relationship/prom model of their heterosexual norms (Lesko, 2001). Trans students would not be required to subscribe to one or the other of the two binary genders, but would be allowed to fashion their gendered bodies as they feel they should. LGBTQ+ students would not become only gay or trans, to the exclusion of their racial, gender, ethnic, religious or class identities. A queer lens would advocate for an understanding of sexuality outside of the normative, romance-

to-marriage-for-life paradigm (McWhorter, 1999). It would advocate an understanding of sexuality and gender expression as always contingent and in the process of forming, within relations with others (Butler, 2004). It would also disrupt the formal sexuality education model currently in place that frequently implicitly or explicitly positions girls as victims of sexual violence and boys as sexual conquerors (Fields, 2008; Fine & McClelland, 2006; Tolman, 2006). It would create possibilities for different sexual subjectivities regardless of one's sexual desires or partners.

This queered notion of sexuality and gender offers an opportunity for all students to interact with others different from themselves, and with ideas that may be strange or unknown to them. As public spaces for students who attend them, schools also serve as a forum for ideas. As noted previously, ideas that find believers or backers have the opportunity to become values, beliefs, and systems. Ideas that can be kept out of the public forum, isolated as fringe, private, or immoral, cannot receive a public hearing and remain silenced. LGBTQ+ youth in schools must sometimes breach the rules of polite conversation, advocating for recognition and against formidable, if unspoken, opposition (Burrington, 1998). This is the only option, because keeping certain ideas out of public space effectively isolates their speakers as extreme (Young, 1990).

Sexuality and gender expression are elements of young people's subjectivity. Although they are formed within a historical moment and a social setting, they are still expressions of selfhood and freedom, and are explorations of young people's interactions with others and with the world. Schools provide social locations in which young people meet one another and recognize their attractions. This has long been supported as an activity of schools for heterosexuality (Lesko, 2001). Schools have operated as locations to reproduce normative masculinity and femininity, often in the name of community or family values (Lugg, 2015). For example, schools may line students up by gender in the hallways in order to keep girls safe, have gendered bathrooms and locker rooms that assume easily recognizable bodily differences between boys and girls, or teach science curricula that discuss biology with male and female as binary gendered categories, without addressing other gender possibilities in humans or other animals. Even school policy language on forms that addresses children's caretakers as "mom and dad" assume "natural" gender roles that may not be relevant. Normative masculinity and femininity are taught as binary categories, naturally existing in nature, and historically unchanging or evolving. The social categories of gender are assumed in much of elementary and secondary policy, curriculum content, pedagogy and interpersonal relationships to be based in immutable natural laws.

Through their explanations of their maps, youth researchers demonstrate the ways teachers can help students think critically about categories, and who gets to belong to them and who does not. Schools could become a site of discussion about the ways people are divided up, the definition of categories and the historical and cultural contingency of those categories. Sex education classes could also provide opportunities for students to discuss sexual ideas before acting on them and a place to think about the ethics of being in relationships with one another. Students perceive health education to contribute to their safety in schools (Linville, 2011) and they seek adult guidance in sexual decision-making and in thinking about sexuality and gender choices with which they are presented. Teachers could be educated and authoritative about decisions about sexual and gender information they present in sex education classes, but also in responding to student questions and content in other areas such as English, science and history (Britzman, 2000). LGBTQ+ student look to teachers to have reliable and authoritative information about LGBTQ+ lives that they can share with straight-identified students, to dispel myths and counter discrimination.

Although the youth researchers whose maps are presented here advocate for mixed-use spaces in which sexuality and gender can become the focus of advocacy work and social support, they reiterated in several of our research meetings that gay-straight trans alliances were not the solution to the problems in their school. GSAs, students felt, would be too revealing for students who would not want to claim a firm identity by joining the group. However, multi-focus groups that allow for political advocacy on many issues would bring together students who claim non-heterosexual sexualities, gender non-conforming identities and other students who could work as allies on those issues but not claim the identities (Birden, 2005). Although the name gay-straight alliance would seem to allow for this as well, the perceived focus of the group strictly on sexuality and gender issues might discourage other students whose political goals focus more broadly on diversity from joining.

LGBTQ+ students are asking for an opportunity to participate in the erotic public and social spaces of schools. They are also asking to hear their experiences and identities reflected in conversations in the public forum, including in the curriculum, class discussions, in peer conversations, in after-school programming and in the recognition they get from adults in the building. They want their bodies to exist in the spaces of schools.

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