

Schooling Gender:
Identity Construction in High School

by

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ABSTRACT

For many adolescents, high school is a critical period of self-awareness, peer-influence, and identity construction. During this volatile period, young people explore how to express themselves in ways that range from conformity to non-conformity and transgression. This is particularly true when it comes to young people's understanding and expression of gender identity. For some youth, their personal form(s) of gender expression align neatly with social expectations; for others, it does not. When gender expression does not align with social expectations, students may be vulnerable to bullying or harassment by peers or adults. Often, youth who are policed and regulated by their classmates through bullying (or harassment, depending upon the relevant or implemented policy) are targeted based on their perceived identity, be that racial, ethnic, citizenship, or, most frequently, gender and sexuality. This project advances the need for research done from a critical youth studies perspective (both methodologically and ethically) and provides new insight into the types of language and practices used by youth to express, perform and "do" gender. Utilizing qualitative methodology, including participant observation, focus group and individual interviews, surveys, and the collection and content analysis of school ephemera, this research investigated how high school students navigate gender identity amidst other intersecting identities. This project examined how youth both "do" and "perform" gender in their everyday lives as high school students. Their gender identity is frequently understood amidst other intersecting identities, particularly sexual orientation, religion and race. These youth also pointed to several important

influences in how they understand their own gender, and the gender identity of those around them, including media and peer groups. Because this research took place at two charter art schools, the findings also provided a framework for understanding how these two schools, and charter art schools more generally, provide alternative spaces for young people to experiment and play with their identity construction. Findings indicate that youth are forced to navigate and construct their gender identity amidst many conflicting and contradictory ideologies. Schools, media, and peer groups all heavily influence the way young people understand themselves.

DEDICATION

For David J. Prior for his love, support, strong mentorship, and encouragement throughout this process. He fondly referred to himself as my “invisible” committee member and his help throughout this experience is immeasurable. He is greatly missed.

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PREFACE

CONDUCTING A YOUTH-CENTERED RESEARCH PROJECT

I began conceptualizing this project several years ago. While working with my freshman students in an Introduction to Women's Studies class, I grew more and more interested in the way my students talked about gender – how they related it to other identities, how they conflated it with discussions of anatomy or sexuality. I became interested in how young people learn about gender, what influences their own identity construction, and how they talk about gender amongst their peer groups. Ultimately, I wanted to know if and how gender mattered in their everyday lives.

After working with several high school students as an advocate with Peer Allies (a coalition between the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), Phoenix and the Anti-Defamation League, Arizona region) I realized the necessity that, if I was going to conduct research that investigated the lives of youth, I needed to conduct research with youth. While, as will be described further within this dissertation, there have been several recent studies that have looked at how youth understand gender in relation to curriculum, violence, media, etc., most of these studies lack a youth-centered analysis. I wanted my research to be different.

Just like adults, young people want their voices to be heard. While most adults have spaces wherein they can express themselves (be that through affiliation with different group membership, voting in elections, freely choosing their peer cohorts,) most youth do not have such spaces. Youth are often limited

by outside restraints – legal, social, familial – that constrict their ability to freely express themselves, or, to have spaces to engage in conversations about things like gender and sexuality. I wanted this research to focus on youth experience, and, as such, who better to ask about how youth navigate gender than youth themselves.

BALANCING CRITICAL YOUTH STUDIES WITH RESEARCH DILEMMAS

As a graduate student researcher, I experienced a variety of hurdles while designing and carrying out a youth-centered research project. Gaining access to high school students can be tricky, particularly given the fact that I sought to talk with youth, and learn from youth, about how they understand and construct gender identity. While gaining access to the field, and continuing while in the field, I struggled for many months with school districts and their bureaucratic structure and guidelines for researchers, as well as constantly negotiated with gatekeepers and institutional and district review boards to design and implement a project that integrated youth into the knowledge creation process. This was especially difficult for me given my topic of gender identity construction.

Like others conducting research on youth identity, culture, violence, and other topics, I encountered resistance from different agencies and institutions while trying to maintain a research approach that was youth-centered. In addition to understanding how youth navigate and construct gender identity, I was particularly interested in how youth engage with the knowledge creation process and how they feel about being part of research, as well as how to integrate youth into many different facets of the research process.

To do so, however, researchers must find ways to negotiate barriers that result from how youth and children are commonly constructed as a vulnerable population by Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) and other bureaucratic institutions. While human subjects committees traditionally attempt to shelter and protect children from ethical abuses in the name of science, in doing so, youth are portrayed as vulnerable because they frequently lack any kind of political or economic power. This is compounded by the lack of formal recognition. Despite the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, youth around the world also frequently lack civil rights in practice. In particular, as the UNCRC points out, youth's participation rights are frequently neglected. The UNCRC asserts that children (and youth) have the right to have their views respected, the right to freedom of expression, the right to freedom of thought (UNCRC Articles 4, 12, 13 and 14) and the right for their ideas to be given due weight.

Largely ignoring these conventions, previous literature on youth draws from adult-centered approaches. As a result, youth have been exploited by researchers. They are also often categorized as powerless and marginalized, which leads researchers to ignore or neglect their agency. Because they lack the same kinds of citizenship rights as adults, youth are often not given a voice in decisions that affect their own lives. Additionally, research on youth has tended to focus on only certain aspects of young people's lives that are of interest to adults, while neglecting things that are important and meaningful for youth. The vast majority of research on youth has come from an adult perspective, and, as

such, may not have any resemblance to the lived experiences of the young people that research claims to study.

As will be further discussed throughout this dissertation, between working with gatekeepers and other bureaucratic structures, it is difficult both to access youth and to advocate for research that is also youth centered. It is particularly challenging to access youth for ethnographic research that focuses on a critical youth studies approach or that addresses “sensitive” topics such as gender; ethnographic research involves observational work which may be deemed intrusive, as well as interview styles that are both open-ended and opportunistic, requiring a far deeper level of trust than a simple paper survey. My own research encountered such difficulties; however, I continually advocated for conducting ethnographic research that was done in conjunction with youth, rather than having the youth I was working with removed from the process. I addressed this in several ways: (1) to allow youth autonomy, I asked youth to construct their own pseudonyms; (2) I gave them the option of choosing the alias name of their school; (3) I conducted both focus groups and individual interviews with youth and this allowed me to ensure that those topics participants may not have felt comfortable addressing with the whole group could be discussed in a more private setting; (4) I asked the youth to analyze their own experience in being part of a research project, providing a forum for youth to discuss how they felt about being part of a research project in general and what they hoped I would gain from their insights; and (5) I worked with youth to code and analyze select portions of data.

The students I worked with were given the opportunity to choose their own pseudonyms they would use in their focus groups, interviews, and for the narrative assignment. This allowed students the freedom of expression to choose whatever they wanted. It additionally allowed students to choose names that were very different from their own. For example, one female student chose the name “Darth Vader.” The students expressed to me that this was a particularly fun part of the research process because they got to be anyone they wanted to be. Some chose famous people (like Katy Perry), while others chose names that had significance to them in some way or another. For example, one female student chose Francesca because it was the name her parents were going to name her and then did not.

In addition to having the youth I worked with choose their own names, I also asked them to help invent an alias for the school. This way, I was not the person making the decision about how to refer to the school, and this meant that students attending the school were able to create a new name that had meaning for them. The students came up with a variety of different names for the school ranging from things like “Professor Xavier’s School for Gifted Youngsters” (like in *X-Men*) to “Arizona’s Creative Academy.” This process allowed the youth to be a bigger part of the research process rather than just providing “data.”

I also asked the youth to describe their experiences of being part of a research project. Though they gave a variety of responses, an overarching theme that emerged was how the students appreciated being asked to voice their own

opinions, to name their own experiences, and to be able to freely talk about these issues.

*Sarah:*¹ How do you all feel about being part of a research project?

Blackwing: Awesome.

Sarah: Okay. One at a time, yeah, Blackwing.

Blackwing: I mean sometimes, depending on what day you catch me, I love talking and vocalizing things. Not only for other people's benefit, but sometimes it makes me realize things and I just start talking and then I think about the conversation later in the day. I was like, "Oh, okay, I guess really that's what I think. It didn't occur to me." I love being a part of things like this, where I can just talk it out and help other people help me, or help me help other people.

Sarah: Yeah, Mia Stiles.

Mia Stiles: I feel special. I feel like I'm important.

Sarah: You are.

Mia Stiles: Thanks.

Sarah: What did you want to say Raphael?

Raphael: I feel important for once because for me, as a freshman, I don't get that many opportunities. I'm just kidding. It actually feels pretty good to actually be part of something that not that many people don't really get a chance to be part of, and mostly that—I've never been in a research project. This is my first and I'm glad to be part of it because I'm speaking what I feel like needs to be said. Not that many people get those chances. I just like expressing myself.

¹ "Sarah" refers to me, as the researcher. I decided to keep my own name in the transcripts so as to provide readers with the understanding that I was the one speaking, but also to refer to myself the way I did with the students and the staff and the way they referred to me (rather than saying "interviewer" or "researcher").

Autumn: I like it. I also like hearing other people, what their opinions are because on a normal day, you don't get a forum like this where everyone's expressing important issues such as this. Yeah, it's really interesting because.

Sarah: Crystal.

Crystal: I like it because it breaks away from—like I really love intellectual conversations and like talking about things. It kind of breaks away from my high school life, where we talk about homework and fees and stuff. Nothing really helps, and it's just so boring to me. To be able to voice my opinion and hear other people's opinion just feels really good.

Ryan: I just like being a part of history because this research *will* finish, and then 50 years from now, it's still gonna be finished. It's gonna be a thing that happened at a time when society was at a different place than it's gonna be 50 years from now.

Sarah: Yeah, Charlotte.

Charlotte: I feel like what I say in this can impact the future. I feel like I'm doing something actually important, and even though I'm just talking, I feel like I'm also doing an action. It's really cool, and I do love to talk.

Kay: I also—I have sympathy for you because my mom, she's got a PhD as well, and I know how long it takes and if you don't have help, the effort that you have to put into it. I have sympathy for you for that, and also, I love the idea of psychology and how our mind works and how that affects the world that we live in.

As seen above, by having youth describe their experiences and expectations about being part of this research project, I was able to remind youth and affirm that their voices are valuable and that they are the true narrators of their own experiences. It also allowed me to bring their voices to the forefront and encourage other researchers to remember that youth have their own experiences and expectations about being part of research projects; therefore it is important that they are consulted and integrated into a variety of aspects of the research, not just as subjects or informants.

Additionally, I asked the students I worked with to describe how they felt about previous research that had been done on youth. Below are some of their responses:

Kay: I feel like research projects that are done, they're so—when they're written in newspapers and the way that I perceive them are so written in stone, and they're so unchangeable. I think that we change all the time, so not necessarily—they're not always written in stone, like you were saying, 75 percent of students spend more time watching TV than they do doing their homework. It might be true for a few students in this school, but not necessarily everybody. I don't think a lot of research programs, because they are so generalized, I don't think they have an opportunity to include the one percent, I guess. Again, I think Academy is made of the one percent.

Sarah: Katy Perry

Katy Perry: I agree with Kay. I also think that like half the time, when you hear—especially if it's like through something like the news, or like when you hear something, it's most of the time, a stereotype, and most of the time the stereotype is not true, like Kay said about the 75 percent of students would rather watch TV than do homework. It's like you have to kind of talk to the students before you can actually make that judgment because unless you've known the student, you don't have any idea as to how much they watch TV.

Sarah: Darth Vader.

Darth Vader: There is a cliché that the—or the news media, I think because it's like—I mean there are very—too much—we do very much fall into a cliché almost, or like a superficial—what's the word for it? I'm sorry.

Respondent: Stereotype.

Darth Vader: Yeah, stereotype. I mean because there are—there is gang violence in high school. There is this—that drugs and stuff like that happen. I feel like that those things are brought out more in public school than I see them here. I mean we do have our moments where we hit that, and it's like, “Did we really just do that? That really just happened,” and I feel like I'm going to public school, but you know, at the same time, that's why I like Academy because you don't see most of the things. I go out to the and I'm like, “Well, this is it. All right. Time to make

something of it.” I guess what I’m trying to say is like yeah, we do have those. The media does influence that. They’re not wrong all the time. The media sometimes just is garbage, but you know, they do have a point to make and they are telling the truth sometimes. If by saying that 75 percent of students watch TV more than they do their homework, it’s most likely not a lie, but it’s not necessarily like what happens with the other 25 percent? That’s where I agree with Katy Perry where we kind of fall in line. We kind of are that little extra, I hope, at least.

Sarah: Amber.

Amber Wilson: I think people like to sensationalize, kind of, the—or only take the negative aspects of teenagers in general, when they’re saying 75 percent of the students would rather watch TV. You’re also not getting that 15 percent of the students would do their homework first or something like that. I think most of the stereotypes that are out there are negative, and don’t necessarily—I mean they do pertain to a certain part of the teenager’s life, but they don’t pertain to all of it because we do negative things, but we also do positive things. I think it kind of sucks that not so much of the positive stuff is out there. I think the media actually—like social media, Facebook, we have kind of an area now that we have a grasp on, and we can make a more positive—I don’t know, we can kind of give people a more positive perspective on ourselves. At the same time, we can also give people a more negative perspective on teenagers through the media. It’s kind of a flipside.

Sarah: Charlotte.

Charlotte: I agree with what Amber said. I also think viewers generally go out to find the negative, like the stories that have more of a negative side to them, like what would be more interesting, gang fight breaks out in local public school, kills two and injures four, or like student wins award in swimming? What would you want to read? I think our school doesn’t really fall into a lot of that stuff because we’re small, and because a lot of things are personal and we really like—we emphasize individual growth, as opposed to like going with everyone else.

Sarah: Stacey.

Stacey: Well, I just feel like—it’s pretty much been said. I feel like there’s generally a negative connotation with teenagers as a whole. I mean not just with our generation though; it’s been in generations past. People always, always have this negative side no matter what we do about it because there’s—the reason there’s such negative connotation is

because that is what's brought up. That is what's more interesting. That's what's put into the news media because it's a selling point.

Sarah: Crystal.

Crystal: Well, I don't think you'll ever be able to get rid of teenage stereotypes and generalizations. I know like friends at this school and me personally, whenever I see things like that, things like all teenagers do are drugs and they don't care about anything or they don't know anything because they're not an adult yet, like it makes me want to prove them wrong. It makes me—I think it actually helps. I think it will make me a better person in the long run to like want to prove these people wrong, that I'm one of the 25 percent that will do their homework, or I'm going to be in plays. Even though I did—I wrote a letter to the editor for a class on this article with the guy who said that teenagers were not able to perform things of Shakespeare. They were unable because they didn't have the mind capacity. I wrote a letter and I told them about our school, and it made me feel better because I know that I could prove them wrong, and I know actors at our school and actresses and artists could prove them wrong, too. I think it has its good and its bad.

Sarah: Blackwing.

Blackwing: Yes. I just want to preface this by saying I'm in no way a professional scientist, but the same way that like my dance teacher refers to us dancers to get our attention, you know, I kind of refer to—in a way, I think of myself as a scientist. I don't—the problem I have with these kind of—in these stories in the news and all these percentages and all this is that in my math class, one of the things I hated doing was probabilities and ratios and stuff like that. I'm like I could do—even the coins—counting how many, the coins, I don't really predict that. There are way too many variables. What if the wind blows, or what if you get a faulty coin? There's just like too many variables for me when it comes to things like that. That's why I personally don't like it—I don't like things—generalizations like that. Yeah, I don't like the generalizations like that, but as much as I don't like them, I kind of have to accept that they're there. I mean that's—they're just kind of—you don't have to accept them as being true. You have to realize that they are there. Just like Crystal was saying, for me, I always like almost feel like I want to fight against it. I don't know if that's some weird psychology that's their plan all along. When I hear things like that, I'm like, “Yeah, right, I'll prove you wrong.” It kind of makes me want to go against it, but at the same time, then there are those things you hear on the news, where there's teen suicide. Then you hear about the suicide rate, or like the tendency in youth are going up or something. Then at the same times, you hear that they're going down,

and they've never been lower. To me, it feels like—it doesn't necessarily affect—I don't think it affects me, but then only when I think about it in the instant. If I took a look at it and kind of spent more time with it, I'd probably realize that it does. Another big issue is like I don't know who or what exactly to trust, like I hear two sides of the same kind of idea, and it's like which is correct, or are you supposed to look at both? I don't know exactly what is true.

In addition to giving youth space to construct their own identities within the focus groups and interviews, I also worked with four students on coding focus group transcripts. I thought that this would provide students with more connection to the project while also providing me with a new perspective on how to interpret the data that emerged out of the focus groups. All of the students who participated in the coding and analyzing process volunteered to be part of this portion of the project and are very excited to see what the process of analyzing data looks like and to have their voices be heard beyond their responses in focus groups and interviews.

Conducting youth centered research can be very difficult, given the institutional barriers in place that construct youth as being vulnerable and lacking agency. For the youth I worked with, being part of a research project was exciting because it provided a space in which their own experiences were foregrounded and their own knowledge and lived experiences were valued. This project employed critical youth studies not only as a methodological and theoretical framework, but also an ethical stance insisting that youth are the best storytellers of their own experiences. As can be seen from the above illustrations, conducting ethically and methodologically sound critical youth studies is difficult and we as researchers encounter many obstacles along the way. However,

regardless of the difficulties and hurdles that must be overcome, I argue that researchers have an ethical obligation to maintain a focus on youth-centered research and promote a critical youth studies perspective when conducting research with, rather than on, youth.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

For many adolescents, high school is a critical period of self-awareness, peer-influence, and identity construction. During this volatile period, young people explore how to express themselves in ways that range from conformity to non-conformity and transgression. This is particularly true when it comes to young people's understanding and expression of gender identity. For some youth, their personal form(s) of gender expression aligns neatly with social expectations; for others, it does not. When gender expression does not align with social expectations, students may be vulnerable to bullying, harassment and/or violence by peers and adults. Often, youth who are policed and regulated by their classmates through bullying (or harassment, depending upon the relevant or implemented policy) are targeted based on their perceived identity, be that racial, ethnic, citizenship, or, most frequently, gender and sexuality. Because gender expression (and gender non-conformity in particular) is frequently tied to other forms of identity, it is often policed and regulated most severely. Those students who embody multiple "other" identities are punished or regulated more harshly, and gender non-conformity among these students may be more severely punished because they express multiple overlapping and intersecting identities, each of which carry their own special kind of stigma (McCready 2010). Additionally, bullying and harassment have significant implications for school achievement and success. Therefore, this research is both timely and relevant in terms of

assessing the needs of youth as they navigate the social aspects of gender identity construction in high school.

This research also builds upon previous research on the range in gender expression among youth (Pascoe 2007; Messerschmidt 2004; Best 2004) and provides insight into what is at stake for youth within their peer cohort and their everyday lives at school when they express their gender identity. This particular project took place within a specific setting and group of students, but provides insight into the ways charter school staff and administration respond to youth identity expression more broadly and youth gender identity more specifically. Because of their autonomy, and because data for this project was collected from charter art schools, these sites provide a particularly interesting setting for students to navigate and construct gender identity. This project advances the need for research done from a critical youth studies perspective (both methodologically and ethically) and provides new insight into the types of language and practices used by youth to express, perform and “do” gender.

Research has long been conducted on youth in a variety of settings and from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Youth have been analyzed as participants in and creators of culture (Austin and Willard 1998; Bucholtz 2002; Campbell 2000; Hebdige 1981; Lerner and Galambos 1984; Silverman 1973; Skelton and Valentine 1998;); as victims and instigators of violence (Ferguson 2001; Grossman et. al. 2009; Howard 2006; Messerschmidt 1999 and 2004; Miller and White 2003); as sexual and sexualized beings (Ashcraft 2006; Azam 2009; Brown and Roe-Sepowitz 2008; Carpenter 2005; Corcoran 2000; Durham

2009; Holland et. al. 1996; Humphreys 2007; Lamb 2008; Tolman 2005); as being part of, rejecting or being neglected by school curriculum (Fields 2008; Fisher 2009; Garcia 2009; Irvine 2004; Moran 2000; Weis and Carbonell-Medina 2000; Weis and Fine 2000; Wilkinson and Pearson 2009; Willis 1977); and as receptors and creators of media (Brookes and Kelly 2009; Brown and Cantor 2000; Faucher 2009; Gray 2009; Olson 2004; Steinberg and Kinchloe 2004; Jackson 2009). All of this work has influenced the creation, design, and implementation of this project. However, this research has tended to focus on specific aspects of gender (e.g. gender and violence, gender and sexuality, gender and media) and omits a focus on the particular ways youth describe and define the significance of gender in their own lives.

Despite the wide range of inquiry on youth, much of the research has traditionally been adultist (Fields 2008) in its theoretical orientation, methodological stance, ethical perspectives, data collection and analysis. By adultist, I mean that the design, implementation and analysis of the research, as well as the theoretical and ideological questions and research issues that have been investigated have been from adult perspectives – frequently neglecting the wants, needs, and desires of the youth participants. With a few recent exceptions, research on youth has reproduced understandings of youth as unidimensionally bound by their age, youth as vulnerable and unable to speak for themselves. By taking a critical youth studies perspective (theoretically, methodologically and ethically), this research project, in contrast, is youth-centered. Youth were part of the design, data collection and analysis. As such,

youth provide their voice to describe and demonstrate how they “do” gender in schools.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study examines how youth “do” gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987): that is, the way they describe and enact gender and the ways gender is policed in and through schools. This study also examines the variety of external factors at play in creating students’ gendered identities. Based on an intersectional analysis, that will be discussed in greater detail in Chapters 2 and 4, research findings contribute to a more nuanced understanding of gender identity construction in high school settings and how it intersects with other identities (e.g. race, religion, sexuality). Research findings additionally add to an interdisciplinary understanding of identity and youth culture, building on the sociology of education and sociology of gender literature as well as critical youth studies. This study not only highlights the ways gender and other identities are used to enact social control, but also the ways youth develop and embrace alternative interactions and ways of being. It is essential that both educators and scholars understand how youth make sense of identity through localized cultural practices because these practices “infiltrate and mediate other important processes, appearing in schools, for instance, as distractions and sometimes as components of lesson plans, and deeply influencing students’ social and personal identities” (Wortham 2011, p. vii). By understanding the way youth navigate their gendered, raced and sexual identities in schools, we can understand the hierarchies, and the maintenance and reproduction of inequalities, that shape

young people's experiences. This research contributes to current debates around curricula and policies, the recent push for "safe" schools and multi-cultural/diversity education, discussions of the hidden and overt gender curricula in schools, and recent local, regional and national anti-bullying campaigns.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research began with the following research questions and used a variety of data collection methods to help answer those questions. This project utilizes a mixed method approach to data collection including using (1) participant observation; (2) formal and informal interviews; (3) focus group interviews; (4) collection of survey data; and (5) the collection and content analysis of school ephemera and brief written narratives.

First, I wanted to learn how youth describe and make sense of gender. In order to uncover this, I collected data using focus groups, interviews and written narratives by the youth interviewed. This allowed the youth I worked with several mediums through which to articulate what gender means to them and how they interpret gender in others. The written narratives additionally provided a forum for those youth to convey stories about how they understood gender and how they saw gender in their school on their own time and in their own way.

Second, I asked how do youth enact and navigate gender in various school settings? To explore this question, I utilized participant observation of school hallways and classrooms, as well as student interactions in focus groups. My third research question revolved around how official and hidden curricula shape gender ideologies and practices and the role of peers in this process? School

ephemera (including school dress codes, student handbooks, and school policies) and participant observation were used to analyze how students interact with the hidden curricula and participant observations, focus groups and interviews were used to understand how peer groups shape ideas about gender. Finally, I wanted to understand how youth navigate their many intersecting identities in relation to gender. By intersecting identities, I mean the multiple subjectivities youth navigate on a daily basis – their racial, gendered, classed, and sexual identities (to name a few). I utilized focus groups and interviews to answer this question.

This project highlights the importance of a critical youth studies perspective when working with youth in that it provides a better understanding of gender identity as it intersects with other aspects of youth identity. As Stritikus and Nyugen (2007) point out, differences can be lost, or never even discovered, when gender and sexuality are not thought of as being constantly produced, (re)produced, and changing within specific contexts and social relations. Gender and sexuality interact with organizational discourses and practices of race and social class across such contexts as family, peers, school, and religious and ethnic communities.

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

These initial considerations (Chapter 1) introduce the contested ideas about youth gender and identity construction and situate this research within a larger body of literature on youth, gender and schools. Further, Chapter 2 will discuss how this research is situated within larger bodies of multi and interdisciplinary literature, focusing specifically on youth and gender and

ethnographies of identity construction in schools. Chapter 3 situates the research project within a historical discussion of schooling and introduces the setting in which this particular project took place. The focus of Chapter 4 is the methodological approach used in this research. As I discuss the theoretical components and methods used for data collection, I will also address issues of critical youth studies, feminist standpoint theory, and participant focused data collection and analysis, as well as my location and participation within my research community. In Chapters 5 - 7, I will discuss the findings from the data. A grounded theory analytic approach led to important insights, and I provide an analysis of the thematic components that emerged during this process. Chapters 5 – 7 also include significant portions of interview transcripts (thereby allowing youth participants to speak for themselves), as well as the critical secondary data (school ephemera) they are frequently exposed to. In Chapter 8, I will summarize and discuss the significance of my findings, and consider their implications for future research.

Chapter 2

CONSTRUCTING GENDER:

YOUTH, GENDER AND IDENTITY IN HIGH SCHOOL

Gender expression among youth can be understood from several broad, interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary arenas. Youth navigate their identity construction amidst multiple identities and subjectivities² and, as such, scholars have begun to be attentive not only to one aspect of their identities (i.e. race or gender or sexuality), but also to the way these many identities intersect and inform one another.

Schools are frequently sites where notions about gender are both solidified and regulated, and are often spaces where gender transgressions are policed and controlled (Herdt et. al., 2007). Schools operate as central institutions for social reproduction, and this makes them important sites for analyzing the ways youth interact with gender ideologies at both the personal and organizational levels. Below I outline the theoretical considerations and literature that have guided the design and implementation of this project.

² This project uses both “identities” and “subjectivities” and they are often used interchangeably. While they are distinct, they are often used interchangeably within the literature and the lines between them are often blurred. Because both identity and subjectivity are used and also within multiple disciplines and this project is interdisciplinary in nature, I chose to use both terms. Gender has to do both with identities and subjectivities. All “forms of identity and identification (including those pertaining to gender) are based on and linked to the procedures, processes, techniques, and structures of subjectivity, or...the process of subjection” (Brady & Schirato 2011, p. 6). Additionally, identities are “socially, culturally and institutionally assigned, as in the case, for instance, of gender or citizenship, where state institutions, civil society and social and cultural practice produce the discourses within which gendered subjectivity and citizens are constituted” (Weedon 2004, p. 6).

Ethnographic studies of young people have emerged over the past several decades. Research on young people and gender has ranged from studying gender and sexuality (Elizur & Ziv, 2001; Howard, 2006; Pascoe, 2007; Redman, et. al. 2002; and Wilkinson & Pearson, 2009) to social and gender inequality within sex education classrooms (Fields, 2008 and Garcia, 2009) and queer young people in rural America (Gray 2009). There is substantive research on gender and violence as well as the way gender identities are negotiated and policed through both language and violence (Ferguson, 2001; Lopez & Emmer, 2002; Messerschmidt, 2004; Miller, 2008; and Stoneberg, 2002). Additionally, research has been conducted on the psychological/emotional development of girls and boys (Belknap & Holsinger 2006; Slater, et. al. 2001).

To identify the interrelated, complex and often-contradictory issues and concerns related to young people and identity construction, I draw from three theoretical arenas. First, I explore how scholars have defined and characterized adolescence, youth, and youth culture. Second, I explore the theoretically and conceptually rich history of gender studies, providing a broad overview of studies of gender and gender identity expression and moving more specifically into the literature on youth gender construction. Within this section I provide several key theoretical concepts such as hegemonic masculinity, emphasized femininity, gender consciousness and intersectionality. Third, I discuss studies of youth in schools, focusing on the reproduction and maintenance of inequalities. Within this arena, I look at the literature on ethnographic studies of gender and sexuality in schools and the recent pushes for constructing safe

spaces within schools for those students who may not fit within what is defined as “normal.” I conclude this section by examining the hidden curricula literature and how the official and hidden curricula help maintain power relations and reproduce inequality.

Sustaining an interdisciplinary and intersectional perspective throughout this study was critical because, like adults, young people have multiple subjectivities that shape their experiences, and research on these subjectivities comes from multiple perspectives. This interdisciplinary grounding facilitates a multi-faceted perspective on how young people construct, understand and negotiate gender identity as it relates to other intersecting identities such as race, class, sexual orientation, and citizenship. This study contributes to the literature an intersectional analysis of youth identity construction that looks not only at youth gender identity construction, but more specifically at the way youth construct their gender identity in relation to their other intersecting identities. Exploring the everyday interactions of youth and gender helps to uncover how the daily nature of gender becomes solidified and often serves to reinforce inequalities.

Previously, gender studies scholars have largely focused on gender and sexuality, on gender and school curriculum, or on the gendered nature of youth violence, however, this project looks at the specific ways youth understand, describe, and construct gender in their everyday life as high school students. Although we know that youth enact their identities in multiple, and often conflicting ways, there is little research that provides rich and thorough

descriptions of how gender, sexuality, race and religion (among other identities and subjectivities) intersect to influence identity construction and schooling (Rolon-Dow, 2004), and even fewer studies have been done from the emerging critical youth studies perspective (Best 2007). We have gained much from previous research about youth, and youth in schools in particular. Below I will highlight the key scholarship, while, also identifying gaps within the literature that this research project seeks to address. Before I turn to the discussion of youth gender identity, I will first reflect on how young people have been constructed as a research category in multidisciplinary literature.

ADOLESCENCE AND YOUTH

Adolescence is a “subject position heavily laden with normative assumptions and social meaning” (Raby 2007 in Best 2007, p. 48).

The issue of whether adolescence is a universal stage of development or a creation of modernity has been debated across disciplines, including Anthropology, Psychology, Sociology and History (Tait, 2000). Importantly, the idea of adolescence as a separately recognized stage in human development did not really exist prior to the nineteenth-century. Prior to that, all people under the age of majority were categorized as children. Hall (1904) developed the notion that adolescence was linked to the body, a phase tied to age and physiology, including puberty. Contemporary Western societies typically use the age of one’s physical body to define and give meaning to one’s social identity and actions, whereas many other cultures use rites of passage (or other symbolic events or activities such as age cohorts) to signify transition into adulthood

(Lancy, et. al., 2010, LeVine & New, 2008). Since Hall, several scholars from varying disciplines have critiqued and built upon his notion of adolescence as a universal, physiologically-based developmental period.

Like Hall (1904), Erikson (1968) reported that adolescence was universally characterized by young people experiencing what he termed an “identity crisis,” wherein they struggled to find their authentic selves. Building upon the notion of “authentic selves,” Slater, et. al. (2001) claim that “the adolescent’s overall developmental goal is to create a unique identity” (p. 443) where they experience an enormous amount of change. Accordingly, during this period, “a person’s primary task is to differentiate parental relationships, to disengage from internalized parental influence, and to forge an individual course of development” (p. 443). Ayers (1997) calls this the “treacherous ride into adulthood” (in Blake 2010, p. 1).

Responding to Hall’s characterization of adolescence as a universal period of “storm and stress,” the anthropologist Margaret Mead (1928), found great cross-cultural variations in the concept of adolescence. Her research demonstrated cultural frameworks largely determined if and how adolescence was experienced and thought of as a specific developmental phase. Mead sought to uncover why American teenagers and adolescents were experiencing an uneasy transition into adulthood. For example, the Samoan girls she researched did not experience the same kinds of traumatic transition into adulthood. Mead argued that American adolescence can no longer only be regarded as a period of “physiological change,” because we know that puberty and changes in the body

(which are found worldwide) do not create this (or similar) conflicts around the world. Mead argued for cultural contextualization and created an anthropological concern with the “cultural construction of youth identity” (Adelman & Yalda 2000). For Mead, conflicts and difficulties that American youth experience are the “beginning of mental and emotional maturity” but are “bound to be filled with conflicts and difficulties” given the cultural importance and distinctions between adulthood and childhood in American culture (Mead 1928, pp. 161-62).

Like Mead, the psychologist Albert Bandura (1964), diverges from Hall’s universal notion of “storm and stress” and instead claims that each individual goes through a different maturation process. Even if storm and stress do appear, they may be a result of other social forces, not an essential characteristic tied to adolescent development and physiology (Lerner & Galambos, 1984). For example, Bandura believed that young people (adolescents in the United States) learn from observing, imitating, and modeling others (social learning theory) and that, unlike Mead, not only does the environment in which young people grow up in shape their transition to adulthood, but that is also shapes the way young people cognitively make sense of what is going on around them (their maturation process). For both Mead and Bandura, adolescence cannot be universally categorized as traumatic or a period of “storm and stress,” even though this is the case for some. Instead, there is great cross-cultural variation in the definition and experiences of adolescence by adolescents, and in some cases, the concept of adolescence carries no recognizable social or cultural meaning.

In addition to ideas about adolescence being characterized by “storm and stress” or an “identity crisis,” brain researchers depict youth from a biological perspective focused on physiological maturity, framing youth as not being fully developed/cooked. They are seen as not fully mature in their “judgment, problem-solving and decision-making capacities” (JJDPFA Fact Book, p. 1). Adolescents are thought to live in a “precarious middle ground between the innocence and immaturity of childhood and the responsibility and accountability of adulthood” (JJDPFA Fact Book p. 1).³

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF ADOLESCENCE AND YOUTH

Though adolescence is often still closely linked to biology (some would call this biological determinism), many scholars now understand adolescence as a socially constructed category (Corsaro, 2005). Adolescence has emerged as a useful way of explaining youth behavior, while simultaneously contributing to the way we define and control that same behavior. Overwhelmingly, the definition of adolescence involves an understanding of young people in a specific stage of development between childhood and adulthood. Young people who inhabit this stage are usually seen as “becomings” rather than “beings and becomings,” (Best 2007) and are frequently not taken seriously by a society that “negate[s] their personhood” (Myers & Raymond 2010, p. 169).

There is debate as to when adolescence begins (age 9-13) and when it ends (18-25) but, for the most part, as stated above, adolescence is thought to

³ See also Cauffman et. al. 2010; Steinberg 2009 and 2008; and Gruber & Yurgelun-Todd 2006.

begin at puberty and end in adulthood (typically as determined by law, employment or family). In addition to the reconceptualization (and continual redefining) of adolescence, adulthood is also being redefined, particularly in the United States, as a result of later onset of first marriage and the delay of economic independence with extended education. This more extended period of adolescence is unique to complex industrial societies, and the expected time period related to a transition to adulthood is often much earlier in non-Western settings, particularly among females, who may be expected to take on the roles of wife and mother around puberty. Like childhood and adolescence, adulthood is rarely addressed directly and is largely defined by default based on taken-for-granted categories (Blatterer 2007). Regardless of its universal, timeless, localized or temporal features, U.S. adolescence is currently constructed as a time when young people work to create identity and make the transition from childhood to adulthood. The concept of adolescence and youth is shaped by a variety of cultural practices, values, and definitions where multiple meanings have been constructed (Campbell, 2000). Much is taken for granted about the construction of adolescence, particularly in the United States. Not all young people experience adolescence in this way. There are cultural variations in the distinctions between child and adult, and in the characteristic features of what it means to “grow up,” and therefore, it is important to understand that the construction of adolescence as previously outlined is a Western notion and necessarily limits the way we can talk about youth and adolescence.

Adolescence is a “subject position heavily laden with normative assumptions and social meaning” (Raby 2007 in Best 2007, p. 48).

Competing images of the “adolescent” infuse contemporary culture. We are presented with the image of the over worked, high performing, teen, as depicted by a student who is scheduled from morning till night in sports, academics and extracurricular meetings and activities, contrasted with the idea of the dangerous “at-risk” teen through images of violence, school shootings, and teen pregnancy (Males 1999). These images are perpetuated and reinforced in academic discussions as well as through the media and are particularly racialized, classed and gendered. For example, the exhausted, overscheduled teen is depicted as a white middle to upper class teen whereas the pregnant teen is depicted often as a young woman of color, or, if white, a poor, young woman who herself is often the child of an uneducated single mother. The construction of youth in this way has supported the need for policies and interventions that alternately “protect,” or penalize youth, depending on their background.

Like “adolescence,” the concept of “youth” is also a social construction, one that is frequently conflated with adolescence, but for some, can carry different meanings. The term youth tends to indicate more of a recognition of agency among young people (Bucholtz, 2002; Best, 2007). The definition is in part based on “explicit efforts to classify young people as either acceptable or dangerous[,] to fashion white, middle-class norms for youth – and gender – appropriate behavior[,] and to identify and control youth who resisted these processes” (Adelman & Yalda 2000, p. 40). Youth participate in a variety of

adolescent cultures and have a wide range of hybrid identities (Corsaro, 2005; Hebdige, 1979). Youth culture, which is linked to the way adolescents live their lives, refers to the shared norms, values, activities and practices that connect young people. This socially constructed category is “located in liminal social spaces, at the blurred boundaries between ‘childhood’ and ‘adulthood’” (Morrill, et. al. 2000, p. 526).

Understandings of young people and society have been dominated by subculture theory and supported by the popular notion of the “generation gap.” According to subculture theory, young people are positioned in hegemonic discrete categories that appear to have specific codes of conduct and behavior and notions of how to relate to the outside world. Shaped by Hebdige (1979), Hall and Jefferson (1976) and other scholars of the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham, England, youth are thought to want to break free from dominant societal expectations. These subcultures often are distinguished by elements such as fashion, beliefs, slang, dialects or behaviors. Youth participate in a multiplicity of youth cultures and belong to more than one culture at a time, often moving between and in and out of cultures.⁴ These youth cultures are frequently defined by their material artifacts and peer relations wherein they utilize and re-appropriate symbols such as vehicles, music and

⁴ It is important to note that youth also participate in the adult world and that youth subcultures are not strictly defined outside the context of the “adult” world. However, culture and subculture are frequently used interchangeably when talking about youth. The literature also points out that culture and subculture are also particularly hard to define and each term is defined differently depending on historical time frame, disciplinary background and particular group being studied.

style. Socioeconomic class, gender, intelligence, conformity and ethnicity are also notable in relation to youth subcultures. Youth subcultures can be defined as systems of meaning, modes of expression, or lifestyles developed by groups in subordinate⁵ structural positions *in response to* dominant systems — and which reflect their attempt to solve structural contradictions rising from the wider societal context (Hebdige 1979; Tait 2000; Jefferson & Hall 1976). However, this perspective has been criticized for defining youth culture only in relation, or opposition to, that of adults.

Each youth subculture assigns their own meaning to symbols such as modes of behavior, speech, musical tastes, each of which is a “discourse constructed from various cultural objects that are appropriated and endowed with new meaning” (Tait 2000, p. 19). For Hebdige, this is a kind of subversion to normalcy. He utilizes Umberto Eco’s term “semiotic guerilla warfare” (1976, p. 105) to describe the practice of appropriating symbols and embedding them with new meaning. Youth culture is also frequently characterized by

⁵ These scholars have claimed that youth are part of a subordinated class (based on age, socioeconomic class, citizenship rights, among others) and see these youth as constantly “striving for mechanisms by which to pierce their ideological oppression and thereby create spaces within which to realize themselves” (Tait 2000:15). These youth subcultures were thought to be subordinate for a variety of reasons, most specifically because youth lacked the autonomy of adults, particularly due to their age. Additionally subculture theory originally described working class youth who often did not have the means and freedoms of middle class youth.

consumption practices and material goods (Campbell 2004; Bernard 1973; Berger 1973).⁶

While subculture theory has dominated early discussions of youth and youth culture, it has been critiqued in useful ways and although authors still utilize subculture theory, new work on youth, particularly youth identity, moves past purely focusing on subculture theory. The CCCS's notion of counterhegemonic struggle and youth participating in ritualized fight against the larger social order assumes a "centrally located understanding of power" which neglects the nuance of youth not as a life stage, but rather government's interest in controlling populations (Tait 2000, pp. 42-43).

Parts of these discussions additionally focus on the distinctions of different generations and the generation gap between adults and youth. Frequently, scholars describe the constant distinction between youth and adults and focuses on the generation gap (see Bengtson 1970; Mead 1978 and Williams & Bedward 2001). This interdisciplinary literature, like the literature on youth and adult cultures and subcultures constructs youth and adults at odds with one another. Additionally, these scholars also discuss the way generation gaps persist into adulthood with older generations of adults being at odds with younger generations of adults (Shapiro 2004).

⁶ These practices are about individualism and about creating a world for themselves by selecting and rejecting various aspects of adult culture and making them their own. Youth cultures/subcultures create meanings that are only understandable to those within the culture and are commonly unintelligible by outsiders. Take for example, safety pins used by "punks."

YOUTH, POWER AND INEQUALITY

Despite the fact that youth create and recreate their own cultures they are not considered sovereign agents and are often viewed as monolithic. Because of this, adults seek to regulate youth in a variety of ways. Youth and children are commonly constructed as a vulnerable population both theoretically, ethically, and methodologically when it comes to local, state and federal laws, Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) and other bureaucratic institutions. Despite the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), youth around the world also frequently lack civil rights in practice. The UNCRC is the first legally binding international instrument that sets out a range of human rights of children. The convention provides 54 articles regarding provisions, protections and participations and articulates rights of the child such as rights to survival, rights to the protection from harm, abuse, exploitation and harmful influences and the rights to participate fully in family, cultural and social life. As Raby (2007) suggests, “with adolescence, power relations may become more complicated because teenagers are in a social position that shifts frequently between areas of dependence and independence” (in Best 2007, p. 47). Children are vulnerable because they frequently lack any kind of political or economic power, however, the diverse range of social locations within and between childhood and adolescence complicates easy assumptions about the interface of dominance and subordination that define young peoples’ lives.

Young people lack citizenship (legal and social) – and therefore lack what it means to be taken seriously as human beings with rights and responsibilities.

As Evelyn Nakano Glenn (2003) articulates, citizenship “refers to full membership in the community in which one lives. Membership in turn implies certain rights in and reciprocal duties toward the community” (p. 19). Young people lack this citizenship both in a legal and social sense. They do not meet the qualifications of citizenry, and therefore, it can be argued that they are not treated as fully human. This is important when understanding the rights and responsibilities of young people and their ability to “freely” express themselves and their identity. Citizenship rights are equated with human rights, and because of their age (and often additionally because of their gender, race and class), young people lack these rights. Decisions that impact youth are frequently not made by youth – rather they are made by adults.

Citizenship rights are both social rights as well as legal rights. In the United States, citizenship is achieved once a young person reaches the age of majority (age 18). There are a variety of contexts and formal markers of adulthood. In the U.S., “rights are allotted to them in confusing chronological juxtaposition.” For example, criminal responsibility at 8, cigarettes, leaving school, sex and marriage at 16, social security and the right to vote at 18, and alcohol at 21. The markers of adulthood are “incongruous” and are part of different historical legacies, ideas about dependency and parenting, and assumptions about maturity and age (Thompson, et. al. 2004, p. 219).

Additionally, there has been increasing literature on the concept of youth sexual citizenship. Used here, youth sexual citizenship is both the idea that youth “should be guided in the enhancement of their own sex of their own sexual

identity, interests and autonomy as they concomitantly develop respect for the identities, interests and autonomy of others” (Kornman 2006, p. 3-4) and also in its widest form to refer to “the political and social recognition that is granted to those whose behavior accords with the moral values underpinning the construction of the nation-state” (Hubbard 2001, p. 53). Citizenship is not only about the rights granted or denied various groups, but also ideas about terms of access to rights more generally (Richardson 2000). Similarly, the concept of gendered citizenship can help us understand the ways in which youth, particularly young women, are denied full access to the social, economic, and other benefits of society. While some would claim that women now have the same rights to citizenship as men, in practice, gender plays a prominent role in the rights of citizenship (Walby 1994 and Sever 1997)

Because much previous research comes from an adult perspective, this research instead sought to create a space wherein youth could identify and discuss these experiences within the context of identity construction. Young people frequently lack forums to express themselves and their own experiences given that they often lack legal and social rights to be heard. Because they lack the right to vote, for example, they are unable to express their voice in political elections (at the national, state and local levels). Young people’s decisions are often made for them, whether that is where they go to school, how they get from place to place, even what movies they are allowed to see or music they are allowed to buy. Because of these limitations, youth often feel that they lack spaces wherein their voices are heard or where they can make decisions about

their own lives. Providing youth forums to express themselves is key to understanding how young people construct their own identities.

GENDER

Gender is a fluid, dynamic, complex and contested social phenomenon (Lorber, 1995; Mascia-Lee & Black, 1999; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Gender identity, or the ways in which people identify with socially constructed gender categories and how they perceive themselves on the spectrum of gender, has been theoretically reconceptualized in recent decades. Understanding and mapping the way people make sense of their identities requires that gender be studied through and across multiple perspectives. Gender, among other identities, is also sexualized, racialized and classed, and researchers have pointed out the many ways that gender intersects with other identities (Connell, 2005; Hill Collins, 2009; Messerschmidt, 2004). This research further builds on the intersections of gender within this nexus.

GENDER: A SOCIAL AND BIOLOGICAL CONSTRUCT

Gender is regularly understood as the meanings that each society gives to the physical and/or biological traits that differentiate females and males, these meanings translate into gender roles and expectations that provide people and societies with a set of scripted, gender appropriate behaviors. In this way, gender is considered socially constructed and is about power, human agency, and the varying social status of a range of femininities and masculinities; gender is both shared and contested within societies and there are hegemonic cultural norms and beliefs around gender as a social institution (Messerschmidt, 1999; Ridgeway &

Correll, 2004). Gender is a salient “framing device, especially in discussions of the body” (Adams 2009, p. 122). And, as such, studying the way young people construct and negotiate their gender has implications for the way we theorize gender.

Gender is not as straightforward a concept as many believe. First, it is distinct from sex, the physical and physiological features that differentiate females from males. As opposed to being a biological designation, gender is a social construction – the differentiation and institutionalization of the expected characteristics, norms, and behaviors associated with being female or male in any specific social context. Gender also refers to the rank ordering of this social division, and subsequent statuses, on interlocking societal levels. (Rupp 2006 in Kuumba 2001, p. 9).

Though frequently conflated, gender and sex are not equivalent. On the one hand, sex is a distinction made based on socially determined differences in hormones, genitalia and genes (i.e. sex category). Gender, on the other, is a socially constructed category that is constantly enforced on a daily basis. Historically sex categories were thought to be purely biological, recent discussions, however, have claimed that gender and sex are both socially constructed and biological, meaning that neither is purely one or the other. Authors such as Fausto-Sterling (2000) have indicated that “our beliefs about gender – not science – can define our sex” (p. 3). Labeling someone a man or a woman is a social decision, not strictly bound to the confines of their anatomy and that differences in anatomy are themselves socially and culturally constructed. Fausto-Sterling (2005) makes the argument that we must look at both biology and culture and argues that “culture is a partner in producing body systems commonly referred to as biology – something apart from social” (p.

1516). It is important to look at sex, gender, socioeconomic position and culture when understanding the body. She advocates that “our bodies physically imbibe culture” (p. 1495). We are missing a discussion of youth in this way, particularly of young people struggling with definitions and understandings of gender.

Bodies within this work are usually only discussed as hormonal bodies. They are rarely discussed as in process rather than fixed. Current literature leaves out discussions of physical body – the majority of the focus on bodies revolves around situating youth in puberty or when we are relating gender to sexuality.⁷

The life-course systems approach can be applied to understand the way young people’s relationships with their bodies plays into their understanding of their own gender identity – and also, their understanding of others (Fausto-Sterling 2005). Fausto-Sterling further advocates that we use a full systems (a life history-systems) approach to our understanding of adolescents (and adolescence) and the way we, and young people, understand their bodies. This perspective shows the necessity of viewing youth within their full context, not merely focusing on their embodiment and the biological aspects of gender identity (the way young people understand and interpret their sexed bodies and the corporeal reality of being embodied), but also its social aspects (the way

⁷ By this, I mean, that frequently the literature that discusses “gender” focuses on gender as a socially constructed category and tends to neglect biology. There is, however, ample literature and popular discussion on youth that is primarily focused on the body (i.e. youth are subject to their bodies, they have unruly, dangerous, “at risk,” awkward and uncontrollable bodies). (See Azam 2009, Luker 2006, Nathanson 1991).

society has constructed gender identity ideology, the relationality of gender and the performance of gender).

GENDER BINARY

Gender is, by definition a social category that has been imposed on a sexed body (Scott 1986). Young people navigate a world that is ordered by a “gender binary” where masculinity and femininity oppose each other (Butler, 2004; Myers & Raymond, 2010). This gender binary creates the illusion that there are only two genders – male and female – and that they are defined in opposition to one another. Rather than portraying gender as a spectrum or continuum, the binary and dichotomous notions about gender remain fully intact and are perpetuated through heteronormativity⁸ (Myers & Raymond 2010) and notions of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005) and emphasized femininity (Connell 1987). Particularly in the United States, this gender binary operates on an institutional and structural level. The gender binary is also used to distinguish social relations between the sexes.⁹ It has been described as “not a trait but a system for dividing people into distinct, nonoverlapping categories despite their natural variability on any particular characteristic and regardless of the inconsistency between features that we are all

⁸ As will be defined further below.

⁹ “Sexes” here means man versus woman as frequently just as the gender binary does not take into account the continuum of gender identities, so too, this discussion rarely takes into account a continuum of sexes outside of the male/female dichotomy.

supposed to be definitive” (Kuumba 2001, p. 11). In that gender is socially constructed, gender should be thought of as fluid with breachable boundaries.

Many have criticized feminists’ reliance on the polarization of the sex/gender divide because the meanings attached to sex differences have become, in and of themselves, socially constructed and changeable, “in that we understand them and attach different consequences to these biological ‘facts’ within our own cultural historical contexts” (Pilcher & Whelehan 2004, p. 57). The sex/gender divide is too simplistic an explanation and does not adequately take into account the many variations in sex and in gender. This divide reinforces the problematic notions about the gender and sex binaries, which eclipse discussions of bodies that fall outside these “norms.” Additionally, feminist theories about gender have been critiqued because they represented a universal and unilateral picture of womanhood and gender. Critics instead advocated for an intersectional picture, one that provided a contextual analysis and took into consideration multiple identities and subjectivities.

HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY AND EMPHASIZED FEMININITY

Connell (1987) first coined the term hegemonic masculinity¹⁰ and described it as the culturally idealized form of masculinity in a particular place

¹⁰ As has been discussed within several works, hegemonic masculinity exists in relation to other types of masculinity: subordinate, complicit, oppositional and marginalized masculinities. These masculinities are discussed in relation to hegemonic masculinities and as those that deviate from hegemonic forms of masculinity. Subordinate masculinities are defined in relation to hegemonic masculinity. They may reflect norms more typically associated with femininity, or represent racialized caricatures of gender norms within subordinated social groups. Complicit masculinity is the benefit that men receive from hegemonic

and time. Hegemonic masculinities have cultural significance and relevance. The conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity opens complex issues. As Connell (2005) claims, “I emphasise that terms such as ‘hegemonic masculinity’ and ‘marginalised masculinities’ name not fixed character types but configurations of practice generated in particular situations in a changing structure of relationships. Any theory of masculinity worth having must give an account of this process of change (p. 81). They are frequently honored, “extolled at the symbolic level and through embodied practice, and constitute social structural dominance over women as well as over other men” (Messerschmidt 2004, p. 43). Hegemonic masculinity has been defined not merely as the male role, but as a “particular variety of masculinity to which others – among them young and effeminate as well as homosexual men – are subordinated” (Carrigan et. al. 1987, p. 110). Hegemonic masculinity involves particular groups of men, not men in general, “who are oppressed within patriarchal sexual relations, and whose situations are related in different ways to the overall logic of the subordination of women to men. A consideration of homosexuality thus provides the beginnings of a dynamic conception of masculinity as a structure of social relations” (p. 110). Male peer groups are incredibly important in the

masculinity without actually participating in those dominant forms of masculinity. Oppositional masculinities are those that are constructed by men who are not able to accomplish culturally acceptable forms of masculinity, so instead, rework hegemonic masculinity to an achievable goal, and marginalized masculinities can be a variety of things including the way marginalized people attempt to pass within dominant construction of masculinity, or the way marginalized people commodify their marginality into masculine performance (Connell 1995).

construction and maintenance of masculinity for young boys, as well as the policing of appropriate, hegemonic masculinities. These characteristics¹¹ might include toughness, competitiveness, physical force, family patriarchy and heterosexuality (Connell 1990).

Emphasized femininity on the other hand, contends that all forms of femininity are constructed in the context of the subordination of women to men, and that its most stereotypical form is defined in direct opposition to hegemonic masculinity. As with masculinity, multiple forms of femininity are defined on a large social scale and can be seen in the global subordination of women to men. Central to the “maintenance of emphasized femininity is practice that prevents other models of femininity gaining cultural articulation” (Connell 1987, p. 183). Additionally, as Connell & Messerschmidt (2005) point out, because “gender is always relational, and patterns of masculinity are socially defined in contradiction from some model (whether real or imaginary) of femininity” (p. 848). Both hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity are important theoretical devices in understanding the socially acceptable standards and norms young people’s gender presentation is measured against. Because masculinity and femininity are not “fixed properties” of the female or male body, the “meanings and expectations for being men and women differ both historically and across interactional settings. Normative expectations for men and women

¹¹ It is important to point out that though there are some general qualities about hegemonic masculinity as a “form of social power,” takes on different meanings based on historical and social-spatial modalities (“in terms of class, ethnoracial, sexual, and age variations”) (McGuffey & Rich 1999, p. 608).

maintain gender inequality, as strictures of masculinity push men to ‘do dominance’ and strictures of femininity push women to ‘do submission’ (Schilt & Westbrook 2009, pp. 442-43).

The distinction of gender occurs in many different spheres and affects the political, familial, religious, educational, social, environmental arenas and intersects with race, ethnicity, sexuality, and class, among other pertinent identities. These value-laden distinctions are embedded in the gender binary and thus influence and perpetuate discrimination, at the institutional as well as individual level; take, for example, “one man one woman” marriage laws or male/female bathrooms. This discrimination has previously been described as sexism but is now also being classified as genderism which takes into account that discrimination is no longer solely based on physical bodies (i.e. traditionally sexed men are “better” than traditionally sexed women) but also includes social and cultural factors. This again, unfortunately, perpetuates the distinctions that sex is purely biological and gender is purely social. Additionally, genderism is based on the idea that everyone’s gender expression should match their sex and that there are, and should be, only two genders (to match the only two sexes). (Transgender Policy Group, p.u.).

Gender, like race and class, is not just a mode of classification by which we are sorted into “respective and appropriate niches” (Kimmel 1996, p. 160). Rather, gender is about power and just because both masculinity and femininity are socially constructed does not mean that they are equivalent or that there are no dynamics of power and privilege in operation. Because gender is usually

defined in binary terms, those who do not fit in these categories are regularly ostracized, regulated or left out of the discussion all together. This assumption of binary classification is based on the expectation that people will assume the gender and gender expectations of the biological sex they are born with. Inconsistency in the presentation of self-based on biological sex and gender expression is typically not tolerated by others, or met with hostility or confusion (Grossman and D'augelli 2006).

Because of these binary classifications, it is assumed that people will neatly fit within one of two categories – they will either look, dress, act like a boy/man or girl/woman. This, however, is not the case. Those who do not fit within these classifications are often referred to as gender transgressors or gender non-conformers. Gender non-conformity has been described as individuals who blend attributes that are stereotypically associated with various forms of femininity and masculinity (Connell, 1987) and as those who do not adhere to the “norms or rules of dress and other cultural practices that are based on a person’s perceived biological sex. A gender-nonconforming boy may choose to present or be perceived as effeminate or not hegemonically masculine” just as a gender-nonconforming girl may choose to present or be perceived as masculine or not essentially feminine (McCready 2010, p. 119).

GENDER NON-CONFORMITY AND GENDER TRANSGRESSION

The concepts of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity describe that there is “a predominant way of doing gender relations...that enforces the gender order status quo” (McGuffey & Rich 1999, p. 608). Those

who do not fit within the gender status quo, for example those men and boys who are not hegemonically masculine, and those girls and women who do not fit within emphasized femininity are often heavily critiqued, policed and regulated. Gender non-conformity appears in a variety of forms and has been discussed frequently within gender and sexuality research. While often discussed under the larger “transgender” category, gender non-conformity also includes other types of gender transgression, passing, impression management, and cross-dressing (Rosenfeld 2009, McGuffey & Rich 1999). Gender non-conformity is often linked directly to sexual orientation, where those who do not fit traditional social expectations of gender expression are “read” as non-heterosexual. Gender transgression is described as any activity that is outside the “gender-appropriate” boundaries, what McGuffey & Rich (1999) call the “gender transgression zone.” Within this zone, “hegemonic notions of gender are challenged and defended (McGuffey & Rich 1999, p. 610). Transgender individuals blur the dichotomy of male versus female, masculinity versus femininity and man versus woman. Transgender is a term used to describe “individuals who exhibit gender-nonconforming identities and behavior, or in other words, those who transcend typical gender paradigms” (Grossman and D’augelli 2006, p. 112). The umbrella term “transgender” can encompass transsexuals, cross-dressers and gender benders/blenders.

For many, gender is regularly conflated with sexuality because it is produced by and reproduces heteronormativity. By heteronormativity I mean, “the mundane, everyday ways that heterosexuality is privileged and taken for

granted as normal and natural” (Myers and Raymond 2010, p. 168), what Adrienne Rich calls compulsive heterosexuality (Tolman, 2006). Further, what Schilt & Westbrook (2009) refer to as “the suite of cultural, legal, and institutional practices that maintain normative assumptions that there are two and only two genders, that gender reflects biological sex, and that only sexual attraction between these ‘opposite’ genders is natural and acceptable” (p. 441). Within these heteronormative structures, heterosexuality is privileged in both overt and covert ways, and, because sexuality “becomes increasingly central to identity and social relationships during adolescence, schools are critical social contexts in which dominant beliefs about sexuality are played out” (Wilkinson and Pearson 2009, p. 546) and therefore where heteronormativity is played out. Heteronormativity is a key organizing principle of what Patricia Hill Collins (2004) calls the “matrix of domination” and is woven through “nationalist discourses of family, citizenship, patriarchy, and terrorism” (Ward & Schneider 2009, p. 434; see also Puar 2007). As Williams (2000) describes, if the questioning “begins with gender, it inevitably segues to sexuality” (p. 109). Gender and sexual orientation are often confused even though “sexual orientation is based on the gender of one’s erotic object of choice” (Grossman and D’augelli 2006, pp. 112-13). Further, gender is a “combination of one’s birth sex, gender role and gender identity, whereas sexual orientation encompasses sexual attraction, sexual identity and sexual behavior” (pp. 112-13).

DOING GENDER AND GENDER AS PERFORMANCE/GENDER PERFORMATIVITY

Rather than as a property of individuals, we conceive of gender as an emergent feature of social situatedness: both as an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements, and as a means of legitimating one of the most fundamental divisions of society (West & Zimmerman 1987, p. 126).

Earlier research on gender focused on gender (and sex) roles.

Responding to this research, West & Zimmerman (1987) and later West & Fenstermaker (1993 and 1995) built upon and transformed the way people talked about gender by claiming that the “doing” of gender is a routine accomplishment that is embedded in interactions rather than a specific role or attribute of individuals. Crafting an explicitly ethnomethodological (and therefore, specifically sociological) understanding of gender, West & Zimmerman claim that we “do” (and re-do, re-make, re-constitute) gender every day. Doing gender is based on interactions, that is, we do gender in the presence of others (be that in the physical or electronic presence of others). Gender is more about how we do what we do, rather than about what or who we are. Gender is a social script based on assumed biological differences (Pascoe 2007). Gender is done through and within interactions, thus our doing of gender is judged by others based on whether or not we have accomplished what we have set out to do. And, typically, what we set out to do is to mimic/re-inforce/re-invent conventional ideologies of gender. Gender itself is an “activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one’s sex category” (West & Zimmerman 1991, p. 127). West & Zimmerman (1987) posited that “doing” gender is part of a routine accomplishment in everyday life.

West & Zimmerman were inspired by Garfinkel's (1967) example of Agnes and her doing of gender. Garfinkel (1967) describes Agnes, a transsexual who was raised as a boy, but at the age of 17 adopted a female identity and underwent a sex reassignment operation several years later. West & Zimmerman describe the way Agnes navigated sex, sex category and gender and ultimately claim that, as Garfinkel points out, Agnes "attempted to be 120 percent female," meaning that she attempted to be "unquestionably in all ways and at all times feminine" (1967 p. 135). Garfinkel transformed an "ascribed status into an achieved status, moving masculinity and femininity from natural, essential properties of individuals to interactional, that is to say, social, properties of a system of relationships" (West & Zimmerman 2009, p. 114). Because initially her sex did not match her sex categorization, she constantly risked being "found out." So, Agnes

faced an ongoing task of *being* a woman – something beyond style of dress (an identificatory display) or allowing men to light her cigarette (a gender display). Her problem was to produce configurations of behavior that would be seen by others as normative gender behavior. Agnes' strategy of 'secret apprenticeship,' through which she learned expected feminine decorum by carefully attending to her fiancé's criticisms of other women, was one means of masking incompetencies and simultaneously acquiring her needed skills (West & Zimmerman 1987, pp. 134-35).

Gendered behavior is monitored by others constantly, which means that we are taught to do gender in a specific way and that all other expressions may be judged severely. Gender consciousness, and the doing of gender, begin at a very early age and are reinforced by social, institutional and structural ideas and assumptions about gender. The doing of gender changes across time, place and

situation (meaning culture, age, history, setting and personal experience can all play a role in how gender is accomplished).

West & Zimmerman's initial presentation of their ideas of "doing" gender has produced significant theorizing by others, both those who support their ideas, and those who contest them (see Trautner 2005, West & Fenstermaker 1993 and 1995, Avishai 2008, Messerschmidt 2004, Jones 2004 and Jurik & Siesmen 2009¹²). The concept of doing gender has been critiqued on the basis that it focuses too heavily on micro interactions, neglects power relations, and institutional/macro-structures and also does not allow for the recognition of agency, intent or consciousness. (Fenstermaker & West 2002, Smith 2009, Pascale 2007 and Jurik & Siesmen 2009). Though there have been valid criticisms and reformulations, doing gender remains an important concept in conceptualizing how youth navigate and construct gender in their everyday lives. In addition to "doing gender," another key concept in the literature that has been used by scholars across disciplines to understand how people express and understand gender is the notion of gender as performance.

To wide acclaim, Butler (1990) categorized and discussed the power of gender and the importance of gender as a fluid and as a performative concept in her book *Gender Trouble*. Butler argues that performativity is "not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body understood, in part, as a culturally

¹² Here Jurik & Siesmen (2009) provide an overview of the critiques of Doing Gender but they do not agree with them.

sustained temporal duration” (1990, p. xv). In *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Butler builds on her notion of gender as performance and asks “if gender is a construction, must there be an “I” or a “we” who enacts or performs that construction” (in Lorber 2005, p. 266)?

For Butler, performativity is not one singular act, but rather, it is based on repetition and ritual. The “internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body” (Butler 2006, p. xiv). Gender as performance is the effect of reiterated acting. This acting produces a static notion of gender while eclipsing the many contradictions of any single person’s gender:

the body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others but also to touch and to violence. The body can be the agency and instrument of all these as well, or the site where “doing” and “being done to” become equivocal. Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite ever only our own. The body has its invariably public dimensions; constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine (Butler 2004:21).

Butler’s discussion implies that all aspects of gender identity and expression are a performance. Butler argues that the performative nature of gender, which is produced and compelled by regulatory practices, in essence, gender performance is not about “free-floating attributes” but rather the acts then produce the effect. So, rather than us performing our natural or inherent gender, we are instead “words, acts, gestures, and desire [that] produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the place of signifying absences that suggest, but rather reveal, the organizing

principle of identity as a cause” (Butler 2006, p. 185). These acts and gestures create the illusion of an interior gender core.

Butler, similar to West & Zimmerman’s discussion of Agnes’s gender transformation, utilizes the example of John/Joan and sexologist John Money. In order to discuss how “bodies are constituted as recognizable subjects” Butler discusses David Reimer who, while born with XY chromosomes, had his penis severed in a botched surgery, was surgically converted to a girl (testicles removed and a vagina was created). David was renamed Brenda and “started to behave in a manner and develop preferences (regarding toys, desires, toilet etiquette, etc.) which marked her as different from other girls. This was followed by various attempted medical interventions – all strongly resisted by her – that sought, amongst other things, to help facilitate Brenda to ‘become a girl’, in both a medical and socio-cultural sense” (Brady & Schirato 2011, p. 6).

Butler notes that gender is both constructed and deconstructed, so, when discussing gender and the ideas about gender, it is beneficial to include a discussion of the theoretical components of Queer Theory.¹³ Butler also explicitly links discussions of gender with discussions of sexuality because, “in other words, acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for

¹³ For purposes of this research, by Queer Theory I mean the deconstruction of the gender/sex binary. “Queer theory operates within a distinctive understanding of power where sexual and gender subjectivities are fashioned from the signifying systems of the dominant sexual and gender taxonomies. These taxonomies, in tern, regulate subjectivity and social life in gender” (Valocchi 2005, p. 751 quoted in Rosenfeld 2009, p. 631).

the purposes of the regulation of sexuality with the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality” (Butler 2006, p. 186). Queer Theory delves into the formation of gender identity and explores the categories of gender and sexuality. It debunks the stable categories of sex, gender and sexuality allowing for multiple identities (Jagose 1996). Queer Theory has been used to discuss and question the hetero/homosexual definition and the performative nature of each (Sedgwick 1985 and 1990), and has also be used to describe the “those gestures or analytic models which dramatise incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire” (Jagose 1996, p. 3) and is often used to debunk the gender binary. Additionally, queer theory posits

both the fluidity of gender and sexuality and the social construction of identities, desires, and even bodies, poses a challenge for women’s studies. Is our subject women? Or gender?...queer theory and queer studies developed out of the interest in feminist theory and women’s studies in the complexities of gender and sexuality, the very term “queer” is intended to destabilize our understandings of such concepts as “woman,” “female,” “lesbian,” “heterosexual,” even “sexual” (Rupp 2006, p. 59).

Doing Gender and Gender as Performance (Performance Theory)

represent different disciplinary perspectives, and therefore, are often employed for different types of inquiry. West & Zimmerman represent a sociological theorizing of gender whereas Butler represents a philosophical theorizing and discourse analysis of gender, and each have been taken up by other disciplines but have remained distinct. Butler’s approach to gender implies more agency, intent and political critique whereas although West & Zimmerman’s approach, while not refuting the idea of agency, does not necessarily provide a starting

point for the discussion of agency. These two disciplinary perspectives have not been put into conversation with one another.

While both share a perspective on gender as an emergent phenomenon, and both argue that gender is more about what you do than who you are, West & Zimmerman focus on the accountability of sex category whereas Butler focuses on the performance of identity and how those performances constitute who we are. For Butler, gender exists only to the extent that it is performed (Butler 1990a), and this means, for Butler, we do not know where psychology and biology begin or end. With respect to their accounting for agency, West & Zimmerman believe that gender is constructed in social situations and that agency is disassociated from purposeful action whereas Butler describes “self-authoring and subject formation through gendered performances” and locates agency not just in transgressive acts, but also in the work “one does on oneself to become a willing subject in a particular discourse” (Avishai 2008, p. 412).

Though Butler wrote five years after West & Zimmerman, she never cites their work. Even with *Undoing Gender* (2004), Butler discusses the undoing of gender without making reference to the foundational “doing gender” argument.¹⁴ In a revised *Gender Trouble*, she claims “in this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed” (Butler 2006, p. 35). For West & Zimmerman, as sociologists, the idea that individuals

¹⁴ West & Zimmerman (2009) make reference to this when they stated “today, ‘doing gender’ often appears in print without acknowledgment of its source, and some scholars (such as Judith Butler) play on our wording (*Undoing Gender*, Butler 2004) without ever citing our work” (p. 113).

do not exist prior to this performance is irrelevant – they are concerned only with the point at which doing gender is part of social interaction. This research project sought to explore both the ways that youth do, as well as how they perform, gender.

By discussing gender as performance, doing gender and queer theory, I have situated this research within larger conversations that have been going on for decades. This project builds on these discussions and theoretical insights by putting them in conversation and by providing examples that though they have disciplinarily been seen a completely different and distinct, they are not mutually exclusive. Feminist and queer theorists have provided some of the most influential theorizing on the categories of sex, gender and sexuality. There is, however, little discussion and research on youth within these fundamental and foundational ideas about sex, gender and sexuality, with the exception of a few later studies (Messerschmidt 1999 and 2004, Jones 2004, for example). So, while this research project builds on and is informed by previous discussions of gender as an emergent social phenomenon, it also creates new knowledge about where youth fit into these discussions, focusing specifically on how youth describe how gender fits into their everyday lives.

GENDER CONSCIOUSNESS

The concept “gender consciousness” can be used here as a way of explaining what might be going on with youth as they “do” gender. Gender consciousness refers to what youth do and say about gender and what understandings and meanings they have about it. Similar to legal consciousness

(Merry 1990), gender consciousness is part of a “reciprocal process” wherein the meanings given by youth to their world become “patterned, stabilized, and objectified.” However, consciousness is not merely an individual trait nor is it solely conceptual, but rather is a “type of social practice reflecting and forming social structures” (Silbey 2008, para. 2). In addition to being part of a “reciprocal process,” gender consciousness refers to the idea that gender impacts many factors in every aspect of a person’s life; in a “broad sense, is the feeling that one’s gender affects [one’s] life” (Dunlap 2003, p. 3). Gender consciousness has also been theorized in relation to group consciousness and feminist consciousness (Tolleson-Rinehart 1992, Jenkins 2003, Sigel 1996, Conover & Sapiro 1992, Gurin 1985, Hogeland 1994). Additionally, gender consciousness has been frequently used within political discussions (Dunlap 2003, Tolleson-Rinehart 1992) and has been defined as the “recognition that one’s physical sex¹⁵ shapes one’s relationship to the political world” (Herring & Marken 2008, p. 229).

By utilizing the concept of gender consciousness, we can more clearly articulate how youth do gender, how they construct and deconstruct their identities based on social scripts about gender, how gender relates to other identities, and how these understandings, in turn, become part of normalized daily activity. The concept of gender consciousness helps to understand how youth describe and make sense of gender and the role gender plays in their daily

¹⁵ Here is a prominent example of how gender and sex are conflated within the literature and is used to designate physical sex.

lives. Not only was gender consciousness for the young people I worked with an important part of what it meant to identify with a particular social group, it also shaped the way youth defined and understood their world, and how those understandings became normalized.

YOUTH AND GENDER

As the above discussion shows, there is a vast body of literature on the theoretical underpinnings of gender that spans across many disciplines including sociology, anthropology, philosophy, psychology and women's studies. As will be discussed below, the cultural and social ways in which we define young people (youth and children) limits the ways that previous research has constructed and investigated youth gender identity. The literature on youth gender and sexuality lacks a rich discussion of gender as distinct from sexuality. Because these two identity categories have regularly been conflated, much of the previous research has collapsed them together and left readers to assume that gender and sexuality are somehow equivalent.

Frequently, children are constructed as innocent and asexual and it is not until adolescence that they become "sexual" beings. Most cultural conversations do not depict children as sexual beings. Because young people (especially young children) are thought of as asexual, conversations about youth sexuality typically begin by focusing on adolescence; however, gender expression and sexual identity do not begin at adolescence. Beginning in utero, children are gendered (usually based on the binary distinction of the sexes, that is, that the fetus is

either a boy or a girl). Part of this is because of the panics that have occurred around youth gender transgression and sexuality.

There has, however, been significant theorizing on the way children negotiate gender, specifically focusing on studying how boys and girls “both segregate and organize themselves within the same gender groupings” (McGuffey 1999, p. 609 see also Absi-Semann, Crombie & Freeman 1993). For instance, Thorne’s (1993) study of the way girls and boys organize themselves on the playground or Canann (1990) study of note passing and joke telling. Similarly, there has been significant theorizing on gendered play and sports (see Messner 2002 and 2009, Fine 1992). There is additionally significant literature that investigates childhood sexuality and sexual expression among children (see Martinson 1973, Ryan 2000, Sandfort & Rademakers 2000, Moran 2001).

Moral panics about youth gender transgression and sexuality are not merely moral panics, they are a specific kind of moral panic; a sex panic. Sex panics, as articulated by Herdt (2009) are a subspecies of moral panics that tend to revolve around a sexual event. During a sex panic, “through state and non-state mechanisms that impinge on institutions and communities, people become totally overwhelmed by and defined through the meanings and rhetoric of sexual threats or fears” (p. 5). These instances show the folk devil (as Cohen 1972 described) as the “oversexed or undersexed” and play into cultural fears about the “evil sexuality” of the Other (whether this Other is the stereotypical hyper black masculinity or the fear that sex education will promote active sexuality among young people or even the fear that gay parents will raise gay children).

We are a society that is “fixated on punishing the sexually deviant, even as ‘deviant’ sexuality remains a moving target” (Regnerus 2007, p. 4). Systematic and continuous forms of discrimination are pivotal in producing panics (Herdt 2009). Take, for example, the way teen pregnancy has been regulated and constructed and the depiction of teen mothers. Teen mothers embody moral sexual panics about teen sexuality, the sexuality of youth of color, the fear of the “welfare queen” and the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Herdt 2009) and “teen pregnancy” remains a code word to talk about African Americans and poor women (and girls) without ever mentioning race or class (Males 1999).

As Herdt points out, “panics are characteristic of states that experience times of divided public opinion, changing social, economic and political circumstances, and a clash between state mechanisms of control and the free expression and individual elaboration of sexuality” (2009, p. 32). These states frequently become more heated and contested when they involve children and youth. This discussion of sexual panics about young people builds on the notion that sex (sexual intercourse), while extremely common and “normal,” among young people both historically and cross culturally, still has the remnants of the historical cultural script of sexuality as a disease or a sin, something that was shameful until adulthood. This helps to explain why sexual panics often promote the most outright hostility and volatility. The social anxieties around sex and children quickly become panics because of the cultural script of the Romantic (innocent/asexual) child: the “Romantic child’s innocence depends on protection

from sexuality – shielded from all information and knowledge” (Irvine 2004, p. 13 and see Waites 2005).

Moral and sexual panics about young people’s sexuality and transgressive gender identity have come in a variety of forms. These panics are particularly volatile because they involve children. While the particular panics have their differences in the ways youth are regulated, all of these panics have similar characteristics in three ways. First, they often have competing notions of sex, gender and sexuality. Panics about young people and sex frequently differ on the way they define sex, the way they define gender and the way they define sexuality. As such, there is little universal language in describing and defining what is so worrisome about youth and sex. Secondly, these panics often have competing notions on how to view young people. As was discussed in the previous section on youth and adolescence, because of cultural context and historical shifts, there is no universal understanding of the period of adolescence. Because of the lack in continuity of how to categorize adolescents and youth, there are competing notions about what rights they have. This includes legal rights, human rights and sexual rights. Because of these contesting themes continue to emerge within panics about young people’s sexuality.

The importance of understanding moral panics about youth sexuality is to realize, as Garland (2008) points out, that “moral panics often seem ephemeral but over time their cumulative effect can be to create social divisions and redistribute social status as well as building infrastructures of regulation and control that persist long after the initial episode has run its course” (p. 16). These

lasting effects influence the way we conceptualize youth, the rights they are granted and the pleasures and dangers they encounter. As Barry (2000) points out, “youth tend to be viewed as dangerous and in need of control when they do not fit in with the current zeitgeist of society” (in Weis & Fine 2000, p. 87). As can be seen in the moral panics over youth sexuality, we construct some youth as in need of protection (typically whites, more specifically white girls) while constructing other youths as threat (typically youth of color, more specifically young males of color). The sexuality of young white girls is deemed innocent, while the sexuality of young girls of color has been viewed as threatening and in need of control (Garcia 2009; Fields 2008). The deviance of young white boys is regularly categorized as “boys will be boys,” whereas the deviance of youth of color is categorized as threatening (Ferguson 2000). Moral panics are often “based on a discursive deployment of fear as the press plays on anxieties concerning the danger of sexuality cut loose from its ‘traditional’ moorings in marriage and the family” (Hubbard 2001, p. 53).

These same ideas steep into other aspects of young people’s lives and the categorization of white students and students of color can also be seen in discussions of school violence and discipline, the school to prison pipeline, and continues in sexual health classrooms today. It is important to recognize the “multiple and intersecting identities under which people exist and through which they are marginalized, necessitating a political analysis that highlights one’s full humanity across multiple dimensions and not just in the sexual realm” (Cohen in Herdt 2009, p. 109). This is particularly important when thinking about youth.

Because adolescence is constructed as a highly sexualized life phase and one of the “characteristic feature of adolescence is the ‘shift from the relatively asexual gender systems of childhood to the overtly sexualized gender systems of adolescence and adulthood’” (Miller and White 2003, p. 1219), there have been several studies in recent decades looking at how young people construct gender through sexuality and sexual discourses (Pascoe 2007, Elizur and Ziv 2001, Redman et. al. 2002, Wilkinson and Pearson 2009 and Howard 2006). Many of these scholars unwittingly reinforce the standard gender binary and the relationship between gender and sexuality for youth. For example, some of this recent literature either intentionally, or unintentionally, perpetuates the idea that gender and sexuality are one and the same, or that gender expression is the way to expression sexual identity or orientation. Additionally, this literature commonly denotes adolescence a universal category,¹⁶ one that young people experience in the same way.

While this age group (youth and adolescence) is demarcated by sexuality and sexualization, it is important to point out that young children are sexualized in a variety of ways.¹⁷ Discourses and performances of sexuality are used to create gendered boundaries in order to regulate gender (Martino, 1999). These studies tend to focus on young men and masculinity or issues of violence. These

¹⁶ This may be because all of this research was conducted in the U.S.

¹⁷ This sexualization takes a variety of forms – see (Tolman 2006; APA Report 2007; Azam 2009; Durham 2009). Policing of young people’s, particularly young children’s, gender expression is often vigilant, reflecting fears that any kind of gender non-conformity may indicate same sex desire.

works, while important, often conflate gender with sexuality, and neglect the way young people construct gender as separate from sexuality.

Ideas about youth and sexuality are shaped by race and class, as well as the compulsory nature of heterosexuality. The hegemonic “appropriate” sexuality reinforced and reproduced in schools is heterosexuality. Like homosexuality, heterosexuality is a “social-historical construction” that emerged within a particular historical moment (Katz 1996, p. 11), and, like homosexuality, has a changing and contested history. Because heterosexuality is the assumed norm, it is rarely questioned or challenged which leaves all that is not heterosexual as the deviant, the Other. As Katz (1996) argues, “...heterosexuality is not identical to the reproductive intercourse of the sexes; heterosexuality is not the same as sex distinctions and gender differences; heterosexuality does not equal the eroticism of women and men. Heterosexuality...signifies one particular historical arrangement of the sexes and their pleasures” (p. 14). Early theories of heterosexuality were daunted by procreation and it was historically pathologized unless it was procreative. Early theorists of heterosexuality were also predominantly White, and this has left lingering racial effects on the theorizing of what is considered normal and deviant. It was only with the decline of the procreative imperative that pleasurable heterosexual sex became acceptable (Katz 1996).

Sexuality, as Hill Collins (2004) claims, is not simply about biological functioning, but rather, “it is a system of ideas and social practices that is deeply implicated in shaping American social inequalities” (p. 6). Commonly, ideas

around “appropriate” and normative sexuality are often conflated with fact, science, and biology. Heterosexuality is not just a set of private practices taking place in the bedroom; rather, heterosexuality is a structure of power that confers right of citizenship (Pascoe 2007). Within these heteronormative structures, heterosexuality is privileged in both overt and covert ways, and, because sexuality “becomes increasingly central to identity and social relationships during adolescence, schools are critical social contexts in which dominant beliefs about sexuality are played out” (Wilkinson & Pearson 2009, p. 546).

INTERSECTIONALITY

People in general, and young people in particular, construct a sense of identity in relation to multiple others, and have multiple layered identities that are derived from social relations, history and power structures. Moreover, identities are fluid and changing over time and across situations and audiences; they are never static. As can be seen from the two previous sections on the construction of youth/adolescence and gender, youth occupy multiple identities, are part of multiple communities simultaneously, and navigate experiences of oppression and privilege through and in relation to these institutions and identities. The concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991) is used to grasp the many identities people have and seeks to bring to light the multiple contesting frames and situations of youth’s everyday lives. According to Nash (2008), intersectionality has three main purposes:

1. Intersectionality helps to underscore the “multidimensionality” of the lived experiences of marginalized subjects.

2. Intersectionality aspires to provide a vocabulary to respond to critiques of identity politics.
3. Intersectionality invites scholars to come to terms with the legacy of exclusions of multiple marginalized subjects from feminist and anti-racist work, and the impact of those absences on both theory and practice (pp. 2-3).

Since theories of justice are particularly concerned with whether, how and why persons are treated differently from others, we need to account for overlapping, intersecting, dynamic and converging identities of youth. This means addressing issues of gender, race, socio-economic class, power and sexual orientation, not just as separate identities added up, but how the embodiment of each of these identities collectively constructs youth identity (Johnson, et. al. 2011. See also Hill Collins 2000 Matrix of Domination). The intersectional analysis of youth identity is at the heart of this project and has been threaded throughout this literature review. This project begins with the premise that “students do not merely come to school with neatly packaged and predetermined identities that can be sorted along ethnic, class, or gender lines. Instead, identities are constantly under co-construction and respond to images created by self and others within particular school sites” (Rolon-Dow 2004, pp. 25-26).

In their 1995 article *Doing Difference*, West and Fenstermaker advocate that sexuality, gender, race and class cannot be understood “apart from the context in which they are accomplished” (McCready 2010, p. 120). This is useful in understanding that identity categories such as race, class, gender and sexuality cannot be “fully understood through seemingly fixed attributes such as skin color, sexual anatomy, or sexual orientation” (p. 120). Further, certain aspects of a “student’s identity become more salient during face-to-face

interactions in certain contexts, such as among particular groups of peers” (p. 120).¹⁸

The construction of youth gender identity is more than just about gender. Instead, the way young people construct and define, as well as the way their identity is defined by others, is based on young people’s many intersecting identities. Race and sexuality, in particular have a significant impact on the way young people negotiate their identities and the way their identities are evaluated by others. Significant research has been done on the way young people navigate these multiple identities. For example, several recent authors have investigated how young people construct their own sexual identities within schools and within the classroom (Garcia 2009, Fields 2008, Tolman 2005, Weis & Carbon-Medina 2000), how young people construct their gender identity in relation to class (Mikel Brown 1991 and 1997, Messerschmidt 1999 and 2004), and how youth navigate race and gender identity (Ferguson 2001, Pascoe 2007, McCready 2010).

YOUTH IDENTITY IN SCHOOLS: SCHOOLS AS SITES OF SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

Identity is neither continuous nor continuously interrupted but constantly framed between the simultaneous vectors of similarity, continuity, and difference (Hall in Chabram & Fregoso 1990, p. 206).

The two previous sections (Adolescence and Gender) have provided a foundation for the discussion of how youth and gender are constructed in

¹⁸ Similar to “doing gender”, *Doing Difference* has been critiqued for its inattention to social and institutional structure (See Hill Collins 2000 and Thorne 1993)

schools. Everyday battles over youth identity take place in schools.¹⁹ The remainder of this chapter will highlight the literature on how youth have navigated identity in schools, particularly how schools have been studied as sites where inequalities are reproduced and the gender binary and heteronormativity are maintained.

Youth spend the majority of their time within the physical and social boundaries of school. Schools are a powerful socializing institution that impact young people through the curricula, teacher-student interactions, and formal activities (Myers & Raymond, 2010). Of course, education does not just take place in schools. Education occurs at dinner tables, in front of the television set, in online social networking contexts, inside religious institutions, on street corners, in family planning clinics, in the library, on the field, in the “gay” club, in the alternative magnet school, and in detention, to name only a few (Barry, 2000; Ferguson, 2001; Pascoe, 2007; Proweller, 2000; Weis & Carbonell-Medina, 2000).

Schools do more than just teach; “they control access to jobs, sort people into groups, attempt to control what we think and say, attach privilege to some and not to others, and, via these activities, perpetuate social inequalities or, on the other hand, foster fairness” (Hill Collins 2009, p. 4). Young people who do not fit into the “appropriate” norm frequently find themselves as “...objects of hate crimes and taunting that led to other acts of violence” (Grossman et. al. 2009, p.

¹⁹ Chapter 3 will provide a more thorough look at the creation and societal importance placed on schools.

35). Schools are cultural institutions that are supposed to socialize youth to fit into communities. As such, administrators, teachers, and other personnel become “gatekeepers of the status quo” upholding normative beliefs about “appropriate” gender expression and the appropriate sexuality expression (Grossman et. al. 2009, p. 43). Research has highlighted that the development and expression of gender identity is a critical process in adolescent development, particularly as young people enter puberty. Anthropologists Richard Condon and Pamela Stern (1993) sought to understand the cultural shifts occurring in an Inuit community with the introduction and implementation of “Southern” (U.S) style schooling point out that the “acquisition of an appropriate gender identity (and its associated roles) is undeniably a result of the interaction between both external (cultural) and internal (physical maturational) forces” (p. 384). For the purpose of this research, the external is schools and the internal is gender consciousness. When combined they helps us to better understand how young people navigate identity within their daily lives in schools.

HIDDEN CURRICULUM

Unless pressed by powerful, insistent voices, we fail to name the ‘norm,’ the ‘normal,’ and the social process of ‘normalization,’ much less consider them perplexing, fit subjects for probing questions...examination of these formerly unquestioned, socially institutionalized norms and systems may provide a startling new view of a previously invisible, taken-for-granted ‘normal’ social universe coexistent with the more deeply pondered ‘deviant’ world – perhaps even unsettle forever our idea of norm and deviance (Katz 1996, pp. 16-17).

Because this research seeks to uncover what is occurring in schools, literature and theoretical groundings in the hidden curriculum is important. The

hidden curriculum, for Apple (1971), is the “norms and values that are implicitly, but effectively, taught in schools” and are not explicitly written down or stated as part of the formal curriculum (p. 27). The strength and weakness of the hidden curriculum is the fact that it is “nearly impossible to pin down” and that it is a “deliberately vague term, referring more to an after effect (hiddenness) than to any particular process (of hiding) or content (of what is hidden) (Vallance 1980, p. 139). Vallance believes that the hidden curriculum has more to do with a “reflection of subtle societal forces” and that unfortunately it seems to be an inevitable effect of schooling. This definition is particularly important when looking at the hidden gendered curriculum. In seeking to understand the kinds of learning provided by the school environment that are outside the formal educational curriculum, she questions how, when and by whom these kinds of “learnings” are communicated to students, as well as an assessment of the “educational significance” of this kind of covert learning and a judgment as to what (if anything) we can do about them (p. 145). Vallance concludes by claiming that unfortunately we have done ourselves a disservice in creating the concept of the hidden curriculum because “education may well be the most complex and ultimately frustrating of all social phenomena to study” (p. 149).

As Bowles and Gintis (1976) point out, hidden curriculum can be differentiated by economic class and by one’s expected economic trajectory. More specifically, lower class students are taught to be docile workers (unskilled or semi-skilled laborers), that is, that they were taught things like punctuality, how to respect authority, neatness and cleanliness, whereas those students who

were more advanced were taught creativity, problem solving, “intellectual openmindedness” (skills needed to function as professionals or management) (p. 12). Romero and Margolis (1998) build on Jackson (1968) and Apple and King’s work (1977) to explain “weak” and “strong” kinds of hidden curriculum: the weak consisting of the professionalization process or the “connections to civil society” – for Romero and Margolis that was the process that taught graduate students how to become sociologists. The strong form of hidden curriculum, on the other hand, reproduced social inequalities, that is, that the curriculum was used to preserve the “existing social privilege” and “stratified social relations” (1998, pp. 2-3).

There has been a significant shift in the literature, however, because early theories of hidden curriculum were focused on the socialization processes and reproductive nature of these processes. It rarely saw students as possessing any agency. It is important to focus not just on schools as purely reproductive institutions, but rather to also see the interplay between education and economy and to see the agentic behavior of those people within these institutions (Apple, 1980). Importantly, Willis (1977) in his analysis of the “lads” and school boys, brought attention to the fact that students were not just passive “cogs in the capitalist machine,” (p. 130) but rather that they had agency. Willis was seeking to understand how social reproduction was sustained on the individual level and how we could account for people’s complicity in social arrangements. Willis emphasizes that while the “lads” challenged both the overt and hidden curricula, they also reinforced and perpetuated the “ideological distinctions that lie at the

heart of our economy” (Apple 1980, p. 50). So, while the “lads” had agency, they were also part of the reproduction. While Willis’ research pointed out the way schooling is a dynamic, as well as contested site of reproduction, it neglects any real investigation into the complexities of gender relations, the experience of schoolgirls or even a discussion of mixed peer groups. Willis’ work provided a starting point into new discussions of the hidden curriculum and the breaking down of the purely reproductive, and instead highlighted the way young people can also challenge, reinforce and negotiate these curricula; many scholars have used his work as a jumping off point to investigate the many race and gender implications.

Whether through rituals of romance (Holland & Eisenhart 1990), punishment and discipline rituals (Ferguson 2001), or through pep rallies, dances and other school rituals (Pascoe 2007), or through silenced/absent discussions in the sexual health education classroom (Fields 2008), the hidden curriculum remains relevant today and is an important part of the justice literature that looks at the connections between schools and students. For this research, the hidden curriculum is particularly important in how the curriculum is often gendered in covert and silenced ways. Whether it is because it is the way gender is silenced in the classroom or the way gender is explicitly stated in the dress code, gender remains a prevalent concept for interrogating the many ways hidden curriculum literature remains relevant today. Hidden curriculum is important for this project because it helps to answer how the official and hidden curricula shape youth ideas and enactments of gender.

GENDER AND IDENTITY IN SCHOOLS

Schools²⁰ function to reproduce and reinforce socially normative notions of gender identity among other contested social identities/locations and are sources of social power. Those who do not conform to normal gender identities are considered deviant and are monitored, regulated and socially controlled (Garcia, 2009; Messerschmidt, 2004; and Thorne, 1993). As such, this research attempts to uncover the role schools play in the gender identity construction of youth, as well as how youth “do” gender within schools (West & Zimmerman, 1987). This research takes an intersectional approach to youth identity looking not only at gender, but also at the way gender intersects with other identities such as religion, race and sexuality.

Gender is also policed within schools and regulated based on the “appropriate” norm. Gender in this context often refers to the physical embodiment of sex – that those who have male sex characteristics act, dress, can be read²¹ as masculine and that those who have female sex characteristics act,

²⁰ I am defining school(s) broadly. This definition includes traditional district bound schools, charter schools, magnet schools, etc. It is referring to the institutional structure in place. With the realization that education occurs in many places, here I am specifically looking at what is occurring within the geographical boundaries and physical space of schools.

²¹ What Kessler & McKenna (1987) refer to as gender attribution, which is “based on how people interpret themselves and each other not only in terms of their sex (male – female), but of their gender presentation (feminine – masculine) as compared with generally dominant Western norms. In other words, we use the concept as a heuristic device to represent the sometimes complex process of attributing sex and gender characteristics to an “other” to render them understandably human (and therefore sexed and gendered) in terms of existing social norms” (McGrath & Chananie-Hill 2009, p. 247).

dress and can be read as feminine. Therefore, deviant in this case would be those who do not dress/act in accordance with their biological sex. Young people (particularly young children) come into a world already organized by gendered binaries, and schools are one of the many socializing institutions that reinforce the gender (and gendered) binary (Myers and Raymond 2010). So those who deviate from the norm are those who choose to dress, act, talk, or engage in other gender non-conforming activities. Of course gender and sexuality are closely linked and regularly collapsed into one category or conflated. Quite frequently those who demonstrate gender non-conformity are policed and regulated based on assumed sexuality (Herdt et. al. 2007).

Part of the reason for choosing a high school setting, is because in a secondary school social setting, we are likely to find a variety of displayed gender identities. There is likely to be representations of “hegemonic masculinities (e.g., “cool guys” and “jocks”), complicit masculinities (e.g. “regular guys”), subordinated masculinities (e.g. “gay boys,” “wimps,” and “nerds”), and oppositional masculinities (e.g. “freaks,” “tough guys,” and “profeminist boys”) (Messerschmidt 2004, p. 43). The same can be said for different forms of femininities (Holland, et. al. 1996; Impett, et. al. 2008; Messerschmidt, 2004; and Mikel Brown 1997).

Social institutions, such as schools, often “mirror the larger structure of society, including the norms and behaviors of acceptable” gender and sexuality (Wilkinson & Pearson 2009, p. 546). Schools are a particularly fruitful site for these discussions, because young people spend a significant amount of their time

at school. Schools are “community institutions. They are strongly affected by the larger social processes, resources, and characteristics of the community in which they are embedded” (Miller 2008, p. 67) and as such, schools are a central site of socialization and a socializing institution in which people “struggle to define themselves in relation to others” (Wilkinson & Pearson 2009, p. 545).

Schooling is one of the cultural institutions designed to socialize youth to ‘fit’ into the community. In fulfilling this role, many school personnel become gatekeepers of the status quo, which includes fostering heterosexuality and gender ‘appropriate’ expression. Educational policies are needed to ensure that schools foster the inherent worth of each student regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression (Grossman et. al. 2009, p. 43).

Schools are one of the most significant socializing institutions in the United States,²² they “become sites of intense cultural politics” (Levinson and Holland 1996, p. 1) and are normative constructs in the lives of youth (Wilkinson & Pearson 2009). As has been pointed about by many critical education scholars, schools serve as sites that often reinforce problematic social and cultural disparities and rather than being “innocent sites of cultural transmission, or places for the inculcation of consensual values,” are places that “exacerbate and perpetuate social inequalities” (Levinson and Holland 1996, p. 5). Schools, rather than creating spaces for advancement and empowerment, regularly reinforce dominant social control apparatuses. As such, schools in many ways

²² It is important to note that schools are just one of many socializing institution in young people’s lives. Families, peer groups and media have also been identified by the literature as having strong influences on what young people know, how they learn, and how they construct their identities (see Kotchick et. al. 2001; Miller and White 2003; Grossman et. al. 2009; Myers and Raymond 2010; Wilkinson and Pearson 2009; Lorber 1995; Brown and Cantor 2000; Brookes and Kelly 2009).

reproduce hegemonic notions of gender and sexuality for young people. Schools affect youth through curricula choices, teacher-student interaction, and the formal structuring of activities throughout the day and influence not only how students construct and understand their own identities, but also how they read and interpret the ways identities are expressed in others.

Schools can be an unwelcoming environment for adolescents with “nonheterosexual feelings, behaviors, and identities. In schools, as in the broader culture, heterosexuality is often assumed and institutionally enforced through rituals, daily interactions between students and teachers and the curriculum” (Wilkinson & Pearson 2009, p. 542). These rituals can include school dances, where students cannot take a “date” of the same sex. This regulation of sexuality reinforces a heterosexual standard (heteronormativity) and additionally gives rights to those who fit within the “appropriate” standard. These rituals can include certain activities that are deemed appropriate for girls (cheerleading for example) and those activities that are appropriate for boys (football for example). Those students who wish to participate in activities that are not appropriate for their sex can frequently be regulated, sometimes with hostility.

Further, schooling significantly shapes adolescent sexualities and draws from and “reproduces the romance and virginity discourses,” which can be detrimental to young women in general, and young women of color in particular. Sexuality discourses also differently marginalize youth of color, working class youth and female youth in a variety of ways. There is a pervasive silence around

female desire and girls are frequently left to decipher their sexual feelings and impulses without any help (Ashcraft 2006).

One prime example of the way young people's gender and sexuality identities are policed is provided in the work of C.J. Pascoe. Pascoe's (2007) discussion of the way young boys police the borders of masculinity through sexualized homophobic discourse (fag discourse) provides specific examples of how schools as socializing institutions reinforce normative notions of sexuality and gender expression. Specific notions of appropriate gender and sexuality are constructed through disciplinary practices, student-teacher relations, institutional practices and social events (p. 27). According to Pascoe, "teenagers, teachers, and the institutional logics of schooling construct adolescent masculinity through idioms of sexuality" (p. 4). For example, teachers reinforce popular notions of heterosexuality and masculinity, often at the expense of students who may define themselves as non-heteronormative. They participate in this fag discourse. Pascoe provides several examples: the way Mr. Kellogg ignores the blatantly homophobic comments in his class and shrugs them off as "boys will be boys behavior" (p. 39) or the way Mr. McNally lectured his class about the inappropriateness of homophobic insults (like "that's so gay"), but then engaged in such discourse by pretending to hit on a male student in order to make the class laugh (p. 39). This link is particularly important because of the way school personnel regularly prioritize and reinforce a specific sexualized heterosexuality and reinforce notions of homophobia as acceptable and appropriate.

Additionally, in her ethnography of girls' note passing and boys' joke telling, Canaan (1990) describes the way classrooms "in particular and the school in general provided key sites where teenage girls and boys implicitly elaborated gendered understandings of themselves" (p. 215). These gendered understandings are based on what they learn in and around schools. Similarly, Thorne's (1993) ethnography reveals the many ways schools reproduce gendered binaries from games of tag or "girls-chase-the-boys," or "cooties," or bra snapping. She describes the way both the schools (including the teachers, administrators, and aides) maintain gender binaries and how the kids frequently acquiesce to these norms.

As has been pointed out, schools can reinforce problematic notions about gender. Gender, however, is not the only identity that is regulated and policed within schools. Gender and sexuality are also racialized and classed within schools. Within these normative scripts are also specific racial scripts that young people are taught with regards to sexuality and gender.²³ As Ferguson (2001)

²³ Because this research and literature review is focused on the way education reproduces notions of "appropriate" gender and sexuality for young people, I will only be looking at the race and class implications of this discussion as they relate to gender and sexuality. There is ample literature on the many ways race and class inequalities are reproduced both in and around school that is not at the core of this research project. For example, Pollack (2001, 2004); Kumashiro (2000, 2002); Lewis (2000, 2001 and 2004); and Castagno (2008) discuss race, Whiteness and the notion of colorblindness. Giroux (2003, 2009); Howard (2006); and Ferguson (2002) discuss racialized disciplinary processes. Apple (2003, 2004, and 2005); Anyon (1981); and Romero & Margoliz (1998) discuss the gendered and raced hidden curriculum in schools (both secondary and post-secondary). Anderson-Levitt (2005) discusses and race in a global context; Kozol (1991) discusses the more contemporary ramifications of school segregation;

points out in her ethnography of elementary school discipline practices, “school labeling practices and the exercise of rules operated as part of a hidden curriculum to marginalize and isolate black male youth in disciplinary spaces and brand them as criminally inclined” (p. 2). Ferguson shows that schools function not only to regulate young people based on gendered standards, they also regulate young people based on assumed racial characteristics. This can be seen in the way many schools utilize tracking and other forms of inequality based on class and race disparities. For the young boys she studied, to align oneself with the “appropriate” standards of the school was to “distance oneself from a group identification” (p. 223).

There is significant literature on the way schools continue to categorize and classify youth based on identity categories. There is “always a space between the teacher/teaching and learner/learning, for instance, between who the teacher thinks the students are and who they actually are, or between what the teacher teaches and what the students learn (Kumashiro 2002, p. 78). These conflicts are often hardest and have the most impact on young people who by nature, or by choice, do not fit the standard norm. Schools are spaces where the Other is treated in harmful ways. Below I will discuss some of the remaining justice issues that address the nature of the relationship between schools and youth.

And O’Connor et. al. (2009); and Skrla et. al. (2004) discuss the racialized and classed consequences of No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

To be a “good” student, one must follow the norms and standards as set forth by the school. The link between schools and the creation of “good citizens” can be seen in the way schools regulate young people and young people’s identity expression. In this way, to succeed in the world one must succeed in school. To be successful in school, one must obey authority. As several scholars have pointed out, this seems to impact young students of color (particularly young boys) in different ways than it does other students (Ferguson, 2001; Willis, 1977). Young men of color are frequently the highly regulated within and around schools (see Skiba et. al. 2000 and 2002; Townsend 2000). While the existence of a disproportionate disciplinary standard for young men of color has been extensively documented, it is still not fully understood and there is little literature on how to solve the problem.

These notions about who is the “good” student, who gets disciplined and how, and who is the “Other” in terms of the school environment all play important roles in the way we understand youth and gender identity in schools. Young people are often highly regulated based on the way they express themselves through their appearance (i.e. how they dress). Whether expressing their racial, sexual, gendered or classed identities, the way other people read that expression has more to do with who the student is (i.e. their racial, classed, or sexed identity category) than what it is they are actually wearing. The way that students are regulated based on their classed and racial identity categories is very important because youth are never just one identity category. They are never just gay, or just White, or just poor, (to name only a few) but instead, their identity

are overlapping and intersecting and their identity and subjectivity is more nuanced and complicated than is often presented.

CONSTRUCTIONS OF “SAFE SPACES”

I recognize classroom instruction as an ‘opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries’ (bell hooks 1994 in Fields 2008, p. 3).

Because schools can serve as institutions that reproduce inequalities, teachers, parents and students in recent years have dedicated themselves to creating safe spaces in and around schools for young people who do not fit within normative constructions of gender and sexuality. The importance of constructing safe spaces for young people is a dominant aspect of the literature on resistance and resiliency. There is a need to create safe spaces where there can be gender play (Pascoe 2007), where young people can express themselves freely and where students can actually survive (and thrive) in school.

Clubs such as Gay Straight Alliances (GSA) promote inclusion and provide young people with a place to be themselves, whether they are gay or straight. These clubs help young people address issues of identity in safe spaces with the support of their peers, some of their teachers and administration, and sometimes with the support of their parents. GSAs provide a place for young people where they can be themselves, where they can share common interests, and where they do not have to fear ridicule from others (Gray 2009, Herdt. et. al. 2007; McCready 2010 and Weis & Fine 2000).

GSA's provide young people with a means of empowerment at the grassroots level. In this way, "schools become a site for new forms of agency and activism...when young people begin to challenge the gendered and racialized scripts for sexuality that are prevalent in the dominant youth (and adult) culture" (Herdt et. al. 2007, p. 240). Alternative spaces provide the "opportunity to explore our 'differences' from the dominant heterosexist society, to form our own notions of what society could be like, and to just relax and have fun without worrying too much about the repercussions of living in a society that is not totally our own" (Barry 2000 in Weis & Fine 2000, p. 84).

In addition to GSA's there are alternative spaces that challenge the normative assumption of "at risk."²⁴ Like Proweller's (2000) study that presented a picture of teen mothers as resilient. The young girls in this program are encouraged to tell their own stories. As Proweller argues, "the voices of pregnant and parenting teenagers re-writing/-righting their lives suggests to educators and policy makers a profound need to introduce youths' telling narratives on their own terms directly into debates and discourses around teenage pregnancy" (p. 116). By providing these girls a safe space to reinvent themselves, to feel safe from harassment and judgment, New Ventures Academy

²⁴ There is ample literature on the construction and deconstruction of "risk" in terms of who is "at risk." Because of the racialized, classed and sexed connotations, constructions, and assumptions about who is at risk, this term has been critiqued extensively. Here I use it because it is the language Proweller (2000) uses to discuss the students she worked with. For more on the deconstruction of "at risk" see Swadener & Lubeck (1995) and Wollons (1993).

presents an alternative to schools as negatively reinforcing inequality and instead shows how schools could provide a forum for young voices to be heard.

Similarly, Gary (2009) describes the many ways young people challenge, reinterpret, and reinvent the “appropriate” behavior recognized by school institutions. Her ethnographic work points to the varied examples of the way young people challenge and create their identities amidst often oppressive social structures (like education). She highlights doing drag at the local Wal-Mart or the “queercore punk band” that plays at the church-sponsored skate park (p. 101) all in an attempt to show difference “safe” spaces. Gray also points to the creation of a GSA and the support of parents and community members (amidst significant challenges and contestation) to Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) and the activism of the Berea College students on Lobby Day (p. 3). Young people additionally find communities and safe spaces on the internet in chat rooms and on blog sites where they can articulate their own identities like AJ (p.159) and Ashley (p. 159).

There are also examples within the literature where teachers and students create safe spaces within classrooms to challenge normative understandings of race (Weis & Fine 2000). Additionally, this work shows the importance of young people having a voice not only in their classrooms and other school environments, but also in the research projects that they are a part of. It reinforces the idea that young people should be able to tell their own story. I agree with Patricia Hill Collins (2004) that people become empowered when they

are allowed to think and speak for themselves. Ideas “matter greatly in this struggle for empowerment” (p. 3).

As can be seen from this literature review, there is an established body of literature on the construction of adolescence/youth, gender, and youth experiences in schools. This research, however, does not provide an in depth picture of how young people navigate their gender in their daily lives at school. While there is a significant body of knowledge on gender, there is less known about youth gender. Additionally, while there is a significant body of literature on childhood and youth, this literature often constructs children as asexual and youth as hypersexual and hypersexualized and regularly conflates gender expression with sexual orientation. And while there is significant literature on youth in schools, this literature has focused on more specific ideas about gender in schools, for example, literature on school curriculum, on youth gender and violence or on youth sexuality rather than on the specific ways youth identify and describe gender. As can be seen from this literature review, there are gaps in the literature that this research fills. This research attempts to uncover the role schools play in identity construction of youth, as well as how youth do gender within schools. As Brayboy and Castagno (2008) note, “students will learn better and be more engaged in schooling when they can make connections to it” (p. 981). Accordingly, research on youth in schools must take into account the way schools construct and maintain often culturally hegemonic pedagogy about the varieties of students they teach.

CONCLUSION

There is an ample body of literature on young people, gender and sexuality, and the reproduction of social inequalities in schools, particularly around sexual, racial, and gender inequalities. This literature review has highlighted some of the major schools of thought and showed that, while there has been and continues to be work done on youth identity construction in schools, there are still gaps in how we understand the way gender is constructed, reinforced and challenged on a daily basis in schools. There are many insights to be gained from the previous multidisciplinary bodies of literature but there are, however, areas that need a more nuanced discussion of the specific ways that youth understand gender in a school environment. As was discussed, the literature on youth and adolescence has been conflicting and has often been critiqued for attempting to provide a universal understanding of the period between childhood and adulthood. As many of the authors have shown, this neglects a cross-cultural (as well as a multicultural) contextual analysis of the differences in understandings of this time period.

The literature on gender and sexuality, and youth gender in particular, lacks discussion of gender as a separate category from sexuality. Because these two identity categories have regularly been conflated, much of the previous research has collapsed them together and left readers to assume that gender and sexuality are somehow equivalent. Additionally, this research also leaves out the specific ways youth “talk” about gender – the words and phrases they use – to make sense of their own gender and the gender expression of those around them.

Similarly, previous research lacks nuanced discussion of how youth navigate social expectations about gender.

The following chapter outlines the history of schools and schooling in the United States and looks specifically at the creation of charter schools. As can be seen from the discussion of gender and sexuality and the reproduction of inequalities in schools, schools are an important site of analysis given that youth (particularly in the United States) spend the vast majority of their time within the walls of schools. Because the body of literature on charter schools in particular, and all schools more generally, lacks an analysis of how youth express and navigate gender within schools, this literature will highlight how this research project fills a significant gap within the school literature.

Chapter 3

SCHOOLING GENDER

Schools are an important site of analysis given that youth (particularly in the United States) spend the vast majority of their time within the walls of schools. This chapter outlines the history of schools and schooling in the United States and looks specifically at the creation of charter schools. Because the body of literature on charter schools in particular, and all schools more generally, lacks an analysis of how youth express and navigate gender within schools, I will highlight how this research project fills a significant gap within that literature.

The previous chapter provided insight into the vast body of literature on youth, gender, and the way schools can, and do, function as sites that reproduce inequalities. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research site for this study, that is, two charter art schools in the greater Phoenix metropolitan area. This brief historical outline provides discussion of schools more generally and then moves into an outline of the creation and maintaining of public schools in the United States. The chapter closes with a look at the push for school choice and the creation of charter schools, where research for this project was conducted.

HISTORY OF SCHOOLING IN THE UNITED STATES

School, an objective competition – as the story goes – provides an arena for discovering the limits of one’s talent and, hence, the boundaries of one’s life pursuit. Educational reformers have proposed an end run on economic strife by offering all children an equal opportunity to make it. Those who have failed to measure up have only themselves to blame (Bowles & Gintis 1976, p. 4).

Much of a young person's time during the day is spent schools, which is often a social space where they are highly regulated. As Bowles and Gintis (1976) have shown, at the close of the nineteenth-century education provided in schools were the "new frontier" and the school replaced the Western frontier as the new folklore of capitalism. Schools, unfortunately, failed to meet these high expectations and, as these authors observe, schools have been increasingly unable to support the myth of equal opportunity and full personal development that they were created to fulfill.

Several contesting and conflicting ideas about how education/schools should be structured, who should be able to attend, what should be taught, and what students should know by the time they leave. Education has been discussed as a mechanism of social control, as a great equalizer, and as a factory that produces productive, well-behaved citizens. Schools impact young people through curricula, teacher-student interaction, and the formal structuring of activities (Myers & Raymond, 2010). Of course, education does not just take place in schools.

For education scholar Michael Apple (2005), education is a "site of struggle and compromise" (p. 272). It serves as what he calls a "proxy" for larger battles over what our institutions should do, who they should serve, and who should make these decisions. Education and schools in particular, are major arenas in which "resources, power, and ideology specific to policy, finance, curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation in education are worked through" (p. 272). The functions of the school include influencing the literacy of the adolescent,

effecting the socialization, and providing a means of social change and control (Lerner & Galambos, 1984). Schools “liberate” children’s minds from the “bonds” of illiteracy and open up a “global network of ideas to students by training them in a world language.” But, in many countries, and historically in the U.S., “schooling also liberates them, at least for the hours spent on its benches, from physical labor” (Anderson-Levitt 2005, p. 993).

This project focuses more specifically on schooling in the United States, however, it is important to note that there are other models that provide additional ways to think about schooling. Many critique (and also contend) the idea that education has been cast as the “repressive arm of the state” for North American youth. In contrast, in many other countries, school is a liberating force. So, whereas students in the U.S. want out of schools, there are kids in other countries dying to get in (Anderson-Levitt 2005). Schools differ because of national cultural difference – national traditions influence teachers’ philosophies and the way they teach and the way they view students. While often the “dominant teacher discourse on adolescence in the school constructed students as half-formed citizens, not worthy of full rights, and in need of close guidance and instruction, students often asserted alternative views of work and rights, questioning – even contesting – teachers’ power through the passion in their moral discourse” (Levinson 1998, p. 48). Further, there is varying perspectives on approaches to education as either a space to create “habits, manners, and responsibilities in the home” (p. 48) that “does not really serve to “educate;” its primary mission is to “instruct.” Education takes place in and through the family

and home. A good education provides the *foundation* for successful schooling, not the other way around” (p. 62). Levinson’s work points to the varying perspectives as to the function and purpose of schools. This notion of instructing rather than educating reinforces what Freire (1970) critiques as a banking mentality of education where teachers “deposit” information into the young people in their classrooms.

Children across cultures and through time have managed to grow to adulthood and learn to become functioning members of their society without the necessity of schooling. Fast-forward to the twenty-first century and we find a world where childhood without schooling is unthinkable. Modern children may spend more waking hours in school than in their homes, more time with teachers than with parents...parents are, through the medium of mass communication, given daily reminders that childhood is a ‘race’ in which the winners enjoy the good life while the losers may be shot in a drug deal gone wrong (Lancy 2010, p. 305).

Most people in the United States think of schools as a central institution in educating young people to be good citizens. Most parents and educators could not imagine schools outside of our current conception. For purposes of this brief history of U.S. schools, I will first provide an overview for how U.S. schools came to be, and then I highlight some the major players in creating today’s education system. I will then discuss some of the major shifts in the U.S. education system, the bureaucratic structures in place within the U.S. public school system, some of the key players and decision makers, some of the major legal and policy decisions that have significantly shaped U.S. public schools, as well as the conflicts/complications that have arisen around access, ideology, pedagogy and curriculum. Lastly, I will discuss the rise in school choice movements and charter schools.

Schooling²⁵ in the United States began in Puritan times, with families and church communities educating young people until they were old enough to begin work (Moore 2006). The first public school was the Boston Latin School, which was founded in 1635. Prior to that, parents thought that it was essential that children learn how to read, but that was often the extent of schooling/education (Moore 2006). Those families that were wealthy could afford to hire tutors²⁶ and could bypass the emergent public schools. Public schools steadily began to grow and really took off between 1640- 1650 (Johnson 1904). Horace Mann is most frequently cited as being the major player in the creation of the public school system. Mann, an educational reformer, created a statewide system of professional teachers and started the “common school” movement arguing that the only way to control all of the unruly children was to require that they attend school. Attendance in school became compulsory by decree of the Compulsory Education Act of 1852 and by the early 1900s, all states had compulsory attendance laws (Johnson 1904).

There have been long-standing debates between church and state about whether public monies could go to fund parochial schools and what role religion had within public schools. Many of these debates continue today. During the

²⁵ I will utilize Levinson and Holland’s (1996) definition of the school as a “state organized or regulated institution of intentional instruction,” which includes many different types of formal and informal education (p. 2). Education, however, is not solely based within the walls of tangible schools. Education is also culturally produced and these cultural productions often contradict the way schools socialize young people.

²⁶ Schools have had a long history of exclusionary practices based on race, gender and class.

Progressive Era, public schools saw great expansion both in the number of schools and in the number of students they served. This kind of expansion continued well into the twenty-first century (Bowles & Gintis, 1976).

There are several key players in the construction and maintenance of public schools. As noted, Horace Mann and his colleagues were key players in constructing the public schools. Additionally, John Dewey was prominent in shaping ideas of schools as not only places where learning took place, but also a place where young people could learn how to live, where they could be socialized to be good citizens. Dewey was a proponent of progressive education and wrote about the central role of democracy in education (Ravitch, 1974). He believed that schools are “constrained to justify and produce inequality rather than correct it” (Bowles & Gintis 1976, p. 102). Schools have had a long history of being linked to improving citizenship and growing human capital. Below I will discuss only two of the many players: those who operate and maintain the bureaucratic structures (school boards, department of education, etc.) and parents.²⁷

Public schools today are under the mandates of the U.S. Department of Education. Though the federal government plays a role in the maintenance and regulation of public schools, individual states have primary authority over public

²⁷ There are other people and institutions that play a role including religious organizations and community members. Due to the focus of this research, I have chosen to elaborate on only a few. Parents are important because of the continued prominent role they play in the construction and maintenance of school, particularly in the homeschool and school choice movements.

education in the United States. Over time, each state has developed a department of education and has enacted laws regulating, among other things, finance, the hiring of school personnel, student attendance, and curriculum. Local school districts typically oversee the administration of schools, rather than the State agencies, with the exception of licensing requirements and general rules concerning health and safety. Public schools rely heavily on local property taxes to meet the vast majority of school expenses. American schools have tended to reflect the educational values and financial capabilities of the communities in which they are located.

Parents and teachers have interacted since the inception of schooling in the United States. Their relationship, however, has been tenuous and has changed over time. Schools have gained more power and control since the mid-nineteenth-century due to the changing status of women and “decrease in functions of the home” (Cutler 2000, p. 2). Though the home and school continue to share the responsibility for the education of young people, their relationship is “contrived, being shaped and directed by men and women with different perspectives even when they possess the same expectations, values, and goals” (Cutler 2000, p. 2). As a result, young people have become “commuters in social space” and have had to learn to “deal with two sets of masters” (p. 3). As has been seen in many debates between parents and schools, including debates about curriculum, sexual health education, and discipline, the relationship between parents and educators is “political and can quickly turn confrontational” (p. 199). One of the major obstacles for parent involvement is

the socioeconomic class status (and race) of the parents. Those parents who feel like they have less social and economic resources and power often feel that they are less likely to make a difference. However, those parents who have more resources have more power and tend to be more vocal. There is also debate about to what extent home life impacts educational achievement. There are those who claim that parental involvement is crucial to positive educational outcome, but others believe that it only has a minor impact (Cutler, 2000). Additionally, parents have played a large role in the push for greater school choice.

In 1997 the National Congress of Parents and Teachers (NCPT) adopted a set of standards for parental involvement in schools. The standards stressed the importance of regular communication between parents and educators, but it also made it clear that teachers and administrators had the lead. So, while this supported and encouraged parental involvement, it made it clear that teachers were in charge. This works sometimes, and not others. For example, parents are often disappointed and disillusioned because they feel schools have not lived up to their expectations, particularly after the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (Cutler, 2000) which has led to the expansion of school choice movements and homeschooling.

SOCIOLEGAL SHIFTS IN EDUCATION

In addition to the role of bureaucratic institutions and parents, sociolegal shifts have occurred that have greatly impacted and influenced the way we understand schools today. The Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954) was one of the most significant shifts in the history

of public education in the United States. Until the early 1950s, most children went to racially segregated and racist public schools. After *Plessey v. Ferguson* (1896), which upheld the doctrine of separate but equal, young black and white children, especially in the South, attended separate and unequal schools. Students of color frequently had to travel extensive distances in order to attend their school, regularly passing White schools on their way (as is the case of Linda Brown whose father filed the *Brown* suit with the help of the NAACP). In addition to the distance students had to travel, resources at non-White schools were often scarce and children were forced into overcrowded schools with few teachers and limited facilities. *Brown v. Board* overrode *Plessey* and the separate but equal doctrine and demanded integration of public schools. The Court claimed “that, in the field of public education, the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.” Emphasizing the importance of schools, Chief Justice Warren observed that

today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society. It is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities, even service in the armed forces. *It is the very foundation of good citizenship.* Today it is a principal instrument in *awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment.* In these days, it is *doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education.* Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms (<http://www.nationalcenter.org/brown.html>) (emphasis added).

The purpose for providing such an extensive quote is twofold: first, the *Brown v. Board* decision was one of the most significant decisions in education history and has been continually referenced within scholarship on race, education, and schools. And secondly, the comments by Chief Justice Warren clearly link education with duties of citizenship as well as promoting the ideals of the American dream, two of the main foundational ideas of U.S. education. To its advocates, *Brown* represented a promise that the color lines in all major institutions in the South would come down, and to its opponents it threatened the “racial system on which the region was founded” (Orfield 2005, p. 1).

Though schools were to have been integrated following the *Brown* decision, public schools have continued to remain unequal with some having little to no resources. Boger and Orfield (2005) identify this as “resegregation” based on housing segregation and income levels. As can be seen in Kozol’s (1991) ethnography of children in America’s schools, many schools in America remain segregated based on both racial and classed distinctions. Children (predominantly poor children and poor children of color) go to schools where there are no working toilets, where sewage floods the playgrounds, where they see drug deals and violence on a regular basis, and where they frequently have no text books or outdated text books that do not reflect their needs (Kozol 1991). This kind of “resegregation” remains in many school districts today where resources are provided in wealthier neighborhoods, or where parents have the resources to send their children to private schools.

This kind of racial and class residential segregation has a long history. As noted, the vast majority of money that public schools receive is from property taxes. Redlining was the process that denied or limited access to loan money, generally on the basis that those who sought the loans were people of color or poor and redlining was a common practice after the *Brown* decision and dictated what neighborhoods people could live (Encyclopedia of Chicago). This process remained normalized until the late 1960s and the passing of the Fair Housing Act of 1968 and the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act of 1975. Redlining had detrimental effects on neighborhoods and was used to promote racial residential segregation. After the passage of those laws, white neighbors began to flee these communities when black families were allowed to move in. White homeowners would sell their property at reduced rates in order to leave the community and retreat to the suburbs, what is commonly referred to as White Flight (Frankenberg 2005). Negative outcomes included lowered property values and taxable income values which, in turn, effects the amount of money schools receive for even basic operations.

OTHER IMPORTANT SHIFTS IN US EDUCATION:

NCLB AND ZERO-TOLERANCE POLICIES

In addition to the important housing, political and socio-legal shifts and policies that continued, the 1983 report entitled *A Nation at Risk* made waves in the educational community because it suggested that several other countries were outperforming American schools, a lingering notion that persists today. This report made it “fashionable to stress academic rigor enforced by national

standards” (Cutler 2000, p. 13). After years of debate and parents and educators vocally demanding school reforms and greater accountability, in 2002, President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). This Act was a controversial measure that was designed to increase public school accountability. The Act requires schools to test students in reading and math each year in order to identify which schools are performing poorly or “underperforming.” Those schools that fail these tests must allow students to transfer to better performing schools, which led to the increased debates about school choice. Failing schools have to make improvements by hiring new teachers (read firing those whose classes are not performing) and/or changing curricula, or they risk being taken over by the state. One of the many problems with such a measure is the fact that most schools that are failing in these standardized testing already lack resources which means they cannot afford to hire new teachers or to change the curricula (Cutler 2000; Boger & Orfield 2005; Giroux 2009).

The NCLB Act is based on the premise of “explicit, direct commitment of the federal government that the achievement gaps that have long existed between the academic success of White and middle – and upper-income children and that of children of color and children from low-income homes are unacceptable and must be eliminated” (Skrla 2004, p. 133). This is ironic because the Act was originally established to address the U.S.’s performance globally. Skrla, et. al. further claim that NCLB relies heavily on accountability that is focused on the disaggregation of student scores by race, class, disability, and language. The relationship between accountability and equity is “complex, dynamic (changing

constantly due to frequent changes in state policies in addition to local mediation through interpretation and implementation), and confusingly interactive with other policy initiatives” (2004, p. 136). There are many who support and those who challenge No Child Left Behind. Those who support the Act claim that it holds schools accountable for their performance, and gives parents greater choice when their schools are not living up to their or state/national standards. Opponents say the No Child Left Behind Act forces schools to “teach to the test,” focusing primarily on the core subjects of reading and math at the expense of other areas of study. Not only does this encourage teachers to teach to the test, is also disproportionately impacts poorer schools, which typically service students of color and poor students. These debates have waged in many states and continue to be a problem today.

NCLB emerged out of the standards movement that focused primarily on how well students (often particular students) performed academically (Hunt 2008). Since the passage of NCLB, there has been significant narrowing of school improvement efforts. This new teaching to the test has left schools focusing all of their attention and resources on the areas of mathematics and language arts, neglecting other subjects, often even eliminating other subjects in order to ensure that teachers have time for instruction in the tested subject areas. Hunt (2008) points out that “the high-stakes nature of NCLB...has created many logical and ethical dilemmas for school administrators” (p. 584) as to whether they should focus their attention (and funds) on other programs such as social sciences and the arts, on the “bubble students” who are close to making the

scores, or, if the focus and attention should only be on students who have a “real possibility of making AYP” (p. 584).

In addition to NCLB and similar acts, the myth of meritocracy continues to promote ideals of the American dream, self-reliance, hard work and success.

As Bowles and Gintis (1976) have pointed out,

the educational system legitimates economic inequality by providing an open, objective, and ostensibly meritocratic mechanism for assigning individuals to unequal economic positions. The educational system fosters and reinforces the belief that economic success depends essentially on the possession of technical and cognitive skills – skills which it is organized to provide in an efficient, equitable, and unbiased manner on the basis of meritocratic principles (p. 103).

The problem with this is that meritocracy, particularly in schools, is a myth.

Schools are not equal in the resources and time they provide students (as pointed out above), which means that students do not enter, pass through, or leave public schools on a level playing field.

In addition to federal funding for No Child Left Behind, federal law now provides financial incentives to schools that implement zero-tolerance policies and politics. Zero-tolerance policies grew in the late 1970s and 1980s. These policies become more popular with school and government officials as school violence (including the school shootings at Columbine High School and Westside Middle School) became the focus of national media attention (Skiba & Knesting 2001).

As several scholars and activists have pointed out, these policies have serious negative implications based on racial and class biases (Skiba & Peterson 1999, Morrison & D’Incau 1997, Casella 2003). Giroux (2009) claims that the

use of “drug sniffing dogs and cameras have become a common feature in schools, and administrators willingly comply with federal laws that give military recruiters the right to access the names, addresses, and telephone numbers of students in both public schools and higher education” (p. 11). These policies impact students of color disproportionately, have led to decreased graduation rates, and have increased the school-to-prison pipeline thereby increasing the burden on the justice system and wasting tax dollars (Advancement Project 2009). Many fear that these policies and the continued implementation of laws and funding incentives that have disproportionate effects on poor students of color will maintain a kind of “dead zone” wherein the “spectacle of commodification exists side by side with the imposing threat of massive debt, bankruptcy, the prison-industrial complex, and the elimination of basic civil liberties” (Giroux 2009, pp. 11-12). So, while schools continue to be linked with ideas of the American dream, they often reinforce inequalities about who advances, who receives the most resources, who gets disciplined/policed, how and by whom, and they reinforce the notions that those who succeed are those that worked the hardest, rather than challenging or questioning the structural differences within schools (Ferguson 2001; Kupchik 2010; Devine 1996; Giroux 2009).

HISTORY OF CHARTER SCHOOLS

As illustrated in the previous section, there have been continual shifts in U.S. schools and education policies. The push for additional school choice has stemmed from many different sources and multiple streams of thought. The

privatization of schools has been part of a larger conservative political movement that has included the homeschool movement and the many culture wars over public school curriculum (Stevens 2001, Knowles 1988, McDowell & Ray 2000). The desire of parents and communities to have more educational choice has led to the founding of new school options like charter schools.²⁸ Charter schools are publicly funded but independently operated schools that are allowed to operate more freely and autonomously than traditional district-bound public schools. So, like other public schools, charter schools receive public money, but are not subject to all of the same rules and regulations.

In 1991, Minnesota became the first state to pass a charter school law. Currently, almost every state has similar laws. Most public charter schools are open, but operate on an admissions process rather than a districting process. This means that students must apply to attend rather than attendance being based on where they live. Charter schools were originally founded by parents, teachers, administrators and/or activists who felt restricted or dissatisfied by traditional public schools. These schools are “merely a political, legal, administrative and financial arrangement of relative autonomy, created in a somewhat different form in each state that has authorized them” (Frankenberg & Lee 2003, p. 12).

In Arizona, charter schools were established by the legislature in 1994 (A.R.S. 15-183, Senate bill 2002). These schools are designed to “improve student achievement and offer educational choice in publicly funded schooling”

²⁸ Additional school choice options include vouchers, inter-and-intra-district choice, magnet schools, and private schools (Frankenberg & Lee 2003).

and are approved by the Arizona State Charter Board (ASCB). Arizona Charter schools sign a contract or charter with the ASCB, which enables the school to receive public funds. In “exchange for increased freedom in operations and curriculum, charter schools have an increased level of accountability in student achievement” (Academy²⁹ website). Charter schools are independent legal entities and are allowed to operate autonomously from many of the restrictions that are placed on traditional district bound public schools, for example, charter schools do not report or are under the authority of school districts (though they are still under the Department of Education), but rather are run under the authority of their creator (with the exception of charter schools that remain within school districts). Charter schools are able to offer distinctive curricula and have “greater freedom to innovate and for the most part, are not tied to geographically fixed attendance boundaries in residentially segregated communities as are neighborhood public school” but instead can draw students from anywhere (Orfield 2003, in Frankenberg & Lee 2003, p. 3). Charter schools are not completely autonomous, however. Instead, charter schools are bound by state law and their charter contract.

Arizona currently has one of the nation’s largest charters and strongest charter legislation. In 1999, just five years after establishing charter school laws, Arizona had more charter schools than any other state. Arizona law permits “any group or individual to propose a charter school to any of the three potential charter sponsors: the State Board of Education, the newly created State Board for

²⁹ Research site

Charter Schools...or any Arizona school district” (Mulholland 1999, p. 1).

Arizona charter schools are free from many state and local education codes, for example, teacher certification, but are obligated to abide by health, safety and non-discrimination laws (Mulholland 1999). Charter schools are directly funded by the state and receive a per pupil operating revenue. Arizona charter schools, like charter schools in many other states, are extremely diverse but most tend to be small (under 200 students) therefore class sizes tend to be smaller than traditionally district-bound schools. Some charters focus on students who have been unsuccessful in other schools, on the arts, on science or technology, and some on specific educational philosophy (Mulholland 1999).

Charter schools were originally “embraced by both political parties, funded from federal, state, and local budgets, approved by most state legislatures, featured in countless newspaper articles, hailed as the potential antidote to all that is pathological in weak public schools, charter schools were put forward as something that combined the independence and autonomy of private schools with the support and free tuition of public schools” (Frankenberg and Lee, 2003, p. 4). Though they were initially praised by many politicians, parents, and teachers, recent scholarship traces the strengths and weaknesses of this new funding, regulatory and curricular education system (see Frankenberg & Lee, 2003 and Nelson, et. al., 2004).

Early literature on charter schools focused predominately in two areas; first, early charter school research analyzed and critiqued whether charter schools had lived up to their expectations (Nathan 1996; Finn et. al. 2001; Rofes 1998).

Were charters free from the pitfalls of traditionally district bound public schools? Did students perform better on tests? Did charters provide students with better opportunities? More recent research has focused on whether charter schools reinforce school segregation or whether they promote desegregation efforts by basing admission on an application process rather than districting (Cobb & Glass 1999; Frankenberg & Lee 2003; Weiher & Tedin 2002).

CONCLUSION

This chapter provided an overview of the importance of schools in American culture and the various debates and policies that have surrounded schools. There has been ample literature and research on schooling in U.S. culture and increasing discussion of the role charter schools play within the broader schooling culture. As can be seen, the vast majority of literature on charter schools has investigated whether charter schools have lived up to the expectations (particularly looking at testing outcomes) and the role race/ethnicity plays in the establishment and maintenance of charter schools. The research project completed for this dissertation focused on the role of gender within two separate art charter schools, filling a gap in the literature on how youth experience gender within charter schools and how charter schools construct, maintain, or challenge normative notions of gender.

The following chapter outlines the methodology utilized for this research project detailing the research design and data collection methods, and providing insight into the daily lives of high school participants.

Chapter 4

METHODOLOGY:

CRAFTING A CRITICAL YOUTH STUDIES RESEARCH AGENDA

This study utilized a mixed-method qualitative methodology to better understand how high school students attending charter art schools navigate and construct their gender identity. The chapter provides an overview of the methodological orientation, study design and data collection methods that were employed to conduct this research. Prior to a discussion of the strengths of qualitative methodologies as they apply to research on youth: the terms ‘method’, ‘methodology’ and ‘epistemology’ should be defined. According to Gayle Letherby (2003), the meanings of the above three words are often misunderstood and confused. She defines a method as a

technique, a tool for doing research, for gathering evidence, for collecting data. Methodology entails a perspective or framework for research...An epistemology can be defined as a theory of knowledge developed through the process of research or empirical study (Letherby, 2003, p. 5).

These definitions are offered to clarify the differences between data collection methods, methodological approaches and epistemologies as they apply to this research. This project was constructed based on a critical youth studies approach and qualitative methodology and my research was guided epistemologically by a combination of social constructivism and advocacy. I sought to address the “processes of interaction among individuals” and to approach this research with an understanding that justice research should have an advocacy and reform component (Creswell 2010, pp. 20-21, Jurik & Cavender 2004). As such,

utilizing a critical youth studies framework (Best 2007) allowed me to concentrate my efforts on having the youth I worked with guide the research and our interactions. Additionally, it allowed me to gain insight and perspective from these youth on what was important to them, and what they wanted people to know and understand about the way they do gender. For purposes of this research project, the methods used were focus groups, interviews, surveys, and content analysis.

As previously noted, gender is complex and young people make multiple meanings about gender and they construct multiple identities. As such, I sought to construct a research project that takes into account that meanings are socially and historically constructed and that young people are regulated, controlled and policed based on their display and performance of gender. My goal was to provide a deeper understanding of how young people make sense of their own gender performance³⁰ and the performance of those around them. My hope is that this research will further efforts to create schools as safe spaces.³¹ Because this research falls into the realm of critical youth studies and advocacy research

³⁰ Performance here is not referring to Butler's (1990) notion of performativity

³¹ The term "safe space" has grown increasingly common within interdisciplinary literature and public conversation (Campbell et. al. 2004; Holley & Steiner 2005; Barry 2000; Rom 1998). I additionally use this language here as the youth I worked with frequently referred to Academy as a "safe space." This is a contested and complex term. For many, safe spaces are imagined. I use safe space both to indicate that this is part of a larger discussion within education literature, but also because my respondents frequently used the term without clearly defining what they meant by it or how they were using it.

(Best 2007 and Creswell 2010), I sought guidance and input from the youth I worked with in order to create a project that was mutually beneficial.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND DATA COLLECTION METHODS

This research began with the following research questions:

- (1) How do youth describe and make sense of gender?
- (2) How do youth enact and navigate gender in various school settings?
- (3) How do the official and hidden curricula shape youth ideas and enactments of gender; how do peers shape each other's ideas and enactment of gender?
- (4) How do youth navigate their many intersecting identities (race, class, citizenship, religion, and sexuality) in relation to gender?

This project utilized a mixed method approach to data collection including (1) participant observation; (2) formal and informal interviews; (3) focus group interviews; (4) collection of survey data; and (5) the collection and content analysis of school ephemera. Findings from this study elucidate a better understanding of gender identity construction as it intersects with other aspects of youth identity, and can further highlight the importance of a critical youth studies perspective when working with and conducting research with youth.

USING QUALITATIVE METHODS AND ETHNOGRAPHY

As Berg (2007) contends, qualitative research provides a “fruitfulness and often greater depth of understanding” (p. 2) into the social phenomenon that is being studied. Qualitative research “builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural

setting” (Creswell 1998, p. 15) and provides for a degree of “immersion into individual lives” (Stewart et. al. 2006, p. 12). This research provided a forum in which respondents could use their voice to describe their own experiences rather than having responses imposed on them. Because the participants were youth, they frequently have had their own experiences and activities dictated, structured and constrained by adults. I sought to provide a forum in which they could interpret and express their own experiences and articulate their own lives. This qualitative approach was a particularly good fit for the research questions addressed in this project and respected the commitment to critical youth studies and to hearing and understanding the voices, representations and performances of young people. More distinctly, I was following Strauss and Corbin (1998), in that using qualitative research helped move me “toward a greater understanding of how the world works” (p. 4). My focus was in descriptive accounts of experiences, utilizing an inductive approach, combined with a deductive approach based on familiarity with the literature and relevant theoretical and conceptual frameworks.

My research aims to provide a holistic picture of the way young people negotiate gender identities in particular, and other identities more broadly, within everyday interactions at their high school. The project incorporated a humanistic approach by utilizing a mixed method format that enabled respondents to narrate their own lived experiences of gender and the ways in which gender impacts definitions and relationships with themselves and others (Chase, 2003). Data

analysis followed theoretical methods outlined by Straus and Corbin (1990) and Charmaz (2005).

Ethnography is the study, and systematic recording, of a culture or identity shared by a group of people (Chambliss & Schutt 2010). While ethnography has come to encompass virtually all qualitative research methods and particularly participant observation, for this project I utilized a mixed-method approach to data collection and relied on ethnography's use of field notes and gathering data about the lived experiences of the research participants. In addition to its ethnographic approach, this study utilized ethnomethodology, in that it focused on the way in which participants (in this case, the youth I worked with) create and sustain a sense of reality (in this case, the way they create and share a sense of reality in the construction of gender) (Garfinkel 1967, West & Zimmerman 1987, West & Fenstermaker 1995). So in addition to trying to describe the world in which these youth create and navigate gender, I also sought to understand how these participants "create and sustain a sense of 'reality'" (Chambliss & Schutt 2010, p. 265). Ethnomethodologists seek to understand the accounts given by the participants, in this case, I sought to understand the accounts given by the youth I worked with, in addition to the teachers and staff, for how they make sense of gender (Garfinkel 1984).

FEMINIST STANDPOINT THEORY

In addition to gender consciousness and the hidden curriculum, feminist standpoint theory is an important theoretical tool in understanding how youth do gender in schools. Feminist standpoint theory emphasizes the importance of

social, political, and historical contexts with regard to perceptions and the fact that individuals who share a specific social status (youth in this case) also share experiences and generate a shared knowledge about the world (Harnois, 2010; Hill Collins, 2000). Judith Lorber (2005) observes that “in the twentieth century, philosophers, psychologists, and physicists have argued that the social location, experiences, and point of view of the investigator or “looker” as well as those of the subjects or the “looked at,” interact in producing what we know (p. 177).

There have been several sociological and feminist authors who have advocated for the use of standpoint theory in order to reject the objective orientation of sociological researchers with the object of their study/knowledge. Dorothy Smith (1974) for example, claims “women’s standpoint, as I am analyzing it here, discredits sociology’s claim to constitute an objective knowledge independent of the sociologists situation” (p. 21). While feminist standpoint theory is frequently used to investigate the experiences of women, I am utilizing it to analyze the experiences of youth. I chose to use standpoint theory (like critical youth studies) in order to “offer a knowledge of the social organization and determinations of the properties and events of our directly experienced world” and I sought to provide analysis and research that is “part of our ordinary interpretations of the experienced world, just as our experience of the sun’s sinking below the horizon is transformed by our knowledge that the world turns away from the sun that seems to sink” (Smith 1974, p. 22).

Prominent discussants of standpoint theory include Hill Collins (2000) who argues for the importance of privileging the perspective of the most

marginalized women because their material experiences allow them to see things that others cannot and in different ways. Hill Collins (2000) claims “first, the notion of a standpoint refers to historically shared, group-based experiences”. Building on this approach, Harding (2004) articulates that standpoint theory “claims that some kinds of social locations and political struggles advance the growth of knowledge, contrary to the dominant view that politics and local situatedness can only block scientific inquiry” (p. 26). Further, Harding (2006) asserts that the explicit use of standpoint theory is “a necessary resource for transforming unjust and oppressive social relations...a diversity of resistance and transformative movements that can focus in the different ways that oppression is experienced and structured for different groups” (p. 257). Here, Harding favors standpoint theory for three specific reasons: (1) standpoint epistemologies are structured from research based on the lives of the exploited groups; (2) standpoint epistemologies seek to identify “conceptual practices of power” that are unique to the specific group in order to understand the view point of that group and; and (3) standpoint epistemologies seek to understand the political struggles of an oppressed group to expose and to empower a consciousness of that group (Harding, 2006). Additionally, Haraway (1988) and Hartsock (1998) argue that standpoint is “not simply an interested position (interpreted as bias) but is interested in the sense of being engaged” (in Lorber 2005, p. 178).

Standpoint theory was largely popularized by feminist theory and is often called standpoint feminism. I chose to use standpoint theory within my methodological approach because of the importance placed on individual

experience. Because the experiences of my respondents are so varied by standpoint and lens, I wanted to allow those voices to be heard, rather than the putative “objective” voice of a researcher. Though I valued the individual experience, I was cautious to understand that those experiences are viewed and understood within the socio-historic context in which they are presented. Because youth frequently have their experiences identified and contextualized by someone else, I wanted to provide a specific forum for youth voice to articulate their own experiences. The use of standpoint theory can be beneficial in fostering positive identity for youth by fostering ideas of self-respect and self-definition. This is also why I worked with the youth to code and analyze the data.

UTILIZING CRITICAL YOUTH STUDIES

This research is part of the emerging interdisciplinary field of critical youth studies (Best 2007), which aims to put youth voice and experience at the forefront of its research. Critical youth studies strive to be attentive to all of the methodological, ethical, conceptual and practical boundaries and advantages of conducting research with youth. This research focuses on the social realities of youth as they “come of age in a historical moment mediated by advanced communication systems and increasingly sophisticated media, economic change, and deepening inequalities (Best 2007, pp. 5-6). Understanding the ways youth have been supervised and classified provides an important context for the way we see adolescents today and learn to integrate their unique perspective into our social and intellectual fabric. Critical youth studies scholars have “treated

children and youth as reflexive social agents and producers of culture, active in the complex negotiations of social life and contributing in significant ways to the everyday construction of the social world, not as subjects-in-the-making but as subjects in their own right” (Best 2007, p. 11). Critical youth studies contribute to social perception of adolescents as their unfiltered voice takes center stage in this type of research rather than filtering their experiences through adult proxies or other authorities.

As previously discussed, youth and children are commonly constructed as a vulnerable population when it comes to IRBs and other bureaucratic institutions. They are vulnerable because they frequently lack any kind of political or economic power. Despite the UN Convention on the Right of the Child, youth around the world also frequently lack civil rights in practice. As Raby (2007) suggests, “with adolescence, power relations may become more complicated because teenagers are in a social position that shifts frequently between areas of dependence and independence” (in Best 2007, p. 47). The diverse range of social locations within and between childhood and adolescence complicates easy assumptions about the interface of dominance and subordination that define young peoples’ lives. As has been shown, the literature on youth, gender and education is varied and crosses many disciplinary perspectives.

This project sought not only to provide a forum wherein the voices of young people could be fore fronted, but also to methodologically involve the youth I worked with. As part of this, I integrated two questions into the

interview protocols that specifically addressed the way youth felt about being part of a research project and what they hoped people would gain from sharing their experiences.

One of the goals of justice studies research is to make people and their lives visible. This kind of research seeks to provide a forum where silenced voices can be heard. There are several implications to this phrase. Phrases such as “allowing voices to be heard, or providing spaces where silenced voices can be heard” are often used within research on vulnerable or underrepresented populations. This has come out of a need to create spaces wherein research participants can “speak for themselves.” It is important, however, to reflect on the fact that though the data within this project are the actual words, phrases, and articulations by the young people and teachers I worked with, I am still providing the frame in which to understand them. I have chosen which excerpts to highlight and the ones that have not been mentioned. So, while it is important to create spaces wherein we can encourage people (youth in my case) to articulate their own experiences, we have to realize that until we change the structure, methods, and theoretical understandings of conducting research with youth, it will remain that the researcher maintains control over just how those voices are heard.

In order to account for this, I attempted to make the youth I worked with as much of the process as possible. I frequently asked them what they wanted to talk about, rather than specifically following the interview protocols. I also had some of the youth I worked with help with coding and analysis so that they could

tell me what they thought was important in the research, rather than me being the only one who could highlight what was interesting, or important, or exciting.

This kind of research should provide a glimpse into the lives of people, provide context in which to understand experiences, expose inequalities, advocate for social change and illuminate new ways of seeing the social world. The goal of this type of research is to improve the lives of the people they encounter and, as such, I sought to improve the lives of the youth I worked with by establishing and maintain an ethical and methodological commitment to these youth.

DILEMMAS IN THE FIELD

The original goal of this research project was to build on the literature of high school youth attending public and traditionally bound high schools. I wanted to see if the literature, as well as popular media imagery, was accurate about the experiences of how youth do gender in schools and the many ways they are regulated both at the institutional and at the interpersonal level. I encountered many dilemmas and roadblocks along the way that influenced and shaped how the project turned out.

GATEKEEPING (INCLUDING SCHOOL DISTRICTS, PRINCIPALS, TEACHERS)

Gaining access to schools proved to be extraordinarily difficult for me given the topics I chose to study.³² Many school districts and principals were hesitant to let me into their schools because they were concerned that any discussion of gender would lead to discussions of sexuality. For example, one

³² For more on gatekeeping see Leonard 2007 and Best 2007.

district wrote in their rejection letter “we regret to inform you that we have rejected your application to conduct research within our school district. While your project may have merit, we do not want research on sexuality conducted within our school district.” I also encountered difficulties with one school district because of my choice of data collection method. Because confidentiality cannot be guaranteed when using focus groups, this district did not think that it was appropriate to allow me to conduct research with their students. My rejection letter indicated that “primarily because it is not directly educational research, but also because anonymity and confidentiality cannot be completely guaranteed, we will decline to participate in this study.” Additionally, given Arizona’s (like many other states’) concern with testing, schools were hesitant to allow me into their schools to collect data because they did not want to deal with additional researchers if I was not specifically looking at testing outcomes and how to increase testing scores.

Because of the significant difficulties I faced accessing traditionally district bound public high schools, I decided to work with two separate art charter schools in the greater Phoenix metropolitan area: Academy and Conservatory. Part of the reason for this decision was that non-district bound charter schools did not have to depend on district approval to allow me into their school. Instead, I only needed to get permission from the Dean/School head in order to conduct research with their students.

I had two very different experiences with gatekeeping within these two schools. At Academy, I was given free rein to move about the school and collect

data in multiple settings. Once I was cleared to go into the school, I worked primarily with the Assistant Dean in planning my visits, coordinating observations sites and getting in contact with the students. Jaime³³ was incredibly helpful and even coordinated a specific student organization for me to work exclusively with for both my focus groups and interviews. Jaime helped put me in contact with teachers who would want to talk with me and helped me maneuver through the school with relatively few problems.

The second school, Conservatory, in contrast, offered significant gatekeeping barriers. The head of the school, Karen,³⁴ was very excited about my research, but from the beginning, was hesitant to allow me any contact with students. I appreciated her concerns because she was trying to protect her students. As she stated when I first approached her about conducting research in her school, she had three students who were in the process of “transitioning,” that is, they were in the process, or at least in the beginning stages, of a gender transition. She feared that any focused discussion about gender would lead to additional attention on those students both by faculty and students. As described in the email excerpt below, this administrator made student safety a top priority:

I have a concern because we have two biological females who are on hormones and waiting until they turn 18 to get the transgender surgery [sic], and we refer to them, everyone does as a male and we have one

³³ All names in this dissertation project are pseudonyms/aliases. The research participant either chose these or, if the participant did not want to choose their own name, I chose it for them.

³⁴ All names in this dissertation project are pseudonyms/aliases. The research participant either chose these or, if the participant did not want to choose their own name, I chose it for them.

male in the reverse situation and these students are very personal, and we have worked very hard to provide a safe and unobtrusive or judgmental environment and I fear these questions will expose or call unwanted attention to these students and our cross dressers. We are very small, only 200 students, so this will cause gossip, although this is not your focus, it sounds like very useful data, I have to protect our students.

She and I had an extensive one-on-one interview where she continually discussed the importance of my project and how much I could gain from her students. She was willing to allow me to talk with her teachers, but any contact had to be made through her. She sent an email, which I was not permitted to read, to all of the teachers and staff about contacting me for individual interviews. Unfortunately, I did not hear from any of them. She was willing to allow me to conduct focus groups with students, but I could only post flyers³⁵ on campus and could not directly talk with students on campus. This limitation meant that focus groups would have to be conducted off campus and that I had to rely on students reading the flyer to generate interest in the project. Again, I did not hear from any of her students.

I additionally attempted to conduct similar participant observations to those conducted at the first school, but found this to be very difficult, because Karen wanted to organize and structure these observations. After many email exchanges and reminders about scheduling the observations, when I was finally able to get into the school, I was limited to one day of observation in four classrooms. Unfortunately, two of the four teachers I was supposed to observe were not present and the classes were watching movies. Additionally, I was not

³⁵ See Appendix A

able to sit in on the entire class because she had my time divided into half the class period for each class.

Though I experienced significant gatekeeping from Conservatory, the administrator, nonetheless, provided an important example of a school administrator who puts the needs to her students first. She continually made sure her students were not adversely affected by any discussion of gender.

Additionally, her interview provided very interesting data with regard to the school's institutional perspective on these issues and the many ways her teachers and staff navigate gender with their students in an attempt to protect them and provide them spaces to express themselves and their identity. I was also able to collect ephemera and have a few informal interactions with some of the staff.

While I was not able to see these things in action outside of what she spoke of, similar practices and standards were described and implemented at Academy wherein faculty, staff and administration provided students with spaces to express themselves freely.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Youth have long been constructed by Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) as a vulnerable population, one that needs significant protection from the harm that can come with research. Because I believe that these rules and procedures are relevant and pertinent, they also construct children and youth as unable to speak for themselves. These protocols and procedures negate youth agency.

Several ethnographers³⁶ have described their own experiences with IRBs, but Gray's (2009) *Out in the Country*, is a prime example of the way IRBs can interfere with research that is constructed to advocate for youth-centered research. For Gray's research on queer rural youth, obtaining parental consent was not only unrealistic, it could have had detrimental impacts on the youth in her study. Gray (2009) was forced to continually advocate for using child assent rather than parental consent forms and frequently encountered difficult feedback from her IRB. Ultimately, however, Gray was able to structure her application in such a way that parental consent was not needed because she was able to convey the harm that could come from requiring such consent.

My own experiences with the IRB were not as contentious as Gray's, but I did have my own bumps in the road when advocating for youth-centered research, particularly around the idea of the need for parental consent and the language used in my interview protocols. The idea of youth not being able to provide consent is particularly problematic because this limitation is solely because of their age. I also had all of my youth sign youth assent forms, but the IRB required that, for anyone under the age of 18, I had to obtain parental consent. I had no problems obtaining parental consents from all of my students and no students were unable to participate in the study because they could not/did not feel comfortable getting parental consent. The problem was bypassed for the students who were 18, but some other students wondered why they had to get their parents' permission to talk about things that they considered unproblematic.

³⁶ See also Wagener et. al. 2004; Lammers et. al. 1998.

One student remarked, “I don’t know why we had to have our parents sign these forms when we talk about this stuff all the time in school. Besides, why should my parents get a say in what I talk about.”

In addition to university IRB issues, I also encountered institutional push back when it came to grant funding. One particular issue that I encountered was applying for research funding from a national funding institution. Though I already had IRB approval, I had to defend my decisions to my home institution’s grant approval department. For one grant in particular, I was forced to change the language of my project proposal, budget and budget narrative to exclude the language “youth participant” and “youth co-investigator” and was told the appropriate language was either “informant” or “subject.” Both of these choices are highly problematic, particularly because a good portion of my proposal and the literature was dedicated to advocating for critical youth studies and diverging from traditional research language such as “subject” because of its dehumanizing connotations and the fact that it further perpetuates ideas of youth as lacking agency. What was interesting about this particular grant application was that I had not been required to include this specific language when I submitted an earlier grant application to the same grant organization. I learned that because my home institution has specific guidelines regarding language and since there were indirect costs associated with this grant, I would have to abide by the language specifications from my home institution. I was especially concerned that since I was advocating for research that emphasized critical youth studies, it would seem strange to the grant reviewers that I was referring to the youth

participants as “subjects” or “informants” and negate my claims of conducting youth-focused research.

As described above, these were some of the major challenges I encountered while conducting this research. There were additional challenges including coordinating schedules with youth for interviews, coordinating times with teachers and staff, etc. I had quite a bit of interest in the project, both at the student and staff level. Unfortunately, however, because of the difficulties of scheduling times to meet with people because of the limited time teachers have, I was not able to have in-depth contact with all of the people who were interested in working with this project. Additionally, I encountered difficulties garnering interest from Conservatory both with students and teachers mostly because I was not able to speak with the teachers or students.

RESEARCH SETTING(S):

Two charter art schools in the greater Phoenix metropolitan area were used for this study. Arizona Academy for Creative Minds (Academy) and Conservatory. The majority of the data gathered for this research was gathered from Academy due to significant gatekeeping and research issues that arose with Conservatory as will be discussed further below. Youth participant data was only collected from Academy.

Academy is a small, tuition free charter Arts Institute that prepares students for college or a career in the arts. It prides itself in offering students “a culturally diverse curriculum within an environment designed for self-discovery

and the development of authenticity” (Academy website). According to Academy’s vision statement,

Ideally, art is the process of discovering the true self. In striving for skill, excellence, and truth, we can uncover the inspiration that lies in the creative process. In trusting the process we will discover that meaning is personal, and life is a work in progress. The objective of an Academy education is the creation and experience of meaning. Academy will serve as the tool box for the artistic mind. Our purpose is to help students set goals, master techniques, and develop skills and self discipline. Ultimately, success at Academy is defined as the experience created through a productive, challenging, and tolerant community (Academy Vision Statement).³⁷

Academy serves grades 7 – 12. The middle school-aged youth are in their own separate hallway/wing of the school, separated from the high school students for most of the day; they even have separate lunch hours and separate start/end school times. Academy is located in an urban downtown metropolis and is housed in what looks like a converted parking garage. The school has open breezeways between the academic classrooms and long hallways that link the art classrooms and theatres.

My first time at Academy I got very lost. The bottom floor is still a parking garage lot and depending on where you park, you will end up in a

³⁷ Both faculty and students at Academy were unconcerned about their identities being kept anonymous. In fact, several students even asked if they could use their own names as alias’ and if I could maintain the name of the school. Due to IRB restrictions, all students’ names, and the name of the school is anonymous. Additionally, because of the small size of both institutions, I have not provided all of the demographic information as it corresponds to each student. For example, I did not provide the alias’ name, ethnicity, age, and other identifying characteristics in one place as it would be very easy for students and staff familiar with the school to decipher who was who. Instead, I have provided the overall demographic information of the participants. There are excerpts of focus groups data and interview data, however, which do provide additional identifying information because of the way the student chose to address the question.

staircase that does not provide access to anything but several floors with locked doors. From the bottom floor, there is only one staircase that will take you to the front of the building. When you walk up, if it is after 9:00 a.m., you have to ring a bell and you are buzzed in by the front office. I began to feel bad for Jill because she had to buzz me in almost every day that I visited, and I could tell that buzzing in students and parents was not the best part of her job. When you gain entrée and walk through the doors, the first thing you see is a sign that asks “[Academy] students are you following the dress code?” This is further analyzed in Chapters 5 – 8.

There were a total of 268 students attending Academy when I conducted my research. A total of 85 males and 183 females attend Academy. There is a somewhat diverse racial makeup at the school including seven Asian students, 29 Black students, 59 Hispanic students, nine Indian students and 164 White students.³⁸ There are 25 teachers and staff from varying backgrounds and with varying degrees of experience and education. Some have been at Academy since its creation in 1998, while others are newer.

Conservatory is also a charter arts and academics school in the greater Phoenix metropolitan area. Located near a major university, accessing Conservatory is not as difficult as accessing Academy. Once you park on the backside of the building, you are able to walk through the front doors where you are greeted by the receptionist. However, if you arrive at the front entrance

³⁸ Racial demographic language is based on information provided by school administration on 1/24/12 – see Appendix B. The designations of racial categories are A, B, H, I and W.

during school hours, a gate restricts your access to the parking lot and you must drive around the block and enter through a strip mall parking lot. You are required to sign in. Each time I visited the school, I signed in and waited to be seen by Conservatory; I was not allowed to freely roam the school the way I was at Academy.

Conservatory was established in 1995 with the vision “to open a high school that would give students an advantage in the arts with goals of its graduates entering the professional fields of art and education” (Conservatory website). Like Academy, Conservatory also has a middle school that is also separated from the high school and educates grades 7-12. The teaching philosophy at Conservatory values

active, experiential hands-on learning, and the integration of arts with academics. We are a public charter school, and as such Conservatory is accountable for demonstrating progress from year to year in student achievement, measured in part through state required student assessments. Conservatory meets graduation requirements for high school seniors, and complies with all legislation, both federal and state (Conservatory website).

According to Karen, there are 206 students attending Conservatory this year. Five of them are classified as Asian, seven are African-American, 23 are Hispanic, four are Native American, and 106 are White.³⁹ During my interview with Karen, she indicated that these are self-identified demographics. As she stated, “that’s how they identify themselves. I know we’ll have students that are here and I’ve met their parents and everything, and I know they’re from the

³⁹ The remaining students attend the middle school. Racial demographic data were not provided for those students. Additionally, I was not able to look at the “official records” so the use of “Asian” is the phrase Karen used.

Navajo reservation, and they've checked the box that says White, and so that's how we have to put it in the system" (Interview with Karen). There are approximately 127 girls and 79 boys attending the school.

Both schools had significant disparity between male and female students. Academy has approximately 70% female and Conservatory had approximately 60% female. When I asked Jaime and Karen about this, they indicated that as long as they had been working with charter schools, this was "normal." Additionally, while both schools discussed the constraints of only having two gender categories (which will be discussed further in Chapter 5), students are only able to be classified as male or female, regardless of whether that matches their identity presentation. For example, while administrators at both institutions spoke of students "cross dressing" and "transitioning," both institutions are bound by policies that only reflect students in binary terms.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

A variety of data collection methods were used for this project. First, in order to gain insight as to the lived experiences of these youth, it was important to collect information not just through one method, like an interview, but instead to be able to triangulate multiple points of data to construct a more full experience. Secondly, not all of my research questions could be fully answered by only one method of data collection. For example, conducting interviews would not have enabled me to observe how students enact gender in the classroom or in the school hallways and observations of these interactions can be helpful to understand how students interact with one another in a traditional

setting. Additionally, observations allowed for a greater depth of understanding of the workings of Academy that I may not have received just conducting focus groups or interviews.

RESEARCH SAMPLE

The participants in this study were students and faculty/staff in these two schools (Academy and Conservatory). Students' and teachers' descriptions of gender were gauged with observations, surveys, interviews and focus groups. Student interview and focus group data was only gathered at Academy.

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

As van Maanen (1983, 1988) points out, scholars who seek to write ethnographies – written representations of a culture – should rely on direct, sustained participant observation and repeated interviews of key informants. Participant observation was the first phase of data collection and entailed observing classroom activities, extra-curricular activities, school functions, and observing students during lunches and other breaks and hallway interactions. I spent significant time within the field so as to “participate inside the culture” (Conquergood, 2003) and get very familiar with the staff and students at Academy in particular. Additionally, I observed students at a Starbucks and a frozen yogurt shop that were near Academy where students typically hang out before and after school.

I watched and listened to the way youth interact with each other and staff, as well as paying particular attention to the way they interact with the many different kinds of curriculum. I observed the way they talked (the actual words,

phrases, slang) within their peer groups, as well as within classrooms and hallways and the way they talked to “authority figures,” specifically looking at the way gender is discussed, expressed or “performed.” The majority of my observations took place within the confines of the school. I looked at styles of dress and mannerisms, as well as listening for the way students used gendered talk or talked about their own gender. My purpose was to get a clear understanding of the way youth describe and enact gender within the geographical boundaries of school, and also to understand how the physical and ideological boundaries of school impact the ways these same youth do gender. Additionally, the purpose of these observations was to get to know how these students talk to each other and what they talk about so as to structure my interactions with them based on their own experiences. This aspect of data collection looked specifically at the ways students and staff “negotiate, regulate, and resist particular meanings about gender” (Pascoe 2007, p. 21).

I observed Academy over a four-month period (three – four days per week, usually 3-5 hours per visit), including a variety of classes ranging from theatre to biology, from dance to life art. Because Academy is an art school, I was able to see a different range in activities than I would have seen at a traditional public school. For example, one day I observed a life art class where the students were drawing a nude model. This sort of class would typically not be offered at a traditionally district bound public school and provided a very unique observation experience. When I arrived in the life art class, I did not know what they would be doing. As I had gone to a high school that did not

have such a class, I had no idea that high school students had the opportunity to draw nude models. It was fascinating watching the students interact with each other and how they interacted with the teacher because some students responded in anticipated ways, while other students did not. When I realized I would be observing a life art class and they were drawing a nude model, I assumed that many of the students would giggle, or be embarrassed. Given that I was conducting research on gender, it was fascinating to watch the students as they drew – some were very intent on their drawings, while others had a harder time paying attention. This was also the only class that students inquired who I was and what I was doing. When I told them I was studying how high school students navigate gender, they thought that I had “come to the right place.”

Below is an excerpt from my fieldnotes from my observations that day:

January 10, 2012: There are 7 girls and 3 boys in this classroom. When I walked in, Sally, the art teacher introduced me to class and had me sit down at the front of the room right next to a table with a light hanging over it. The room is very cluttered on all four walls. There are sinks, art supplies, drawings, portfolios, papers, large metal stackups filled with random items like a Jesus statue and a boombox, there are shelves for art and the students keep their portfolios and older art work in a stackup at the back of the room. The tables are set up in a horseshoe shape with the large table that I am sitting next to in the middle. Sally’s desk is on the far side of the room in the front and is also very cluttered. When I entered the room, the door was open with easy access in and out. A woman is sitting next to the table who appears to be in her early to mid 30s. She leaves the room shortly after Sally calms the students down. She comes back into the room with a robe on and sets her clothes next to the table. She then takes off her robe – students seem unphased (no giggles, no comments). Sally turns off the lights in the classroom so that only the center light over the models table is on. The model gets on the table and lays down. Sally puts a screen in front of the classroom door so that any student (or teacher) who comes in has to wait on the other side of the screen. Though there was no initial comments or discussion when the model disrobed, progressively throughout the class time, two boys

occasionally comment to each other and giggle (I am unsure what they are talking about). Sally continually has to tell them to quiet down and pay attention to what they are drawing.

My observations at the school predominately took place within the classroom and in the hallways. Each day at Academy, I would check in with Jaime, who guided me to the class I would observe first and then let me know where else I would be observing throughout the day and each teacher would point me in the direction or have a student guide me to the next class I would be observing. I was frequently not introduced to the class but sat in the back of the room observing. However, some of the teachers did introduce me and let me say a few words about the research I was conducting. In the beginning, students rarely inquired as to who I was; some later told me that they thought I might be a student who was thinking about transferring or was a journalist of some kind. On the rare occasion when a student did inquire about my presence, I told them what I was doing and why I was there. This often sparked discussions among other students about life at Academy and about how students felt about going there. For example, on the day that I attended the life art class, I walked in a few minutes before class was starting. When I walked in, the teacher instructed me where to sit. When I sat down, a male student came up to me and said

J: Who are you?

Sarah: I'm Sarah who are you?

J: I'm J and that's A – what are you doing here?

Sarah: I'm conducting research on high school students

J: Oh. Why?

Sarah: Because I am curious how you make sense of gender.

J: Oh. Well I can tell you anything you need to know.

I conducted four months of observations prior to having any formal interviews (individual and group) so as to get to know the surroundings and the people. I went to Academy 3 – 4 times per week in those four months and usually stayed for most of the day. I conducted an additional ten days of observations once I started collecting interview data to follow up on many of the themes that were emerging out of the focus groups and individual interviews. Each time I came to Academy, I arrived early and left later than my scheduled time in order to see interactions in the hallways and during lunch and while students milled around after school.

I observed one day at Conservatory. As stated earlier, this was because of the gatekeeping I encountered and the limitations placed on me as a researcher. In my one day, I observed four classrooms. I began in an English class, moved to a second English class, was supposed to see a theatre class but instead was guided to a math class, and ended my observations in a history class. My one day at Conservatory was disorganized and somewhat uncomfortable for me as a researcher. The administrator had coordinated my schedule and I did not know that she only had me in each class for a part of the class period. This meant that I either arrived late or left early from each class period. I felt disruptive to the teachers and students. Additionally, I was scheduled to see a second English class and when I arrived the students were watching a movie with the lights out so I had minimal chance to observe. I was then scheduled to see a theatre class and when I arrived the room was empty. No one returned to the room and I waited for quite a while before leaving and heading to the administrator's office.

She apologized and sent me to a math class (which had already begun). I was then sent to a history class that was also watching a movie so I was only able to observe minimally.

I designed this study with the use of participant observation in order to see how students enact gender within the confines of school. By conducting extensive observation days and taking extensive field notes,⁴⁰ I was able to see how students interact with one another and how they interact with their teachers, but only within one of the two field sites. This helped me see how the hidden gendered curriculum operates in the classroom at Academy.

FOCUS GROUPS

Given the social nature of gender construction (Connell, 2005), focus groups were a dynamic way to collect data for this project. The informal atmosphere of the focus group interview structure is “an excellent means for collecting information from young children and teens” (Berg 2004, p. 145). Focus groups provide a forum where young people can express themselves and can interact among and between group members. As Stewart et. al. (2006) suggest, focus groups serve best in order to “understand the group dynamics that affect individual’s perceptions, information processing, and decision making” (p. 9). This research sought to discover how youth described and enacted their own gender, both for themselves and in relation to others. Focus groups have proven

⁴⁰ Fieldnotes were taken during classroom observations, hallway observations, as well as observations in the frequented establishments near the school. For example, I spent several mornings at the Starbuck’s down the street because that was a place that students frequently hung out in the mornings before school (Emerson et. al. 1995).

to be a valuable method for collecting data with youth (Jackson, 2009; Mikel Brown, 1998; Myers & Raymond, 2010), particularly about identity issues. Focus groups provided insight into the research questions of how youth describe gender and what gender means in their daily lives, and the role they see that school plays in effecting gender identity construction.

As was noted above, I was only able to collect youth data from one of the schools I worked with. I worked extensively with Jaime to coordinate focus groups at Academy. Jaime thought it best to have me first work with the Student Advisory Club (SAC) before moving on and trying to conduct additional focus groups with other Academy students. She felt that the SAC students would also serve as recruiters for other potential focus groups. I delivered the parental consent documents to Jaime who dispersed them to the SAC students and insured that they were returned signed. This was incredibly beneficial for me given the difficulties many other researchers have with getting parental consent documents back. When I arrived on the first scheduled group interview day, all of the students either had their parental consent forms in hand or were 18 and signed for themselves. I also asked each student to sign a youth assent⁴¹ waiver that outlined the project and allowed students the opportunity to opt out of being recorded. At the initial focus group, students additionally filled out a pre-focus group questionnaire.

⁴¹ See Appendix C for consent documents

A total of two focus group sessions were conducted with sixteen students. These students were part of the Student Advisory Club and they were interviewed twice as a group. The initial focus group had 15 students and the second session had 16 students. Focus groups included a pre-group questionnaire⁴² where students were asked to self-select/identify demographic questions, choose a pseudonym/alias, and report on matters such as how much media they consume on a daily basis, how they define their gender and how many people live in their household, etc. I worked exclusively with Jaime in coordinating focus groups with these students. I was able to utilize two class periods (each one and a half hours) during which the SAC normally meet. The teachers who supervise the group allowed me freedom with their students and left the class so that, in their words, “students can feel free to be as honest as possible.”

Jaime believed that the best way to establish contact with the students for focus groups was to interview the Student Advisory Club during their normal meeting time and to then see if there was a need to conduct additional focus groups. After the first group interview, I quickly realized that I did not need to hold additional focus groups with other students and that, instead, I could do a more in-depth study of these students. The SAC is comprised of sixteen students, ranging in grade level, interests, racial demographics and backgrounds. They provide a nice representation of the school across all demographic areas. The first day I interviewed them there were fifteen students in attendance (three

⁴² See Appendix D for Pre-Group Interview Questionnaire.

boys and 12 girls) and the second time we had a focus group all sixteen students were in attendance (three boys and 13 girls). Given that Academy has far more female than male students, this demographic breakdown was representative of the student body. Additionally, the SAC was comprised of Caucasian, African American, Latino and students who identified as bi-racial. Students also described themselves as having a variety of sexual orientations (e.g. straight, homosexual/gay/lesbian, pansexual, bisexual) and gender representations including being cisgender, or gender conforming and gender non-conforming.

The SAC is a group of students who serve as the mediators between the student body and staff by “voicing any concerns from fellow students.. The group is supervised by three teachers who are from a variety of disciplines ranging from art to science. The SAC seeks to create and enforce positive change and to execute programs such as fundraisers, Prom, etc. Additionally, the SAC “act as leaders for the student body being the “go to” people for our peers; exemplify the Academy vision and are examples of what a student should strive for; and brainstorm new and positive programs and directions for Academy’s future” (Academy website).

According to one of the students I worked with, being part of the SAC is not like being part of a student council at other schools. Students first apply to be a part of this organization. If their application is selected by the three teachers who work with the program, the student is asked to come in for an interview. The student then interviews with the three teachers who run the organization. In this way, students represent a wide array of age, class, gender and racial/ethnic

demographics and are representative of the school as a whole. It also lessens the likelihood that it is merely a popularity contest like elections tends to be.⁴³

Working with the SAC had advantages and disadvantages. The students were very excited about sharing their opinions and appeared to be ready to share and discuss their ideas as a group. They seemed engaged in the school, both with each other and with staff and administration, and had a clear understanding of school policies and procedures. However, their experiences may not be necessarily representative of the rest of the student body. As will be discussed further in Chapter 7, as a whole, the students had very wonderful things to say about the school but during their interviews were able to be a little more critical. These students, because they are ambassadors to the school, may have been hesitant to speak critically of the school as a group because they felt that they were representing the school because I was interviewing them as a group.

Knowing that I had two separate days with the students, the focus group protocol⁴⁴ was divided into two separate categories. The first day we focused primarily on issues of gender and identity. The second meeting we focused on a variety of topics including being part of a research project, social media and life at Academy. Having two sessions provided the opportunity to follow up and clarify responses, as well as letting students have time to think about their responses outside of the group. Focus groups were digitally recorded and

⁴³ This does, however, increase the power of adults to define and determine what and who counts as representation and how representatives should behave.

⁴⁴ See Appendix E for the Focus group protocol.

transcribed. I took extensive notes while the students were speaking including how they responded to each other, if they were paying attention while their peers spoke, and their overall dress/appearance. Additionally, on the second focus group, I had a research assistant take notes so that I could focus solely on what the students were saying. It was interesting to watch as many of the students rolled their eyes at each other, or tried to stop themselves from talking over each other. Additionally, one or two of the students played on Facebook or their phones and seemed generally uninterested, but when topics such as media or the school environment came up, they perked up and became interactive and responsive. Having a research assistant take notes on the second focus group was particularly important because he was able to hear side comments that I could not make out from my position in the room. For example, when I asked the students what they thought I should name the school, my research assistant heard one of the male students say under his breath “gay academy.”

INTERVIEWS

In addition to conducting focus groups with the SAC youth, I also conducted 10 formal and several informal interviews with students, teachers, administration, and staff throughout the data collection process. This research project was youth-centered but I also wanted to get the perspective of the people the youth interact with every day. Additionally, it was important to talk with the faculty and staff who work with these youth in order understand how they frame gender because this can impact how the youth I worked with frame and understand gender. Interviews were structured and tailored depending on the

respondent's own experiences with gender (Berg, 2007; Esterberg, 2002; Warren & Karner, 2010). As Patton (1990) notes, the purpose of conducting interviews is "to allow us to enter the other person's perspective" and "to find out from them things that we cannot directly observe" (p. 278). Informal interviews emerged naturally throughout the participant observation process in the form of organic conversations and participation in school activities, particularly organic conversations with teachers and staff. Data from these interviews were recorded during (or immediately after) into field notes for coding and data analysis. I did not digitally record these informal interviews because it would have been intrusive to the organic nature of the conversation.

Formal, semi-structured interviews⁴⁵ with students and staff focused on how they describe gender and the role it may (or may not) play within their own everyday life within the school setting. Interviews with SAC students utilized an interview protocol with standard questions that were open-ended (Lofland, 2006). A total of nine individual interviews were conducted which included over half of the SAC students. One additional interview was conducted with Karen from Conservatory. All but two of the SAC students volunteered for an interview, but given the complexity of scheduling not all 14 volunteers could be interviewed. All participants in the interviews were required to have parental consent (if under 18) and a youth assent. Formal interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed.

⁴⁵ See Appendix F for formal interview questions.

Both formal and informal interviews helped to answer my research questions and provided interesting contradictions and support for the discussions had with the SAC students in the focus group. Each interview followed an interview protocol, similar to the interview protocol used during focus groups, but I was able to ask additional probing questions with each student in the more intimate environment. Students were additionally able to discuss things they may not have mentioned in the focus group as well as providing clarification to what they had discussed in the focus group. These interviews additionally provided examples of the official and hidden gender curriculum in schools as will be further discussed in Chapters 5 – 8.

SURVEY OF TEACHERS/STAFF

An online survey was emailed to all of the teachers and staff at Academy through SurveyMonkey.⁴⁶ The teachers were provided with an online survey that was comprised of ten survey questions. This proved to be the most effective way of reaching the teachers. Although many of them indicated that they wanted to be part of an individual interview, many of these teachers just did not have the time to be interviewed. Teachers at Academy are spread thin: they have accepted more students than ever before, so many of the teachers I informally spoke with preferred some kind of online survey. I received a total of eight responses (out of twenty-five total staff) to the online survey. Some of the teachers provided very in-depth responses to the online survey while others provided more minimal

⁴⁶ See Appendix G for Survey protocol.

answers.⁴⁷ Talking even informally with teachers and administrative staff was an important aspect of data collection that provided insight into the lives of the youth at both schools. Indeed, the way youth do and perform gender is influenced by those who regulate and observe their doings and performances (i.e. school staff and administration).

SCHOOL EPHEMERA⁴⁸

Following Sanjek's (2000) understanding of studying inner-city urban areas, this research employed both a "bottom-up" ethnographic understanding of what is going on within the schools – how the students create meaning among themselves, and a "top-down" study of the schools themselves – how schools make meaning of gender. Because this study examines the way young people navigate gender within schools and because schools themselves are one of the major socializing institutions for young people, curricula, lesson plans, handouts, flyers, reading lists, assignments and other related documents were collected from the two research sites, as well as from 10 schools in multiple surrounding public school districts. The purpose of this was to analyze them in order to understand the way gender, and had been presented within the two research sites, as well as within other schools in the greater Phoenix metropolitan area. I was specifically looking at the way gender is simultaneously present and absent

⁴⁷ I spoke extensively, informally, with 20 teachers/staff members. Additionally, I corresponded with several teachers via email and had lengthy conversations with five teachers during my visits to the schools.

⁴⁸ Ephemera for this project are different paper items (including curricula, policies, dress codes, rules and regulations) that have been collected in order to analyze the overt and hidden gendered curricula within each school.

(silenced) and to understand how schools situate themselves (on paper) in relation to gender. These data were used to further provide a rich picture of the experiences of how youth navigate gender both at a personal, identity level, as well as at an organizational level through the overt and “hidden” curriculum. Given the large number of ephemera to choose from, I chose to focus closely on ephemera and policies that dealt directly with the youth (i.e. dress codes, policies regarding school dances, etc.).

Because I wanted to look at the difference in school ephemera across schools, a total of 12 dress codes were collected and analyzed in order to understand how gender is constructed at the school/official level based on outward dress and appearance from both traditionally district⁴⁹ bound public schools and non-district bound charter schools. I collected seven from traditionally district bound school and two from charter schools that were not bound by districts and three from charter schools that were bound within school districts. Where there was public information available, I also collected ephemera including school student handbooks, sexual health curriculum and school course offerings in order to get a broad picture of the way gender is, and is not, present in school policies.⁵⁰ The purpose of collecting these ephemera was

⁴⁹ I chose to look at both district bound and non-district bound schools because, as was described in Chapter 3, charter schools, particularly those that are not bound by districts have more autonomy. I was curious to see if district-bound schools differed in the way they constructed their policies than did charter schools.

⁵⁰ An important caveat to be made is the fact that I analyzed ephemera solely as texts from the schools where I had no access. That is, that I did not know how

to get a broad understanding of how gender is presented in formal and informal ways within these schools. Some of the ephemera collected were “official” school policies (like student handbooks and curriculum regulations from the district) and others were publicly available information like course requirements, etc.

DATA ANALYSIS

I utilized an inductive form of data analysis involving a systematic process of identifying thematic similarities between the focus groups, participant observations, interviews, surveys and school ephemera. This research began with specific research questions and utilized grounded theory methodology in order to understand what is going on in the daily lives of these high school students (Berg, 2007; Charmaz, 2005; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I chose to use grounded theory to create a dialectic relationship between my data, the analysis and my theoretical considerations. According to Strauss & Corbin (1990), grounded theory is a research method in which theory is created from data, rather than the typical deductive methodology where data are created out of theory. I chose this inductive approach to assure that I kept my mind and my understanding of the research as open as possible, so as not to impose my preconceived ideas onto my data. As Kathy Charmaz (2005) describes,

grounded theory studies emerge from wrestling with the data, making comparisons, developing categories, engaging in theoretical sampling, and integrating an analysis...the entire research process is interactive, in this sense, we bring past interactions and current interests into our

the schools enforce these policies or how students interact with them on a daily basis.

research, and we interact with our empirical materials and emerging ideas as well as, perhaps, granting agencies, institutional review boards, and community agencies and groups, along with research participants and colleagues. Neither data nor ideas are mere objects that we passively observe and compile (p. 510).

While I analyzed my data, themes began to emerge between the interviews and focus groups. I began to see similar words, phrases and ideas throughout my respondent's statements. By using grounded theory, I was able to give my data a voice, which then directed my further research and theoretical components, hence, the dialectic relationship between data, analysis and theory.

During my data collection and analysis, theoretical components began to emerge; as Strauss & Corbin (1990) indicate, "theory evolves during actual research, and it does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection" (p. 279). I specifically chose grounded theory because of its ability to allow me to approach the analysis of my data without any predispositions or already formulated ideas and opinions. As each piece of my data was analyzed and coded, I began to realize what Glaser & Strauss (1967) call "theoretical saturation." By this I mean that I reached a saturation point where the same themes and issues continued to emerge within the transcribed data and ephemera and no new ideas emerged either through my own coding nor the coding my participants did.

Interview and focus group data were transcribed, coded and analyzed continually throughout the duration of the project. The emergent data were continually assessed so that topics and themes could be further explored in interviews and focus groups as they emerge. I conducted a two-stage analysis

process that included open and focused coding. I applied an open coding scheme (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to analyze the primary transcribed interviews and focus groups, as well as the archival data. Once I identified the key recurring themes and categories such as specific words or phrases used or particular stories frequently told, I used focused coding (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Through focused coding, I analyzed the data a second time focusing on the themes and categories discovered in open coding (Esterberg, 2002). The key to the qualitative process is “classifying or categorizing individual pieces of data” (Babbie 2001, p. 365). I used Dedoose software to apply codes, analyze excerpts, and develop themes. I used a comparative method in order to identify major points of agreement and divergence within and among the focus group data, as well as within and among the participant observation and interviews. The content analysis of school ephemera provided a picture of the official and hidden curriculum, and as such was analyzed by specifically looking for the way gender was expressed through curriculum or policies.

In addition to using my own coding scheme, I met with four of the students I had interviewed to help code and analyze the focus group transcripts, as well as the school ephemera. This was a very interesting aspect of this research and the youth I worked with were very excited to continue to take part in the project. They expressed that they were surprised and excited that I wanted to continue working with them and that they felt that they had a say in what the outcome of the project would be. I had the students help me code the data from the focus groups only. Because students in the individual interviews expressed

several things that were not covered in the focus groups, I did not think it was appropriate to share that information with other students.

In the beginning of this project, I was unsure how much data I would be able to collect given the restrictions and obstacles I encountered just trying to enter the field. In the end, I had quite a bit of data to manage including focus group and interview transcriptions and notes, survey data, ephemera data, student narratives, fieldnotes, pre-survey questionnaires and email correspondences (129 pages of transcribed interviews/focus groups, 50 typed pages of fieldnotes, 70 pages of school ephemera, 10 pages of written narratives by the students, and 10 pages of teacher survey data). In addition to inputting all of the data into DeDoose⁵¹ to help with the data analysis, I also kept continuous notes within the transcript texts on emergent themes, questions, and important statements. I kept all of the data in a locked filing cabinet. I also did not have a master list of identifying contact information, and this helped protect the confidentiality of my participants.

LIMITATIONS TO DATA COLLECTION AND RESEARCH DESIGN

I collected as many different kinds of data as possible in order to be able to answer my research questions and to be able to provide a full picture of the daily experiences of these young people. There are, however, limitations to the kinds of data I was able to collect. First of all, while I talk about two different research sites, I was able to collect far more data from one site than from the other. I was able to be extensively involved at Academy and to interact

⁵¹ Dedoose is a mixed-method qualitative data analysis software.

personally with several students. At Conservatory, I was not allowed to have personal contact with students unless the student requested it. This made the in-depth data I was able to collect from Conservatory very limited. While I was able to collect a different kind of data and a different perspective from Conservatory, it is difficult to do an in-depth comparison of the two schools. Additionally, because of teachers' limited time and resources, I was unable to speak with many of the teachers who wanted to be a larger part of this study.

I would also have benefited from additional time in the field. While I spent four months collecting data and engaging in Academy, a longer time frame would have allowed me to collect additional data and interact with more students and teachers. Additionally, because of the small nature of the schools, the limited number of interactions I was able to have, and the specific nature of the schools (charter art schools) I am limited in the generalizations I can make about my participants.

CONCLUSION

The methods chosen for this project were based on the overall methodological and epistemological frameworks. These data collection methods provided rich data on how youth describe, articulate, and navigate gender in their everyday lives as high school students attending art charter schools. In the chapters that follow, I provide discussion of the overall themes that emerged from the data and how these themes both build on, and provide new directions, for the existing conversations and literature on the experiences of youth in schools.

Chapter 5

GENDER TALK: THE DOING OF GENDER

Talking about gender for most people is the equivalent of fish talking about water. Gender is so much the routine ground of everyday activities that questioning its taken-for-granted assumptions and presumptions is like thinking about whether the sun will come up. Gender is so pervasive that in our society we assume it is bred into our genes. Most people find it hard to believe that gender is constantly created and re-created out of human interaction, out of social life, and is the texture and order of that social life. Yet gender, like culture, is a human production that depends on everyone constantly “doing gender” (Lorber 1994, p.13).

This research project began with West & Zimmerman’s (1987) concept of “doing” gender, which the Lorber (1994) quote above references. I sought to understand how youth “do” gender in their everyday lives. In doing so, I revealed that youth not only “do” gender, but that they also “undo” (Deutsch 2007) and perform gender (Butler 1993). This finding evokes a discussion about the debate between “doing” gender and gender as “performance” that was discussed in Chapter 2. West & Zimmerman’s (1987) and West & Fenstermaker (1993, 1995 and 2002) theorized about the doing of gender; that is that gender is an interactional accomplishment that is done on a daily basis. Butler (1993) theorized about the performance of gender, how the internal nature of gender is actually a product of repeated acts, words and gestures. While these two concepts have similarities, they are distinct and the scholarship that has evolved around them comes from different disciplinary perspectives. Engaging with both theoretical concepts provides an interdisciplinary understanding of two concepts that are traditionally not discussed together. This is important because discussing

how youth “do” gender does not provide a whole picture about how youth navigate gender in schools on a daily basis.

While, many of the youth in my research talked about gender in this way, in the subversive, ironic, performative way of gender, many also talked about gender as instinctual, personal and not necessarily about performance at all, but rather was a way of communicating their identities to others. Many students talked about the work that goes into “doing” and “performing” their gender. For example, Charlotte discussed how much effort she has to put into being her most feminine self at all time – the effort on what clothes to wear, how to do her hair, how to do her makeup and how to behave.

Additionally, the two theoretical concepts, doing gender and gender as performance, are similar in that they both posit that gender is about reiterated/repetitive acts. West & Zimmerman focus on microsocial interactions, along with a constant interpretation of the social boundaries of sex categories, while Butler emphasizes the macrosocial level. Lastly, West & Zimmerman focus on an interactional analysis while Butler focuses on a discursive analysis.

Building on the discussion of how these students do and perform gender, this chapter will take on two separate aspects of gender that emerged in the data. First I will discuss the varying definitions these young people had of gender. This is an important place to begin in order to demonstrate that when we talk about gender, often, everyone is talking about something different. There is no universal notion of what gender is, therefore, discussions of gender can be discussions of multiple different identities and ideas. Additionally, gender is

often conflated with sex category (anatomy) and sexuality. These definitions range from an anatomical understanding of gender (e.g. females with socially conforming vaginas are gendered female and males with socially conforming penises are gendered male) to definitions divorced from anatomy and focused on a more socially constructed or internal/abstract understanding of gender.

Second, I will discuss the intersectional aspects of gender identity. Gender did not exist in a vacuum for these youth, not only was it influenced by things such as the media, parents and peers, it was also influenced by their other identity categories such as sexuality, religion and race.

“GENDER MEANS...”

As can be seen from the excerpts below from my first focus group with the SAC, as well as the individual interviews, many students (and teachers) automatically think of biology when they think of gender. The first question I asked students was what they think of when I say gender. When I asked students what gender means to them, many of the students were quick to link their ideas about gender to the body. In the focus group, John Simon Ritchie, Mia Stiles, and Katy Perry all describe how gender to them is about physical body parts:

John Simon Ritchie: The anatomical differences between male and female.

Mia Stiles: Well, I agree with John Simon Ritchie about how it's the physical, because the emotional part of your being could be a lot different than the body you're born into. I think by gender it's just the body you're born into, but not what you actually are.

Katy Perry: I particularly think gender, like when you say gender, the first thing that pops into my head is the anatomical difference between a boy and a girl. I think a lot of the times, people read into, “Well, what is

a man and what is a woman and how is it labeled?” as, “Well, I am a woman, but I feel more like a man on the inside,” and I think once you read into it, then you’re talking about more than just gender. Gender to me is specifically the anatomical differences between a man and a woman...

In her interview, Francesca also pointed out that her ideas about gender related to her ideas about the body. She also talked about how she believes that there are certain “experiences” that guys and girls should have because they are “born that way.”

Francesca: It’s kind of what—it’s not what defines you, but it’s kind of what makes you into who you are. It’s how you develop. It’s how you grow. I mean it’s not like—I mean somebody could be a little bit more on the boy’s side than on girl’s side, but that doesn’t mean you change your whole entire gender. Because that’s what you’re born with. That’s what you were born into, and you shouldn’t be able to change it, in my opinion, cuz it’s like—it’s like if I’m a girl, there’s certain things that I should do as a girl, and I should experience as a girl. If you’re a guy, there’s certain things that you should experience as a guy, because that’s the way you were born. It’s not like anybody can just choose their gender, I don’t think. It’s kind of—it’s just the way you were made, and it’s just what happens. It’s kind of like if you were born with brown hair or not. You know? Like if you’re born with brown hair, you’re stuck with brown hair. If you’re born with brown eyes, sure you can cover it up and get contacts, but you’re stuck with brown eyes. You can dye your hair, but you’re stuck with it. It’s just kind of what happens. Your gender is the same exact thing. You know? It’s a trait that will just always be there.

This is an interesting comment from Francesca. While she thinks that gender is something that you are born with (the way you were made) and it has to do with how you develop, she does not explicitly state that it is about what body parts you have. Instead, she thinks it is about who you are. Francesca does not believe that someone should be able to change their gender. She thinks that if you are more on the boy side or more on the girl side (reinforcing the binary

understanding of gender) that this does not mean you should be able to change your gender. Here, I assume she is referring to transgender individuals, though she does not clearly label it as such. Though she does not explicitly state that body parts dictate gender, she still seems to be inferring that there are things that female sexed individuals should experience and that male sexed individuals should experience.

In my interview with Karen, the Dean of Conservatory, she describes how her ideas about gender have shifted over the years. She previously believed that gender was purely about one's anatomy, similar to what many of the students said (as described above). Now she understands gender as the way people represent themselves and the identity they choose. Her ideas changed for a variety of reasons as can be seen from the excerpt below:

Karen: Prior to working in a setting that's so diverse, it was physiological body parts. Now, however, I have to say that it's how a student identifies themselves. How they identify themselves. I think the grey area⁵² comes when it's transsexual, transgender, homosexual, lesbian, because some of these—many people—students, teachers, everybody—I don't think they differentiate or they understand the difference between all of those terms, and they're not interchangeable.

Other teachers expressed similar ideas about how their ideas about gender have changed over time. For example, one teacher stated on her survey that:

growing up in the fifties, I was exposed to the dominant gender stereotypes of that era. As I grew, became educated, and experienced a variety of people from diverse backgrounds, the meanings of gender identification became more fluid and expansive.

⁵² This is an important example of the conflation of gender expression and sexuality, which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Similarly, other students also moved past a solely biological/anatomical understanding of gender and discussed the idea of gender as the way people represent themselves or how they identify, which may have nothing to do with the sexed body. These students talked about how gender is more socially constructed, rather than biological. Youth talked about gender as individualized, as distinct from the body, and as something that is flexible rather than static. In our first focus group, Amber Wilson, Kay, and Blackwing all discuss their ideas about what gender means to them:

Amber Wilson: I think of the way a person portrays themselves to other people.

*Sarah:*⁵³ Okay, so portray themselves how?

Amber Wilson: Not necessarily anatomically speaking, but maybe the way they dress or the way they speak, or the way they view themselves.

Kay: Who I am, I guess, is—my gender is like, my gender is me. It's not definitive, necessarily.

Amber: Gender to me is how a person kind of—it's kinda how a person sees a certain, because a culture does have these ideas of what a certain gender—what it means to be a male or means to be a female. I personally don't think that it has anything to do with your sexual anatomy. I think it's how you see yourself and how you think kinda based off of what society says a female or a male is. Yeah. It's more of a mental thing than a anatomical thing.

Blackwing: When I think of gender, the first thing that kinda pops into my head is that it's, of all the labels that are put on people, I think it's one of the most concrete. It's not completely solid, but it's one of the more concrete ones as opposed to some where it's a little vague. I feel

⁵³ “Sarah” refers to me, as the researcher. I decided to keep my own name in the transcripts so as to provide readers with the understanding that I was the one speaking, but also to refer to myself the way I did with the students and the staff and the way they referred to me (rather than saying “interviewer” or “researcher”).

like this one, it's very easy to label somebody as this or this. Then again, this whole labels thing in my head, and they're all kinda weird to label somebody, but I feel like this is one of the ones that I'm okay with being labeled. It's not like anyone going, like, "Oh, God, don't call me a male." Yeah.

As these students discussed, gender was about how people label them, not necessarily the way they describe or label themselves. Kay in particular links her understanding of gender to her gender consciousness. For Kay, she is her gender and her gender is her.

Many of these youth also described gender as not mattering. For example, in her narrative assignment, Amber said that

In an ideal world, gender would not matter. I don't believe it should matter. Even if someone wants offspring and they are unable to have their own because of literal gender (sex organs), there are so many other options out there. Gender can hold people back in so many ways, and the human race doesn't need to concern ourselves with it anymore.

Amber's comments reflect ideas expressed by several of the students in the focus groups when they discussed gender being nothing more than a label. Though Amber talked about gender previously as a social category, here she discusses "literal gender" as biological sex or "sex organs."

For these young people, gender was a label that was put on them by society rather than something that they related to or thought mattered in their everyday lives. These youth described society just trying to label them and fit them into a little neat box. They viewed gender as either much more complex than that, or as mattering little in their everyday lives.

In her interview, Jack, who only spoke once in either of the focus groups, explained that she did not feel that gender was very relevant. But she does point

out that her ability to be free to be herself and express her gender is based on the fact that her gender aligns with her anatomy.

Jack: I feel like to me, it's not as big a— as relevant of a—I don't know. It's not as big of a deal to me as it is to my peers, or even other students here. For me, there's male and female, and I know there are people who identify with different ones, which is where I think people get confused when they look too deeply into it. I feel like it's a *you are what you are* kind of thing. I think kids my age get too involved in it, and they then just throw in sexuality, and they just get so emotional, and they just— *[laughter]*. It just turns into a big deal for them and they just decide *[exasperated sigh]*. For me, I guess when I was younger, I've always identified with females, so that's why it's not a big deal to me. I was born a female. I feel like a female, so for me, it's not a big deal. I recognize there are people who don't identify with that, and I guess I'm grateful that I don't have to go through that. I don't judge people who go through that at all. I guess I don't pity them per se, it's just I understand that's a thing. It's just something that some people have to go through and define with gender, just not identifying with the gender that they are labeled or were born into. It's just not something that is really prevalent to who I am personally, and it's not something that I really identify with, like I really associate much with sexuality. I understand that it has something to do with sexuality, cuz some people have a preference to only mate with one gender or the other. I think people just have too many preconceived notions about gender, and they just confuse themselves. Then when people have preconceived notions, then people get perceived notions about those notions, and they try to do a full 180 on other people, if that makes sense.

This is a clear example of the way for some youth whose identity configures “appropriately” with their body, believe that people should be free to be who they want to be. Jack is reflexive of her position here when she indicates that it is probably because she has always identified as female, and she “is” female, it's not a big deal. Jack also provides an example of the binary thinking that revolves around gender. You are either male or female. In the excerpt Jack also as provides an example of how many of the young people I worked with conflated ideas about gender with ideas about sexuality. She describes that she thinks that

the kids at Academy get too involved in their own identity and that when you add in sexuality, it turns into a big deal.

In the focus group, Lilly Jade spoke several times about what gender means to her and links this idea clearly to discrimination and that young people should be able to be exactly who they want to be without fear of discrimination.

Lilly Jade: What gender means to me, I feel that gender identification—is that what we’re—was created by society, so we can exactly decide who is male and who is female. That’s part of human nature for us, because it makes life easier. It makes life easier to understand who’s whose race. There’s also arguments as to some people saying that race should not even be on forms, because we’re discriminating and with gender. There is that issue that comes up with discrimination, but I personally feel like with Amber that personally, because it goes along with my sexuality,⁵⁴ it’s whatever it’s up to the other person...

Here again, Lilly Jade provides an example of the dichotomous thinking about gender and the idea that gender is just a tool for classification. As a society we seek to classify others in order to understand them and gender is another tool to do this.

In her interview, Crystal discussed how gender is both aspects of anatomy and personality and challenges ideas that just because one is male or female (reinforces binary), does not mean they have to conform to stereotypes.

Crystal: Gender to me isn’t that important as people make it seem. I understand that it’s important in medical terms of reproduction and stuff, but like it isn’t important to me based on personality or who the person is. Just because you’re female and you can have a child doesn’t mean that you have to conform to your stereotypical woman things, or if you’re a man, you don’t have to conform to stereotypical—like marrying a woman or being masculine. I just think that used to be—it didn’t used to be—

⁵⁴ Here again is an example of how the young people conflated gender with sexuality.

okay, I think about it as a medical term that's been taken way out of proportion. That's how I think of it.

These are two important distinctions in the discussion of gender – sex category and social category. As was discussed in the literature review, gender is often conflated with sex category. Where sex is the anatomy you are born with (though these categories are also socially constructed), gender is the socially constructed categories that represent or express your sex category (though is regularly tied to sexual anatomy and the body). Because gender is frequently thought of as a sole means of conveying sex category, they are frequently conflated to the point that typically, when someone asks about gender, they are not asking about how someone identifies themselves on a masculinity – femininity spectrum, but are rather asking if they are a male or female. The students I worked with, did, however, employ different notions of gender fluidity. For example, the students were allowed to choose their own names. While some students chose names that conformed with their sexed body, for example, Lilly Jade is a girl. Other students chose names that did not fit with their body. For example, Darth Vader, Jack and Ryan are all girls but chose either male names, or names that can be thought of as gender neutral. For some, Darth Vader in particular, this was because she identifies herself more on the masculine side of gender.

The teachers I spoke with additionally categorized gender in both bodily and social terms. On his survey, one teacher indicated “gender to me means having female or male anatomical parts.” Similarly, for another teacher, gender

is “if you are male or female in body or mind.” Another teacher indicated that they thought gender was “the construct that gives us one of the many ways to think about our identity.” Some of these comments are more abstract than others. For some teachers, like the students, gender is solely based on the body. Whereas other teachers discussed gender as having to do with either both body and mind, or as being the tool that allows us to think about and understand our identity.

Even though many of the students and teachers I worked with described gender as being about who you are, they still, most often discussed it in purely binary terms. For them, gender was male or female, masculine or feminine. In all of their examples, even those students who did not identify on each end of the spectrum, but rather somewhere in the middle, they continually discussed gender as being either of the two binary terms – few described it as fluid which reflects gendered hegemonies.

Because of the binary definition and connotations of gender, it became difficult when the students and staff were talking about those students who were gender-nonconforming.⁵⁵ When transgender individuals were discussed, it was only as a point of reference to something that was uncomfortable, unfamiliar, or requiring additional support and protection. While Karen at Conservatory talked about transitioning students as students in need of protection and frequently as

⁵⁵ I use “transgender” here to represent an array of gender non-conforming behavior (e.g. transgender, transsexual, cross-dressers) because that is how the participants discussed them. In most instances, the students and teachers I worked with did not differentiate between transgender and other gender non-conforming behavior.

“cross-dressing” students, Lilly Jade at Academy talked about how, even though she knows that her feelings are wrong and she should not, and tries not to feel this way, that transgendered individuals are to be feared because they make people uncomfortable, at least that is what she was taught.

Lilly Jade: Sometimes, psychologically speaking, I have had issues where I’m speaking to somebody who is transgendered or who is in transition, and I accidentally referred to them as female, but I really work on it to not offend. Psychologically speaking, as human, it’s obviously I can tell you’re female. You have female features. Obviously, you’re male. When a human being is in transition to change into the opposite sexual gender that they were born with, it’s sometimes hard, so that’s what I think. When a human being is in transition to change into the opposite sexual gender that they were born with, it’s sometimes hard, so that’s what I think....Secondly, transgender people are freaks. That’s how I was taught, okay...When I see a male subconsciously who is trying to be feminine, who is going through transition, I almost approach it in a grotesque manner. I’m not trying—I’m being honest here, and this is making me severely uncomfortable to say this, because you guys know me, Lilly Jade, that I’m a loving person, and to look at somebody like that breaks my heart. I know that that was wired into my brain to approach somebody like that that different in that manner, but I do work on it.

For Lilly Jade, the way she was raised influences her understanding of different identity categories. Even though she participates in organizations that are open and supportive of gender nonconforming individuals, she still battles with the ideas she was raised with. Lilly Jade in particular amongst all of the students in the focus group was heavily influenced by her family and cultural heritage. As will be discussed further later in this chapter, Lilly Jade is Mexican American (but describes herself as Mexican) and comes from a traditional Mexican Catholic family. While their relationship is very strained for a variety of reasons, (including her recent decision to come out), her parents and brother have great influence in how Lilly Jade understands herself, and how she reads other people.

Both Karen and Lilly Jade talked about how uncomfortable people feel when they do not know how to correctly categorize or label (read) individuals. Because for many of the participants, gender is a tool for organizing society's members into recognizable categories, it is worrisome and unclear when someone does not fit neatly into those recognizable categories. Binary thinking dominates most discussions of gender, which means that transgender students are often left out of the conversation entirely.

Additionally, my initial discussions with Karen at Conservatory highlighted the constraints the administration deals with even with something small like the computer system when it comes to their transgender or other gender nonconforming students. Because staff and faculty are restricted based on the way they have to enter student information, they constantly reinforce the binary even for those students who may be transitioning or who may have changed their names legally. They are forced to enter the information on the students' birth certificate, whether it corresponds with the students' identity or not. This is an example of the many ways young people lack citizenship. Even for those students whose parents are supporting their change or how have legally changed their name, they are unable to be officially addressed as anything other than the sex category that appears on their birth certificate. As Karen points out, "it is difficult because the computer system requires that we abide by the gender/sex on the birth certificate so when administration has to choose gender for someone who is transitioning (even those who have had their names legally changed) we are forced to use what is on the birth certificate." While, in

practice, teachers and staff diligently work to make sure that students are addressed in the way they prefer to be identified, the fact that administrators and students cannot escape the bounds of policy reinforces heteronormative and binary thinking about gender.

Not only are administrators confined by regulations when it comes to how to identify students, administrators also have to deal with how to accommodate gender-nonconforming students and also how to train faculty and staff to work with and protect these students. Because there have been problems in the past with violence and bullying in the bathroom, those students who are transition at Conservatory go to the administration and get a bathroom key for the faculty bathroom. As seen from the excerpt from our interview below, Karen describes the difficulties that bathrooms pose for students who do not conform to normative ideas about gender and sex.

Karen: I think I mentioned, when you and your chair were here last, when we had some girls take the male-to-female student into the bathroom and wouldn't let them out of the stall, because they wanted to see what they were. Those kids were suspended immediately.

For transgender and gender nonconforming youth, the bathroom can be a scary place. Bathrooms are one of the many places where gender is explicitly policed (often violently) (Halberstam 1998). Karen provides an important example of teachers and administrators who are working within the constraints of policy and law, while also providing students with a space where they can be less fearful. In this case, Karen is providing her students a place where they can use the restroom in peace. While it is not a perfect solution having students use the faculty

restroom, it shows Conservatory's efforts to make sure their students do not encounter unwanted attention (or even violence) when trying to use the restroom while also staying within building code and education policy.⁵⁶

As can be seen both youth and teachers I worked with had many different ways of talking about gender. This is important because as can be seen, when I spoke about my project, it likely conjured up many different ideas for people. This was especially true when I spoke with the students in the focus groups. As they talked to one another, it became clear not only to me, but also to their classmates, that when I said gender, many of them had very different conceptions of what it meant. The same can be said about how "gender" is discussed within the literature. Frequently, gender is conflated with both sex category and sexual orientation. Just as the students I worked with conflated gender with anatomy, they also frequently conflated gender with sexual orientation/identity.

GENDER = SEXUAL ORIENTATION?

One important aspect of our discussions about gender was the conflation of gender with sexual orientation/sexuality. Sexual orientation "is based on the gender of one's erotic object of choice, sexual orientation and gender are often confused" (Grossman and D'augelli 2006, p. 112). Sexual identity/orientation is an important identity category for young people and it is influenced by a variety of things. Sexual identity is one of many overlapping and converging identities

⁵⁶ For further discussion on unisex bathrooms see Halberstam (1998) and Antony (1998).

that influence how young people make sense of and navigate gender expectations in their everyday lives.

My interview protocol did not address sexuality in that I did not have any specific questions about how these youth described/defined their sexuality/sexual identity/sexual orientation, nor did it ask how sexual orientation related to gender. This was for several reasons. First, given that many school districts and school administrators, especially in parts of Arizona, are uncomfortable about the idea of researchers inquiring about sexuality with youth, I was hesitant to include any questions about sexuality for fear of being denied access to schools. I also did not want to build questions into my interview protocol that would make parents not want to give students permission to participate. Secondly, I was primarily interested in how youth talk about gender, not just sexuality, as other research has looked more closely at sexuality (Pascoe 2007, Fields 2008, Gray 2009, Luker 2006). As that literature points out, there is often a conflation between gender and sexuality and I wanted to avoid making any indirect links with my own questions. So I asked questions specifically about gender and masculinities and femininities and did not ask any specific questions about sexuality, sexual orientation or sexual identity. Lastly, because I was seeking to understand what other identities were important to youth when they think about gender identity construction, I did not want to create those identities for them, but rather, I wanted students to tell me what was important to them. For example, I did not want to explicitly ask questions about race, religion, class, or sexuality.

Instead, I let students tell me which of their identities were important in their construction of gender identity and then I asked probing follow up questions.

As noted, the first question I asked youth was “what does gender mean to you?” While several of the responses focused on the definition of gender and its relevance in their everyday lives, several began to talk about their sexual orientation. On multiple occasions throughout the focus groups and individual interviews, the youth I worked closely with often conflated sexuality and sexual orientation with gender. When I would ask about gender, they would respond by discussing sexual orientation. For some youth, it seemed that every answer incorporated the discussion of sexual orientation. In many ways, this was unsurprising given the conflation of gender and sexuality within the literature. On the other hand, while many of these youth discussed gender in sophisticated and nuanced ways it was surprising the immediate link between gender and sexual orientation.

A prime example of this was one of the teacher surveys. When asked what gender means to them, they responded with “sexual identity, all types.” Many of my students clearly linked sexual orientation with gender – sometimes going as far as to conflate the two as the same thing or to completely neglect to talk about gender and rather focus on sexuality. On many occasions (as shown below and emphasized throughout the rest of this section), students would talk about their sexual orientation when responding to questions about gender, masculinity and femininity. As discussed extensively in Chapter 2, these concepts are connected but distinct among gender studies scholars.

In the focus groups, several students linked gender and sexuality, often referring to them as one and the same:

Katy Perry: It's like everybody has their own opinion as to what gender is and what it means to be gay, what it means to be lesbian, and what it means to be straight.

Darth Vader: Expanding upon her idea, I think she's meaning, like, metrosexual to, like, I don't know—

Respondent: Transgender.

Darth Vader: — being straight or lesbian, or bisexual, like that does have a big impact on how I think of gender.

Lilly Jade: ...but I personally feel like with Amber that personally, because it goes along with my sexuality...

Further, when asked about what images and ideas pop into their heads when I say “femininity,” Lilly Jade provided the following response, which clearly shows her linkage between gender and sexuality and the way she conflates her ideas about femininity with sexuality. This excerpt also provides a prominent example of the way gender expression is read as sexual orientation.

Lilly Jade ...Okay. With femininity, honestly, this is something that I've had to deal with on my own. I don't like it and it's something I'm working on, and that's why I got involved with the LGBTQ community. In my upbringing, first and foremost, you don't date somebody out of your race... When I went to ... National last year, before I came out to my family, they said, “Oh, they're trying to convert you,” and this and that. I had to lie my whole way to get to ... National and say that I was *straight*... With femininity though, there is that issue, because in sexuality there is the lipstick lesbians and then there is the butch. I just had a conversation the other day with my mother and saying, “Oh, I don't want you to be going all butch on me.” I said to her, “Mom, I'm not going all butch on you, for God's sakes.”

The above quote provides a look into the many different things that influence how Lilly Jade understands femininity. She implicates race, family/upbringing

and sexuality. Additionally, she provides an important example of the negative classification of lesbian women (either as lipstick lesbians or butch) and the ideas about what appropriate/proper femininity looks like.

When asked about where they get their ideas about their own gender, Amber again clearly shows how the blurred line between gender and sexual orientation. For Amber, her peers have great influence over her understanding of masculinity and femininity, but so does her sexuality.

Amber: I'd have to say definitely my peers, for sure. I mean, here especially, I mean, *I'm bisexual I guess you could call it*, and I used to have really long hair. I remember when I chopped it off I felt like more people were starting to—I felt even myself, I started dressing more masculine. I started feeling like I had to be more masculine, because I cut my hair off. That kinda seemed weird to me, because the reason I cut it off was because I felt like long hair was making me feel like I had to be more feminine.

When making reference to her ideas about masculinity and femininity, she frames it within her discussion of her own sexual orientation, though the question did not make reference to sexual identity. She, like Lilly Jade, also paints a picture of what appropriate femininity is supposed to look like (i.e. Emphasized Femininity Connell 1987).

Similarly, when asked about where she gets her ideas about masculinity, femininity and gender, Ryan says that they come from her religion. But rather than describing her religion's views of masculinity and femininity, she instead discusses her religion's views of sexuality and sexual orientation.

Sarah: What else influences the way that you understand masculinity and femininity?

Ryan: To me, a lot of it has to do with religion, at least in my family. Most religions don't think it's right for a man and a man to be together or a woman and a woman to be together. It's really hard for me, because I like men and women. Even since I was a child, I always was taught that it was—at least with my dad, because he's from Texas and his family are strong Christians. They just don't think that's right. I used to always think it was weird that I would find certain girls pretty and I would have crushes on some of my friends.

Religion will be discussed later in this chapter, but as can be seen from this excerpt, religion influences the way Ryan understand sexuality is clearly linked with her upbringing in a religious home. What is interesting about this quote is that she never mentioned gender once – rather, she interpreted the questions as inquiring about her sexuality.

Part of the link between gender and sexuality was the fact that for several students, gender depended on sexuality – that is, their gender expression was about who they wanted to attract.

Charlotte: Gender is just kind of—I don't know. I think you choose your gender. I think it's whatever you want to be. It's, to me, what you want to attract, I guess, and I think you are the opposite of that.

Additionally, in her individual interview, Charlotte also described how she reads gender in others. She discussed how feminine boys are thought of as less of a man because they will not be able to attract women – she believes that women and girls are taught to look for strong, dominant men when seeking a partner.

At the end of the first focus group I decided to address this issue with the students and asked them whether they thought gender and sexuality were the same, or two different things. I got some push back from the students and some irritation that I would infer that they believed that gender and sexuality are the

same thing. I further probed as to why, then, if I had not asked questions about sexuality and they did not believe there was a link between the two, did they continually bring up sexuality when talking about gender. Some students, like Amber, believe they are closely connected, while other students, like Blackwing believe they are completely distinct.

Amber: I feel like they're definitely connected. I think it's a mix of maybe, I don't know, sexual reinforcement. I don't know how to say that but, I mean, you do wanna have sexual encounters when you're in high school. Depending on how you view yourself I guess. I don't really know how to tie that together. Yeah, I do think they're tied together in some way.

Darth Vader: It's hard for me just to say that my sexuality is dependent on my gender as well, because I get that feeling. I'm just very uncomfortable with even saying that. It's just something—I'm just not a very feely-touchy person on top of that, so yeah. Expanding upon her idea, I think she's meaning, like, metrosexual to, like, I don't know — being straight or lesbian, or bisexual, like that does have a big impact on how I think of gender. I don't know.

Darth Vader seems to contradict herself above. Clearly she is upset by the idea that gender and sexuality are linked, or are the same thing, but she begins by saying that she does not believe they are connected, and then ends by saying that sexuality has a “big impact on how I think of gender.” So again, we see that while these youth believe that gender and sexuality are distinct, they, link many researchers, have a hard time disentangling them and talking about them as separate from one another.

Katy Perry: Well, I personally don't think that gender and sexuality are the same thing. I feel like you can be a man and think, “I'm a woman,” and the thought of a man thinking he's a woman is more about his sexuality than this gender, because obviously, he knows he's a man, but he acts and thinks more like a woman. I think that the two are two separate things, cuz like I said, I think gender's more just what you are,

cuz obviously there are ways to change what you are, but that only requires surgery. Sexuality is what you are and there's really no way of changing it.

Katy Perry here articulates the notion that gender and sexuality are distinct, but she interestingly claims that a man feeling like a woman has more to do with his sexuality than it does with his gender. Part of this, as shown above in Katy's definition of gender, is because Katy thinks that gender is the biological body parts we have, not about the social construction of how we feel or how we identify ourselves.

Black Wing: Well, I didn't really say much in the last discussion, the last topic, but when you put it like that, it kinda leaves a bad taste in my mouth. I don't see like that personally. In my head, I like to keep them separate. I just keep gender and sexuality separate and I don't quite know what that is, but when you said that, I just kinda, like, I don't know. My first inclination, it's a question as to why, but in my mind I think it's a little more separate. I think there's too many variables to just directly link two things like that.

Blackwing provides a key example of how the young people I talked with disagreed that gender and sexuality were linked, but could not articulate how or why.

Ryan: Yeah, going back to what Amber said about how a lot of people see girlie-girls as dumb, actually my sophomore year when I first came here, I—well, I still wear a lot of makeup. I wear a lot of makeup and I was girlie, and whatever. A lot of people thought I was a bitch just by looking at me and a lot of people wouldn't talk to me, because they were scared that I was going to be mean. Then they found out that I'm totally open, totally nice and accepting. That was kind of funny, because my friends would come up and be, like, "Yeah, I thought you were going to be a total bitch." I'm not. Also, about me liking girls, too, they were completely shocked when some people found out who didn't know, because they're, like, "You don't look like you're gay." I think a lot of it does have to do with how you look, at least in people's minds. When they see someone that's, like, the first thing that pops into their head if a girl has short hair, she's probably a lesbian.

Ryan's discussion above brings up several interesting points. First she describes some of the many issues young girls face with how they are judged by other girls. Additionally, she talks about how, since she is a "girly-girl" and wears makeup, that people were surprised to find out that she is bisexual because "you don't look like you're gay." Ryan shows how our ideas about sexuality are tied with our ideas about gender. We often read people's sexuality based on their gender expression. So, as Ryan points out, if we see a girl with short hair (though this is only one of many different stereotyped style attributes) there is the assumption that she is a lesbian. Or rather, because Ryan is "out" at school, that people would assume that she should have short hair and wear less makeup and not be such a girly-girl.

This was reinforced in my discussion with Karen. As can be seen below, for Karen, the lines have been blurred, particularly regarding the clothes that her students wear.

Karen: Because we're dealing with young children, I think it could be both. We have students who physically change themselves to appear to be whatever gender it is that they're looking for. We have other students who do not make any kind of physical change, but identify themselves as a male or female, or something. I don't know if that comes from them still exploring and experimenting, and that's a tough one. Nowadays, also, when we have so many kids that the boys are wearing girls' skinny jeans and the girls are wearing the little gangster Dickie pants, and so I think there's a lot of misperception. If you look at them physically, they may not be trying to achieve anything, and for no reason it's just what they pick, so I think it's kind of funny. I think some kids are physically trying to present themselves as one gender over another, and there are some others that are just, they're happy with themselves and they're going to wear what they feel like they should be wearing, and I think maturity with the kids. I know one of the students, when she was a senior, she wore clothes that—I mean, I don't think I ever saw her in a dress, which would

be feminine, but was Prom King. Didn't discuss it and wasn't advertising anything. She was just who she was and she was happy being who she was. Then, yeah, but she was a little bit more mature. I think she had a different handle on it.

Sarah: Did students make assumptions about her sexual orientation based on her—

Karen: I think students thought she was lesbian. That was it and there wasn't any question, but I think it might have been deeper than that, because she put herself on the ballot for being Prom King. I think a lot of that still is the student's still exploring and experimenting, and trying to understand all these categories that people want to put you in, and these titles. They're not interchangeable, but I don't they always understand what they mean.

As is illustrated above, students are quick to indicate that they do not necessarily believe that gender and sexuality are the same thing. However, they cannot always disentangle them in order to clearly identify how gender and sexuality differ.

In her interview, Francesca shared her ideas about the connection between gender and sexuality. During the focus group, Francesca did not speak but rather, listened because she did not want to say something that might hurt or upset others. In her interview she was very eager to talk about many of the ideas that were discussed in the focus groups. She was especially clear on how she is frustrated by her fellow student's link of gender and sexuality, and instead, she sees them as two very different things.

Francesca: For me, gender is something that's like you're a male or a female, and you're kind of born with it and stuff like that. Sexuality is more like, sure it's like two of the same gender or liking both or something like that or just being completely straight and you know. It's different in an aspect that—let me see. It's just sexuality is something you can choose. It really is. I mean you can—I mean some people are definitely, I believe, they are definitely born like that. Some people I

know a lot definitely choose to be bisexual, or lesbian, or gay or straight. With gender I mean sure, you can try to change it, but there's really no changing it. You were born with your gender. To me, sexuality is a choice. It's choosing whether or not you're going to like the same sex or not. I mean it's not—we're talking about what gender means like the school environment or just to teenagers whatsoever. It's just different to me. When I think about gender, I think about being a male or a female. When I think about sexuality, I think about being gay or straight. I mean they can be linked in some ways, but I just don't feel that's what we're discussing. I just feel—like I've watched a lot of things about being masculine and being feminine and stuff like that and—or I've watched a couple things. It's a lot different than just you know. I don't know. Cuz you can be—cuz you can be gay and still be masculine or you can be lesbian and still be feminine. A lot of people, when they say that they're gay or lesbian, they become kind of the opposite sex. Like a gay man will start acting more feminine. That's not necessarily what it is. You can still be masculine and like men. I mean it's just kind of, you're born that way. You don't have to act feminine. If you're a lesbian—some people that are lesbians try to act more like men and it's like—I don't know. I mean some people do have more testosterone and more estrogen and stuff like that, but you don't have to be the opposite sex if you—if you're gay or lesbian or bisexual. You don't have to be the opposite sex. You're just—you feel that way, but you don't have to act like that. So to me it's just a little bit different than—yeah.

As can be seen, students had a difficult time discussing the gender detached from sexuality unless specifically asked to pull them apart even when asked to pull them apart, they seemed unable to articulate the difference other than to say that personally they viewed them as two separate things. Continually throughout our discussions, these youth brought up sexual orientation (their own and others') in the focus groups and interviews but when asked about it, claimed that they see them as two totally separate things. It was almost unconscious but when brought to their attention, students were hesitant to articulate what they thought the link between the two was. Part of this has to do with the intersecting and overlapping of particular identities for these young people. It was interesting, however, that

the youth were put off by my asking about the link between gender and sexuality. They were very hesitant to talk about the connections between gender and sexuality, because for them, these were two distinct arenas. This was very interesting given the fact that throughout both focus groups and the majority of the interviews, these youth continually discussed sexuality/sexual orientation when being asked about gender.

The students were not the only ones to conflate gender and sexuality. When I spoke with several teachers about my project, their immediate response was that Academy was a good place to be conducting research because they had a lot of students who identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual. Additionally, in their online survey, two teachers expressly linked gender and sexuality. When asked what gender means to them, one teacher said “sexual identity, all types” and another teacher said “gender is the way a person perceives themselves in regard to his or her sexual identity.”

This is also true for many of the faculty I spoke with. One of the first teachers I spoke with upon arriving for participant observation at Academy also linked sexual orientation with gender. Below is a reflection from my field notes from my first day of observations. When I observed a dance class, the instructor was very interested in what I was researching. When I told her that I was attempting to learn how high school students at Academy understand gender, she “what a great place to study, we have lots of students here who are gay and lesbian.” She claimed that Academy staff and students are “more open”. She also described the parents as not as “open” as the students, but seem to be able to

be swayed given where they chose to send their students to school. She described how she thinks Academy allows students the chance to solidify identity prior to going to college. She also thought that since students who go to Academy are encouraged to “be themselves” and are free to express themselves⁵⁷ (and their sexual orientation) that this leads to less sexual risk taking in college. Only one teacher did not make this connection of gender with sexuality. When I explained my project to the theatre teacher, his first response was “How interesting. We have a variety of gender roles here. There is a lack of traditional gender roles so you should find some very interesting things.”

The conflation of sexuality and gender is not new and it is not confined to the youth and teachers I worked with. Often, within the literature, sexuality is conflated with gender identity. This is an especially important discussion given that the regulation of gender identity is frequently based on perceived sexual expression. For example, youth who are regulated and policed because of their gender expression are more commonly being regulated based on their perceived sexuality; a very feminine young man is commonly not being policed because he is feminine, but rather, it is because that femininity is being read as sexual orientation. More specifically, that young man is being bullied/regulated because he is being read as gay based on his gender expression not necessarily because his gender expression matches his orientation. This is particularly interesting given that, as Grossman and D’augelli (2006) point out, most “transgender individuals are heterosexual” (p. 112).

⁵⁷ This theme will be further discussed in chapter 7.

The conflation of gender and sexuality has significant implications for how we understand both gender and sexuality. As discussed in Chapter 2, this conflation reinforces a heteronormative binary framework. If gender expression continues to be read as sexual expression, then young people will continue to be bullied and harassed based on their assumed sexual orientation. Additionally, because of this dichotomous thinking, gender is not understood as fluid and stereotypes are continually reinforced.

INTERSECTIONALITY OF IDENTITIES

At the beginning of the project I was worried about how to ask youth about intersecting identities without running the risk of having students prioritize any one of their many intersecting identities over others. Often, intersecting identities are viewed as simply additive rather than synergistic (Nash 2008), or one identity is seen to take priority over others. Without having to even ask students about their many other identities, students described many different aspects of their identity (e.g. religion, race, and sexual orientation) that clearly influenced how they understood, interpreted and articulated their gender identity. I will use Nakano Glenn's (2004) integrated framework to discuss how these identities overlap and intersect with one another. As Glenn discusses, race and gender (and I would add sexuality and religion) are defined as mutually constituted systems of relationships – including norms, symbols, and practices – organized around perceived differences (p. 12). For Glenn, race and gender are "...relational concepts whose constitution involves ... representation and material relations ... in which power is a constitutive element" (pp. 12-13).

Though Glenn talks most specifically about intersections of race, gender and class her notions of relationality – the way we gain meaning in relation to others – this is very useful for my own and my students’ understanding of their own identities. Gender is created, situated and perpetuated by and through social interaction and through multiple identities and subjectivities. Glenn encourages us to take count of the nuances of race and gender (and religion and sexuality). Glenn’s work was particularly important in helping to reframe my understandings of the importance of relationality, specificity and context and how to identify these intersections. As Glenn (2004) describes,

relationality is important for several reasons. First...it helps problematize the dominant categories of whiteness and masculinity, which depend on contrast. The importance of contrast is illustrated by the formation of “linked identities” in the cases of housewives and their domestic employees, reformers and the targets of reform, and colonizers and colonized peoples...second, relationality helps point out the ways in which “differences” among people are systematically related...[and] third, relationality helps address the critique that social constructionism, by rejecting the fixity of categories, fosters the postmodern notion that race and gender categories and meanings are free-floating and can mean anything we want them to mean (pp. 13-14).

As was discussed above, one of the most important identities/subjectivities when it comes to how students understand their own gender identity is sexuality. For many of the youth I worked with, sexuality was the biggest aspect of their identity that constructed how they understand and navigate their own gender identity and expression. Sexuality influenced the way they made meaning around gender, the way they expressed their own gender and the way they understood gender as expressed in others.

Below are a few of the many examples that came out during my focus group session and interviews. In addition to sexuality, race and ethnic identity influenced how these youth understand themselves in relation to others, particularly their families. Later in this chapter I discuss the additional influences on youth gender identity construction.

RACE AND GENDER

Race and cultural heritage played a role for these students in terms of how they understood gender, gender roles, and the appropriate presentation of self. As can be seen from the excerpt below, Lilly Jade grapples with the standards and expectations she was raised with and the ways that masculinity and femininity were defined in her house. She cannot disengage her own understanding of gender from the identity and expectations that have been instilled in her by her family and heritage even though they do not agree or condone her sexual “preferences.” She describes the way her Hispanic/Mexican heritage has heavily influenced not only in the way she understands herself, but also the way she relates to her family. Her family also heavily influenced the way she understands transgendered people and she is constantly grappling with creating her own identity and attitudes, while at the same time balancing how she was raised.

Lilly Jade: With the upbringing I was raised, and the upbringing that was very Mexican, very Hispanic, very black and white, women are supposed to do this, men are supposed to do this. If a woman speaks up, that means she’s being masculine. That means you’re not supposed to talk back if a male speaks to you in Mexican society. I was raised around a bunch of strong females, so those females affected me almost to a point where I’ve been considered very dominant and manly, and dominance is connected

to masculinity because of that upbringing. Sometimes I do honestly question whether that upbringing and the constant question of masculinity dominance has kinda altered my sexual orientation.⁵⁸ Also, as well with society and how females are brought up, and what I see masculine, immediately the first name that came to my head was bracket. Okay, then I started thinking, and then I thinking of all the males. Actually, I didn't even think about my father until way later on, and my father wasn't even a part of my upbringing, really. He was the weekend, so that's where I see masculinity.

Lilly Jade points out several interesting contradictions. While she says she was raised by a “bunch of strong females” and that sometimes she is thought of as “manly,” she also talks about the dominance of masculinity (what Lilly Jade refers to as Machismo) in her heritage and the fact that dominance is masculine and girls are never to be masculine. Previous scholars have investigated the impact of culture and heritage on the meaning-making of gender identity, particularly looking at the hegemonic notions surrounding Machismo (Lancaster 1994). For example, building on Lancaster's (1994) investigation into Machismo and masculinity in Guatemala, Gutmann (2006) critiques the common correlation of Machismo with dominance and stereotypes of male culture in Mexico City. As both of these authors show, race and national identity significantly impact gender and sexuality, because, as Weeks (1995) argues, sexuality is the “magnetic core that lies at the heart of the national and political agenda” (p. 4).

Later in her discussion she also references that she is very “girly” and has worn makeup and her mother's heels for as long as she could remember, and this connects her previous statement about assuring her mother that she would not be “butch.” For Lilly Jade, her heritage and cultural experience came up several

⁵⁸ Another example of the conflation of gender with sexuality.

times in our discussions. Race, for her, seemed to be a dominant identity that influenced how she understood her gender (and, for her, her sexuality). There were few other students who discussed race as openly and continuously as Lilly Jade.

In her interview, I asked Kay if her ideas about who she is change based on who she is with. Her response is below. For Kay, again, identity is clearly linked to sexuality.

Kay: I surprise myself, but I'm still the same person. I surprise myself because I hadn't thought that broad before. I hadn't thought, "Oh, one day you're going to be dating a white girl." If I would have told that to myself, I'd be like "Oh, okay." ... I'm just used to growing up and dating guys or supposed to be dating guys anyway. There's no real difference. I don't know, I'm just happy with my outside life.

Sarah: That's awesome. Is it dating a girl or dating a white girl that's most surprising to you?

Kay: Oh. *[Pause]* I think it's just a girl because—you're good *[Laughter]*. No, I'm pretty sure it's just a girl because like I've learned to adapt to like the whole race thing. I went to like charter schools back where I'm from and even though the population of the whole state was like—or the black percentage was higher, but I went to schools where I was in school with a whole bunch of like rich kids; so like rich white kids, rich Indian kids, rich Asian kids. Not necessarily the race card that surprised me cuz I'm learning to adapt to each and every race and not really—I mean, how can you say that you can't see race because you do see it. I'm used to that part, not necessarily dating a girl part. That surprised me a lot.

Kay (an African American) provides interesting commentary on how some identities outweigh others and how she thinks of some identities as mattering more than others. In the second focus group, Kay also discussed this idea:

Kay: I'm confused. I feel a lot of the time, all of the time, I'm not sure how to act, as far as feminine goes. My mom, she never taught me like to put on makeup or wear heels, things like that. I have one sibling that's a

brother, so of course, he made me tough and had this kind of attitude towards that. Then I did ballet, and then I do this and then I do that. Then it's just like then I grew up in a society where okay, you're gonna marry this. I asked my mom one time, I was like, "How would you feel if I married somebody of a different race?" She was like, "Well, I guess I'll just have to get used to it." Okay. Now, it's like okay, well, not just a different race, but now I'm in a relationship with somebody who is of a different sex. I don't know how to act. I just find myself acting as if I made up my own gender, as if I made up my own rules. I think it's better than acting like a girl or like a guy. That's just me.

Here again, Kay clearly connects her gender with her sexuality, but also with her race. She worries that her family would not accept a partner that is of a different race, and also, if they will accept someone of the same sex. In response to her own confusion about how to act, Kay states that she has created her own gender which, to her, is better "than acting like a girl or like a guy." Like Kay, Lilly Jade also makes reference to dating someone outside her race and believing that, unlike Kay, it would be both race and gender that her family would negatively react.

The students in my focus groups comprised a variety of different racial identities. Similar to the school racial makeup, I had two students who identified as Black, three that identified as "biracial," two that identified as Hispanic/Mexican and nine that identified as White. As described above, for some students, their racial/ethnic identity was a stronger influence than for others. Interestingly, none of the White students made reference to their own racialized identity. While some of the students of color comments on how race influences their conceptions of gender and identity, not a single White student made the same claims. This is not to say that their racialized identity does not

play a role in the way they define their gender identity, or the way others define and understand their gender identity and gender presentation, but that they did not make reference to it during either the focus groups or the interviews. While sexual identity seemed to play the largest role in how these youth defined and navigated gender identity, race and religion also seemed to heavily influence how they understand themselves.

BECAUSE THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO

In addition to sexuality and race, religion is a very strong aspect of many people's identity. Religion, like ethnicity/culture, has historically framed understandings of gender and sexuality (Avishai 2008, Brasher 1998, Chong 2006, Stoler 1995, Erzen 2006). And religion, like media, circulates messages that shape young people's identity. Many religions have specific teachings on appropriate gender and sexuality and religion remains one of the defining forces in how we as a society frame gender. For many of the students I worked with, religion played a large role in how they understood gender (and sexuality). Coming from various different religious perspectives (Mormon, Christian and Catholic),⁵⁹ several students indicated that religion dictated how they should understand gender, and for many of them, their identities conflicted with the way their religion.

⁵⁹ While the SAC students may identify with other religions from what is discussed within this chapter, on Christianity, Mormonism and Catholicism was discussed.

In response to my question regarding where these students got their ideas about masculinity and femininity, Ryan, a senior girl offered the following during one of the focus groups:

Ryan: To me, a lot of it has to do with religion, at least in my family. Most religions don't think it's right for a man and a man to be together or a woman and a woman to be together. It's really hard for me, because I like men and women.⁶⁰ Even since I was a child, I always was taught that it was—at least with my dad, because he's from Texas and his family are strong Christians. They just don't think that's right. I used to always think it was weird that I would find certain girls pretty and I would have crushes on some of my friends. I was, like, "Oh, my God, I'm a freak. What's wrong with me?" I would pray and be, like, "Please, God, don't let me be like this." This was when I was 9, 8. I never really talked about this, but just this past two weeks, my parents found out that I do like girls as well, and they just don't talk about it. They kind of ignored it and act like nothing happened, because they don't want to accept it. They think that it's a phase. It's just hard not being able to be open about it with my family. It's hard, because I am Christian and a lot of people don't know that, because so many Christians are really judgmental towards other people and I'm not like that whatsoever. I'm very open with everyone and it just sucks that my family can't accept that. They just ignore it. It's hard, but a lot of it with my family is religion, so that's all I wanted to say.

For Ryan, her faith and her family's faith have a lot to do with the way she understands herself and the ways she understands the world. She worries that her religious identity conflicts with her sexual identity and the many complications that causes. She worries about being herself at home because of her sexuality and about being her Christian self at school because of the negative connotations.

Like Ryan, Katy Perry was also strongly influenced by her religion, which has been difficult given the fact that after her parent's divorce, her mother

⁶⁰ Here again is an example of how the students talked about their own sexuality when discussing questions of gender as discussed above.

came out as lesbian and is now married to a woman. For Katy, the way she lives at home is often in contradiction to the way she was religiously raised. During our first focus group, Katy shared the following:

Katy Perry: When I was growing up, I actually grew up in a Christian home. My mom, it was just me and my mom actually living in the house, but my aunt was really close to us as well, probably over every day, practically my second parent. Just growing up, I was always taught what femininity and masculinity were based on the fact that we were really Christian. It was all about how our religion pretty much told us what was right and what was wrong. If we veered to the right or the left at all, it was considered wrong. It was if you're not on the right path, you're on the wrong path. Just growing up, I just remember it was pretty much yes or no, black or white. There was no grey area at all. Then, when I was about 15, my mom came out to me that she was gay, and we no longer lived a Christian lifestyle I suppose. Masculinity and femininity, it's kinda opened the doors to a bunch of different stuff. Now, my eyes are a little more open to the fact that there's kind of a bigger world than just the black and white. I suppose, because I was living around a bunch of women when I was little, I've always just been the girlie-girl type person, sort of. I don't know. I just think that so many different things come into play when I was little that made me believe what I believe today. I guess I can't really pinpoint if it's my mom or if it's my religion, or if it's whatever. It's just I think that it's definitely not a black or white question. There's a whole bunch of grey. I'm just—yeah.

Katy provides an interesting discussion of her religious conflict with her mother's sexual identity. She thinks that they no longer live a Christian "lifestyle" because after her parent's divorce, her mother came out as a lesbian. Because of this, she does not believe that they are "really Christian" anymore. Here again is an example of how religious identity influences the way some students understand gender (and sexuality) and how gender and sexual identity can influence the way some students understand their religious identity.

In her interview, Francesca provided a different perspective on religion. For Francesca, religion and family are a very big influence in her life. Her

Christian identity is the first thing she talks about. Her religion has a powerful influence in how she makes sense of herself and she talks about how her religion has taught her to always love everyone and it has also structured the way she understands gender and sexuality.

Francesca: Oh yeah. Definitely. I mean anywhere you go something's going to influence you in one way or another. It's just how you look on it is how you get influenced by it. If I went to church, and I said, "Oh you know," and the church said, "Oh we don't like gays" and blah, blah, blah, blah. You can say, "Okay, I don't agree with that," or you can say, "Okay. I do agree with that." You have to really analyze what you're being influenced by and you have to analyze what they're telling you. The church that I go to, I don't think would frown upon—I mean it might—but if you went in there, and you said that you were gay or a lesbian or whatever, I don't think anybody would necessarily look upon you any different. I believe that you're supposed to be loving to everybody. You know? Every single person that's out there, you have to love them, and you have to accept them for who they are. Hate the symbol of the center. Because if a person feels that they're being discriminated against because of what they feel or what they think, then you're never gonna get anybody to—not necessarily be that religion, but to look at it in a positive light, because I mean—I don't know. It's just I've always learned to love every single person you meet, no matter who they are. So that's the way I've let it influence me at least.

Francesca provides a unique perspective here. While for Lilly Jade and Ryan their religion conflicts with their identity and for Katy Perry, her religion conflicts with her mom's identity, Francesca identifies as heterosexual and her religion does not conflict with the way she identifies herself. She discusses how her religion has influenced her in that it has taught her to be loving towards everyone and to accept people for who they are. But, her religion has also influenced the way she understands both gender and sexuality. As the excerpts in the previous section describe, for Francesca, sexuality is a choice.

In a different discussion about religion, during my observations of the theatre class one day I heard the following conversation between a young girl and a few of her friends in class:

December 12, 2011: While waiting for the class to be dismissed, several of the students mill around by the door. The teacher has excused himself indicating that he “really has to use the bathroom” and has told the students to wait until they are released to leave class. Everyone stays in the classroom and there are several conversations going on at once. One girl is talking to two other girls and one boy student and says “This guy that I like might be super gay but he’s Mormon which means he will never come out of the closet right? But he’s super gay so I don’t know. I wonder if we would date even though he’s probably gay.” Her friends seem to laugh it off, but one responds “well, if he’s Mormon, he will probably never come out, so you should be good”.

Young people have a variety of different identities. Sometimes, these intersecting and overlapping identities compete with each other, as was the case for both Katy Perry and Ryan. Their religious identity conflicted with their gender identity, and in Ryan’s case, with her sexual identity. For Lilly Jade, her racial/ethnic identity conflicted with her gender and sexual identity as well as with her religion (which for her, was tied to her Hispanic/Mexican heritage). These examples highlight the fact that it is impossible to merely look at gender. Instead, we must look at the many identities young people have, and how those identities influence the way they make sense of their own (and others’) gender identity.

INFLUENCES

In addition to the intersecting identities of sexuality, race, and religion, the students and teachers I worked with also discussed the many things that influence how they make meaning of gender. Students and teachers expressed

that media, peers, and sense of place inform the way they understand identity and influence their identity construction. In this chapter I will briefly discuss the influence of media because it will be looked at more specifically in Chapter 6.

Two students in class during the focus groups, Katy Perry and Raphael, talked a lot about how the media influences their own sense of self and identity construction (in both positive and negative ways). In an age dominated by mediated images, these students are forced to navigate a mediated world. The images that these students see influence the way they understand their own gender identity, as well as the presentation of identity from those around them.

Katy Perry: I think media overall is the biggest thing for me. Not necessarily just Disney, like Charlotte said, but just overall. If you watch commercials, half of the time nowadays it's—if it's selling cars, it's a half naked woman on TV just sitting on a car. If it's for perfume, it's the prettiest girl that you could possibly imagine is the one wearing the makeup. Probably not actually even wearing the makeup, but she's gorgeous, so this is what sells these things. To me, it's like that's always been the thing to define what to consider masculine and what to consider feminine is because it's always that people know. The product-makers know how to work people our age's brains, and work in the way to make it so that we feel like we have to look like them and we have to be that masculine, we have to be that feminine in order to fit into society nowadays. That's makes us feel like we have to do that. I just think it's wrong, sorry.

Raphael: Yeah, what I think nowadays what it is, it's mostly the media that's been affecting the youth. Putting this image, like Katy Perry said, of how we feel of what something should look like or what something should be perceived as. Whenever I go to—I like dance, of course. I look at some shows where it's dancing and I mostly see females, and there's only one male. Then they put that male as homosexual. I think to myself is that what we need to be telling ourselves that's what's okay and everything? Then so mostly I just ponder in my mind and I think, wow, we're being blinded by all this. Does it make it any better too that we have the web with us now? We have Internet, so whenever you go on websites, it perceives it like that too, nowadays. That's why I'm just

thinking that affects most of our interactions with how we think of things, which is the media.

As will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, media is a prominent influence on the way young people understand their identity. The teachers I worked with also claimed that media had a strong influence on how young people navigate their identities. For example, one teacher said:

I think the students of [Academy] are heavily influenced by the media. I think the students of [Academy], rather the type of student that is drawn to art schools, believe that they should act in a particular way because of the perceptions put forward by the media. Art schools in general are full of students confused about their gender roles. Those roles will become more defined as they mature, and most of them will change. I also think that due to [Academy's] largely female student body, gender roles are bound to deviate from societal norms when so many people of the same sex are placed in a contained environment.

Most students claimed that media is the biggest influence in their lives (in addition to peers and geography). In addition to the role the media plays in influencing identity construction, Amber pointed out in the focus group that one of the most influential aspects in her life is the role of her peers. As she describes below, her peers are very influential in the way she has previously understood herself and in the ways she defines herself.

*Amber*⁶¹: I'd have to say definitely my peers, for sure. I mean, here especially, I mean, I'm bisexual I guess you could call it, and I used to have really long hair. I remember when I chopped it off I felt like more people were starting to—I felt even myself, I started dressing more masculine. I started feeling like I had to be more masculine, because I cut my hair off. That kinda seemed weird to me, because the reason I cut it off was because I felt like long hair was making me feel like I had to be more feminine. I think then my peers, I don't know, it just seemed kinda

⁶¹ This excerpt was previously used to describe the way students conflate gender and sexuality. I use it again here to further argue that the influence of peers plays a large role in how Amber understands both herself and others.

like certain little things like that, your peers really define it for you, such as your hair or what you choose to wear. Yeah, I don't know.

Further, in her written narrative Amber wrote:

I learned what it means to be a man or a woman mainly from my peers. This was all a matter of sexual attraction, to be honest. I am bisexual, but most people would only be attracted to me based on how I dressed or acted. Men were attracted to me when I had long hair and dressed in a feminine manner. After I cut my hair females were more attracted to me. It's all a matter of sexual approval, though I wouldn't want to consciously admit that.

Amber's honest response is particularly interesting. Here again it is seen that students conflate (or closely link) gender expression with sexual orientation.

Amber goes so far as to say, similar to what Charlotte claimed earlier, that it is all about sexual approval.

Teachers too believed that peers had a large role in helping students define (and judge) themselves. Several of the teachers I spoke with claimed that their peers were very influential in how students identified themselves. They claimed that especially at Academy, peers have a lot of influence because there are a variety of identities represented. For some students who come from more traditionally district-bound public schools, Academy provides a place where students can express many identities. In addition to influencing fashion trends and hairstyle, many students commented on the way peers influence gender and sexuality.

SENSE OF PLACE

One influence that was surprising to me was the importance of place for some of these students. In relation to the way they understand themselves and

others, several students discussed location and geography. These students believed that the way we understand ourselves and others is influenced by where we are and where we grew up. As Darth Vader discussed in the focus group excerpt below, before she moved to the city, she was used to living in rural areas.

Darth Vader: There's a big difference between cities and rural areas as well. Coming from here, from a small town, I grew up on a farm. If you wanted corn, you didn't go to the store. You went out to your cornfield and you shucked some corn. I don't know, you need milk, you went to the barn and got some milk kind of a thing. Here, it's all go, go, go, go and I'm used to the slow pace of doing nothing because there is nothing to do. Right now, there's a McDonald's around the corner, we're good to go. It kinda makes me sad, but it's really awesome at the same time, because it's something I've never been exposed to before. I think that's also caused me to change a lot. When I first came here, I was always in sweatshirts and stuff. That doesn't really work out in Arizona, and I still wore them. I don't know, force of habit. Didn't like the change. Hated life. I didn't want to change. I liked the way I was and I was just a weird little kid. Now that I've been exposed to a lot of culture out here, like, around the area there's a lot of—it's a lot deeper than I thought the community could be for such a big area. There is small communities within this larger community as well that influence me. Anyway, I just feel like there's a big difference there for anybody who's ever lived in a small city to go into a big city or the other way around, vice versa. It's a big different culture-wise, because there's a lot—the moral standings in these places are lot different. Where I come from, begin gay or lesbian, or bisexual is very frowned upon. I wasn't any of those. I'm straight, but at the same time, I was one of those people who supported that and was very for that, so I was shoved to the corner of that place. I wasn't accepted. Here, it's really different, the fact that I can be who I want out here now...

Darth Vader brings to light what many have discussed about the supposed freedom of urban areas versus the constraint and suffocation of rural areas (Halberstam 2005 and Gray 2009). For Darth Vader, the “big city” provides space to be free, to be yourself, and is a space where sexuality is not limited in the way it is in a small city (Halberstam 2005). Similarly, Mia Stiles also

discusses the differences between rural and urban areas (small and large cities) where gender expression is read as sexuality and reinforces this notion that where you grow up really effects how you understand yourself and others.

Mia Stiles: I haven't really learned the differences between what it meant to be masculine and what it meant to be feminine, because I lived in small town, like, Darth Vader. We were a two-hour train ride from New York City, so we'd go there all the time. We were all kinda mixed, because yes, we had the cheerleader girlie-girls, but one of my best friends who was a girlie-girl was stronger than one of the guys on the football team. It was all kinda combined as in you were what you were. It didn't matter what you do. Nobody really talked about being gay or lesbian, but it just kinda happened, and everyone was okay with it. I mean, I think the media didn't really affect us, because we kinda lived in a bubble, but because we went to New York and see people of all these different cultures, it was okay. I think where you grew up really affects it.

CONCLUSION

This research project set out to explore how young people navigate gender in their everyday lives as high school students – more specifically, high school students attending arts-based charter schools. Young people report a range of gender identities when asked to discuss how they understand gender and what gender means to them. The young people in this study described gender in a variety of ways – as being linked to the body (as sexual anatomy), as being a social category used by society to label them into nice, neat categories, and as an identity category that should not matter as much as it does. In spite of this, and often because of their definitions, their statements still reinforced the gender binary, that is, that there are only two recognizable genders, masculine and feminine. Additionally, many of the participants in the study (students and teachers) perpetuated the binary that there are only two kinds of sexuality

(heterosexuality and homosexuality) and two biological sexes (male and female). Though some students claimed identities that were beyond the binary, overall, their discussions still reinforced the idea that there were only two that mattered. Sometimes they seemed to “understand gender” in this traditional, binary way; at other times, however, some of my students seemed to understand gender in new and sophisticated ways and talked about gender as both individual, interpersonal and structural/institutional.

Young people have many different identities that influence, intersect and overlap with one another. Many of these identities influenced how they navigated, made sense of, and described gender. Sexuality, race and religion were three of the identities that heavily influenced how young people navigate their gender identity construction, and how they interpreted the gender identities of others. For almost all of the students, sexuality was a prevalent identity category that heavily influenced the way they make sense of gender. Not only does sexual orientation and identity dictate appropriate gender presentation, but gender and sexuality are often conflated as being one and the same. Race and cultural heritage were particularly important for Kay and Lilly Jade. Many of their comments explored the ways that race influences not only how they make sense of their own identity, but also the way they read gender and sexuality in others, and the way others (particularly their parents and families) read their gender presentation. For others, religious identity played a strong role in defining what gender means in their everyday lives. Particularly for Ryan, Katy Perry, and Francesca, religion dictates how they make sense of their own

identity. Multiple identities influence the way these young people are able to understand gender – as such, analyzing gender both theoretically and methodologically through an intersectional lens provides alternate ways to understand how young people act and describe their identity and situations.

While these identities play a key role in the way youth make sense of gender, there are many other factors that influence the way they understand gender. Media, sense of place/location, and peers were among the major influences that the youth and teachers described. Peer groups not only influence the way these youth defined their own lives, but also played a large role in the way they made sense of each other's identity expression. Peer groups were so influential that they dictated Amber's decision to cut her hair. Sense of place clearly played a role in how Darth Vadar and Mia Stiles understand gender. Being in a big city provides space for these students to express themselves in less restrictive ways from the smaller cities and towns they grew up in.

Gender was seen as complex, sometimes static, other times fluid and dynamic, sometimes both routine and innate, and other times an accomplished performance. In the following chapter, I will further delve into the role that media, specifically Disney, plays in how youth understand gender. I illustrate the way masculinity and femininity are described, how Disney influences notions of femininity, and how the youth described the constraints that media put on the way they understand themselves.

Chapter 6

"BEING A GIRL IS HARD"

The previous chapter discussed the many definitions young people have of gender, the confluences of gender and sexuality, and the way multiple identities intersect with gender identity and those things that influence the way young people construct their gender identity. This chapter examines the way the young people I worked with talked about masculinity and femininity.⁶² For many of these youth, their definitions and the way they understand gender is greatly influenced by the media, which can create a range of notions about the way young men and women should behave and how they should expect others to behave.

For many of these students the way they understood gender was established and reinforced in the media. Even the names they chose to describe themselves, for example, Katy Perry or Darth Vader, are mediated. In a way that was not described when discussing masculinity, the students discussed the role media plays in their understandings of femininity and their own feminine construction. These students talked about the influence of fashion magazines, reality television shows, Disney movies, and commercials on the way they understood how they were supposed to behave. No student made the same connections in relation to how they believed that boys should behave.

⁶² I use this binary language specifically, as, for most of my students, they did not talk about gender as a spectrum or continuum. Instead, gender was either masculine or feminine.

“I’M A PRINCESS” – DISNEY IMAGES

There is a large body of literature on the influence of media images on identity. As was discussed in the previous chapter on the influences of gender construction, media are one of the main influences on how young people define their own gender identity and how they make sense of the gender identity of those around them. Young people are inundated and constantly bombarded with media images of gender. Whether it is images on the news, in music videos and lyrics, through video games, through televised sporting events, in magazines, on the internet, in commercials, or in movies and television shows, these images seem to depict (for the most part) a normative and concrete depiction of how gender should look. Media create false and artificial standards which young boys and girls measure themselves against (Katz 1999, Kimmel & Messner 2000 and Dworkin & Wachs 2000). These students, as will be described below, also reinforced, and sometimes challenged, dominant notions about hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity (Connell 1987).

Media are a powerful tool for naturalizing values, ideologies about race, class, gender, and sexuality and validating social structures and gendered hierarchies (Kimmel and Messner 2005). Mass media currently does more than merely depict what we are socialized to believe is masculine and feminine; they can also begin to dictate our gender relations and, often, the way young boys treat each other and the way they treat girls and women. As Messner and Montez de Oca (2005) discuss in their study of gender, sports and beer ads, for example, “in beer ads, the male group defines men’s need for women as sexual, not

emotional, and in so doing it constructs women as either whores or bitches and then suggests ways for men to negotiate the tension between these two narrow stereotypical categories of women” (in Messner and Kimmel 2007, p. 489). Here we see how media can send very powerful messages to young people.

One thing that really stood out to many of these students was Disney. Disney is iconic for most young people and has been critiqued by scholars for a variety of reasons. When I asked the students in the first focus group what their greatest influence was, Disney was the first thing that was brought up.

Charlotte: Disney.

Sarah: Okay, how so?

Charlotte: The men on there, they all wear these puffy sleeve shirts and they’re all fighters, and they rake in the money. They’re the smart ones and the women are, like, “Save me. I’m so fragile.”

Respondent: What about Princess Belle? What about Belle?

Charlotte: Well, she can read, but can she do anything else? Besides that, also the men on there are in their 30s, and the princesses are 16, even in the ’90s ones where that’s not even legal. The Little Mermaid, she’s, like, “I’m 16.” Prince Eric comes along, he’s, like, “I’m 40.”

Sarah: Okay, so Disney is problematic.

Charlotte: Disney is out to get us.

These students further critiqued what scholars have already criticized. As has been shown in the literature, these students criticized the construction of femininity in Disney for the way many Disney movies constructed girls as weak, as in need of saving, and as heterosexual. As seen in the excerpt above, students additionally criticized the way the heroines (I use that word lightly) are usually

young girls (not women) and the heroes that these girls fall in love with are usually adult men (think Ariel and Eric). Disney was a particularly important aspect of identity construction for Charlotte. For her, Disney showed her how to be and how to attract boys. It reinforced dominant standards of femininity, particularly Connell's (1987) notion of emphasized femininity, and sexuality and created the impression that in order to be liked (and loved) one has to be like the Disney princesses.

Charlotte: The Little Mermaid.

Sarah: Yeah?

Charlotte: Yeah. Since I love Disney I always have, so yeah

Sarah: Yeah, you did—you talked a little but about Disney in the focus groups. What do you think, specifically, about Disney movies or Disney itself has shaped the way you that you understand gender?

Charlotte: I think it—a long time ago I didn't really understand a lot of things. That, to me, being a girl meant that you always wore a dress or bow in your hair and you sang songs. [laughter] The men were the ones who did the fighting, and they were the smart ones. Eventually, I just figured it out on my own that it was just whatever you want to be.

The students critiqued Disney based on the representation of gender and sexuality. They were particularly critical of the way Disney portrays young girls, or the way Disney sets the standards for which young girls are measured. Scholars have been critical of the construction of femininity within Disney films (as well as the problematic racial/ethnic representations and lack of gender variety) and the students I worked with further problematized the standards laid out for them by Disney movies (Cummins 1995, Beres 1999, Bell, et. al. 1995, Jeffords 1995, Wohlwend 2011, England et. al. 2011, Towbin, et. al. 2004).

Disney was not the only media outlet that the youth critiqued. Many discussed having access to fashion magazines from a young age that dictated how they understood themselves and what was appropriate femininity and were influential in how these young women describe and understand themselves. Like Charlotte claimed, “I started getting fashion magazines when I was really young, so that has been a big role in who I am, I think. It’s mostly my mom and kind of pressuring me to be like a total girl, which is okay with me now. I don’t know if I would—I don’t know I’d probably be different if she hadn’t done that.”

Like Charlotte, Katy Perry was also influenced by fashion magazines and other media images in how she constructs her own feminine identity, but also how she feels others judge how she is supposed to act.

*Katy Perry:*⁶³ I think media overall is the biggest thing for me. Not necessarily just Disney, like Charlotte said, but just overall. If you watch commercials, half of the time nowadays it’s—if it’s selling cars, it’s a half naked woman on TV just sitting on a car. If it’s for perfume, it’s the prettiest girl that you could possibly imagine is the one wearing the makeup. Probably not actually even wearing the makeup, but she’s gorgeous, so this is what sells these things. To me, it’s like that’s always been the thing to define what to consider masculine and what to consider feminine is because it’s always that people know. The product-makers know how to work people our age’s brains, and work in the way to make it so that we feel like we have to look like them and we have to be that masculine, we have to be that feminine in order to fit into society nowadays. That’s makes us feel like we have to do that. I just think it’s wrong, sorry.

⁶³ This quote was additionally used in Chapter 5 to describe how students, in general are influenced by the media. It is used here to more clearly portray the way it influences ideas about femininity and the presentation of femininity. It is also used here to describe how much pressure is put on young people, particularly young girls, to look and act a certain way.

As was discussed in Chapter 5, Katy Perry believes that the media not only influences the way she understands gender, but also strongly influences how she constructs her own feminine identity.

Media then, for many of these young people, plays a dominant role in how they discuss their identity. Fashion magazines and commercials set up unrealistic standards for which these girls hold themselves and for which they are judged by others (Turner et. al. 1997, Sypeck 2004). For many of them, media is what they measure themselves against (or believe others will measure them). Media have a strong influence on how these young people define themselves.

FEMININITIES VERSUS MASCULINITIES

Several converging and diverging ideas about femininity emerged during the focus group and interviews. When the students were asked about what they thought of when I said “femininity,” one of the more disturbing, but not surprising was the idea that for many of these students, when thinking about femininity the first things that pop into their head is “weakness.” In addition to weakness, some students said that when they think of femininity, they think of “not necessarily the smartest” or “someone who pays more attention to their body then their mind,” “shallow,” “materialistic.” For some students, while masculinity had several adjectives and descriptors like “strong,” “confident,” “leadership,” etc., femininity lacked the same kinds of acclaim. For example, Charlotte describes femininity as “Happy. That’s pretty much it.”

Below are a few examples of the way some of the young women in the focus groups described what they think of when they hear femininity. As can be seen, femininity is not necessarily something to brag about.

Katy Perry: Well, obviously, like I said, the first time you say *femininity*, the first thing I would think of is the stereotypical female wearing the dress. When she was growing up, she played with Barbies; the typical thing that you would think of. For the last couple of years, because my mom came out to me that she's lesbian, and so a lot of times, the people she hangs out with are the gay boys. A lot of the times, when I think of femininity, I think of no more than the gay boys, because I know a lot of women that are very non-feminine. A lot of my friends, like I find that women don't strive to be super-feminine anymore, and it's more the men that strive to be feminine. That's the way that they get out that they like the same sex, is that they have to be overly feminine. I don't know, when I think of femininity, I think of more emotion in general, like it's not that masculinity means no emotion, just different emotion, and women overall exaggerate that emotion in order to show that they're feminine sort of thing. The same with gay boys, they're over the top, and I'm not saying I don't like that, but, *[laughter]* yeah.

Amber: I also think, too, when I think of femininity, especially I don't know if it's just this school in particular or if it's high school in general, I think of when girls are trying to be ultra-feminine. We kind of view them as dumb almost. You think of the ultra-feminine girl, you immediately think, oh, she—lip gloss, like, oh, and she says “like” all the time. That's what comes to my mind right away. I don't think there's a really—because when you think of ultra-masculinity, it's so much more positive. You think of maybe a businessman or a CEO of company. When you think of someone who's ultra-feminine, it's not really a positive connotation necessarily.

Darth Vader: The first thing that pops in my mind is weakness. Not that it's a weakness in itself that I grew up thinking that femininity is a weakness. I mean, you could wear a skirt to school and get the crap beat out of you kind of a thing.

As can be seen from these excerpts, many of these girls do not feel that being feminine (or femininity in general) is an identity that they want to take on.

Femininity conjured up weak, powerless, and superficial images for these girls.

This critique of femininity came in many forms. For some students, the doing and performing of gender was described as conscious work and effort.

Take, for example, the quote from Charlotte below,

Charlotte: Okay, to me, I think of a lot of really hard work into it, because it's just the way I was raised. Keeping up with the media, making sure you always look your best, making sure you're the brightest, cheeriest person in the room. I don't know, all that little stuff, it's hard work, but I don't know. When I think of a really feminine person, I think of them always having a smile on their face and making sure everyone else is happy, and looking out for everyone. Being nurturing, but at the same time, they can be catty, too, but not dominant.

Like Charlotte, Kay also talked about the effort and work that went into expressing her identity. Not only is it work to express herself, it is also work just to make others happy.

Kay: I just wanted to say that I'm in constant battle myself of who I'm trying to attract based on what gender that I look like I associate with. I grew up, and I played soccer and basketball, but I also did ballet. I feel like I had two kind of personalities. I had this really girlyie gymnastics set and I was just all, I don't know, just very feminine. Then I would also feel very masculine, too. A lot of times, even now, I don't know who it is or what I'm trying to attract. I don't want to look like I'm butch, but I don't want to look like I'm a girlyie-girl, either.

Some of the students I talked to had a hard time describing what femininity is.

Take, for example, Francesca. In the excerpt below, Francesca depicts the difficulties of trying to define femininity, even for herself. In her interview, she continually tries to use herself as a point of reference when defining femininity because, after all, she is a girl. It is difficult however for her to fully define what she thinks of when she thinks of femininity.

Francesca: Well I think a lot about like when women were fighting for their rights to vote and stuff like that and how—I think of women in the '50's all the time, but it's like—women are very hard to describe, because

I am one. When I think of femininity, it's like you just kinda like—oh gosh—okay, I'm a girl. I know what this is. Let me think about myself. Well, women are just weird [*whisper*]. I think of like—women are so catty. They're so—like I'm gonna say you're dumb and then you're gonna get in a fight with me, but—I mean that's not how my friends are. I think of a lot of pink like most people do. I think of like regular women and just like okay I'm gonna be stylish and I'm gonna be cool and this is gonna be awesome. There are a lot of women out there who are very independent, and they're very like I'm gonna be awesome because I am awesome. I don't know. It's hard to explain femininity, because women are supposed—like for me, they're supposed to—like not just be at home. Like they should be out there working and earning their share and stuff too. They should have education and stuff like that, which I mean is pretty much needed for anything anymore. I mean it's not like we're in the days where you can just sit at home and do nothing. I don't know. I just think of very girly things that I like to do; like go get my hair done; and go get my nails done and I don't know. Do my makeup, and paint my nails, and all that good stuff, and jewelry and clothes.

While students had very critical things to say about femininity, they had much kinder things to say about masculinity. For example, when Amber this about masculinity, she thinks about “leaders of the world”. She claims that, “I don't know. I guess for me masculinity kinda translates maybe more like intelligence and more worldliness. Less preoccupied with their looks I guess kinda.”

Whereas when I asked her about femininity, she indicated that she thought of someone who was “motherly.” So for Amber, masculine traits include leadership, intelligence and worldliness whereas femininity means vanity and motherliness.

The girls in the focus group (as well as in the interviews) talked about masculinity positively and femininity negatively, the boys in the focus groups did not talk about them in the same way. Many of the boys referenced the idea of being “fit” or someone who “is not afraid to say what they want to say in

person.” Additionally, Blackwing described his idea of masculinity in the focus group as:

Blackwing: I think, for me, it’s weird, because I have all these ideas that were instilled in me as a child. It’s to be tough, to this kind of wall, keep things not necessarily inside, but don’t be too flashy. It’s not just about the physical, it’s about mental, so there’s all those stereotypes for masculinity. Then, growing up, I experienced my own things and so it’s contradicting, so there’s times when I find myself, like, yeah, that’s definitely masculine, and other times, like, no, no, why does it have to be masculine. I think with me, it’s always I’m kinda switching, just because of how I was raised and then how I’ve grown up.

As Blackwing describes, there are several stereotypical ideas about what masculinity (and therefore manhood) is. Like Katz (2006), Blackwing talks about masculinity as being “tough” and keeping a wall up. Blackwing also expressed his ideas about femininity during the focus group. While John Simon Ritchie and Raphael talked about femininity and masculinity in terms of art and media and changing perceptions over the years, Blackwing expressed much more personal stories about how he learned about gender roles.

Blackwing: For me, it’s funny, because a lot more things come to mind at once. I think it’s mostly because I was raised with a single mom and three sisters, so all this femininity that surrounded me my whole life. It didn’t change my perception at all. I mean, it exposed me more, obviously, but I think there are things that eventually I would come to realize on my own, but a lot of things, like, they’re typical things, like, makeup and skirts, and everything. The very first thing that comes to my mind is something, this instance that happened when I was 4, I think. My mom took us all to get our ears pierced at the mall and my oldest sister went before me, and she got both her ears pierced. Being me, I was, like, “I want that, too. I want two earrings.” My mom, I mean, not kinda, like, a guy certain way. She’s, like, “No, no, no, that’s what girls do.” I was 4. She just tried to explain it to me. I don’t know why I remember this, but so that’s always kind of a thing when femininity is—the tiniest little things for me. I feel like definitely, over the years, femininity has really broadened out and it covers a lot of things, but there’s definitely still those little things, little nuances that are still key feminine things, yeah.

Here Blackwing talks about how, from an early age, he learned that there were certain things that were appropriate for boys and certain things that were appropriate for girls and often, they conflicted with what he wanted to do.

Given the population makeup at Academy, I only had three boys in my focus group sessions. While each of them had something to add about masculinity, the girls' voices were much more prominent on the subject. While many of the students described masculinity in terms of being hard, tough, courageous, brave, etc., they had very negative things to say about femininity. Part of this had to do with the media's influence on how they define and understand femininity.

As was discussed above, media (particularly Disney) influences the many ways the young people in this study understand and interpret femininity. In the next section, I move to discuss how two girls who are part of this project talk about femininity. These two examples are used to further illustrate the overall picture that young people feel that they are forced to uphold a standard of gender that is unrealistic.

REAL LIFE FEMININITIES

As has been shown in past research for decades, young girls in high school are often been challenged with body image issues, issues of expressing their sexuality and issues of the sexualization of their culture (Azam 2009, Durham 2009, Bordo 2004, Tolman et. al. 2006). The young women in my groups were no different and grappled with the many of these same issues. They

talked about the pressures to fit in, the pressures to look a certain way, the pressures to behave in specific ways so that they will be liked. Below are two examples generated by two very different girls – these are outliers to show the spectrum of experiences for these young girls. I use these two examples to illustrate some of the ideas about femininity (and gender presentation in general) that these girls are forced to deal with. While these students were quite different, they were both forced to grapple with societal expectations about how they should behave in order to be loved.

CHARLOTTE

Charlotte is a very conventionally attractive⁶⁴ young girl who claims to be “girlie” and never leaves the house without makeup on. She spoke about how she always wears skirts (almost always) and her ideas of femininity have been greatly influenced by Disney and its construction of what girls and women should look like (or should want to look like) as well as the pressures from her family, particularly her mom. These influences have impacted the way she interprets gender roles and sexuality and, in many ways, have had negative implications for her own construction of self.

Charlotte: As far as my sexuality⁶⁵ goes, I am straight, but I have always felt like if I wasn't my most feminine looking at all times, if I wasn't always cute and cheery, and bubbly, and I didn't always wear pink or something, then I feel like just because of the way other people have made me feel that I wouldn't be able to attract anyone. I want to be able

⁶⁴ Throughout the focus group, Charlotte and others continually referred to her looks as being pretty, or attractive, etc.

⁶⁵ Here is a prime example of the way students linked their sexuality with questions of gender.

to get someone that I want. Even the people that I want, for me, it's not okay to date a guy who is girly or a guy who would be considered...he has to be the man in the relationship. He has to make the decisions, and be frank and forward, and confident. I'd be the one who just goes along with whatever he says. I don't know, almost to the point where it's like almost like abuse, because it's just the way everything's really old-fashioned in my family. My link to sexuality is that if I'm not a complete girl, then I am going to be alone for my life.

For Charlotte, her gender and sexuality are clearly linked. She expresses her gender with the express purpose of attracting a mate. She has also been pressured by her family to behave in a certain way and been conditioned to believe that in order to be loved, she had to perform her gender in a very specific, very restrictive way. When asked what she wanted others to take away from this research, Charlotte said: "My understandings of what being a girl is, I guess. I don't want everyone to feel as pressured as I was when I was growing up. I don't think that's fair for all girls to grow up feeling like they have to be perfect and sing a song."

Charlotte provides a prime example of Connell's (1987) emphasized femininity. She refers to her subordination (and desire to be subordinated) by men (i.e. she wants a "strong brave" man...it's almost like "domestic violence"). Additionally, Charlotte is concerned and fears that if she does not perform her femininity well enough, she will never be loved or desired.

CRYSTAL

Crystal is very different from Charlotte. She seems very quite, until you get to her know her and find out that she is always the lead in the school plays and that she is very outgoing and funny and has an opinion about almost

everything. Crystal has short dyed black hair, big black rimmed glasses and does not fit neatly into typical standards of beauty the same way that Charlotte does. Crystal (as discussed below) is comfortable in her own sense of self and gender presentation (as are her parents), but she gets very emotional when she begins to think about the future and that she may not fit into societies expectations. She is frustrated not only by the idea that she may not fit within societal expectations, but also at the expectations themselves and that she would be forced to fit them. She identifies herself as pansexual. She feels like her gender presentation, though she is confident in it right now, may in some ways hold her back because she does not fit within what she sees in the media or on the Internet.

Crystal: Well, when I was younger and I was at another school, I was lead to believe, because I was female, that I had to be feminine to be well liked. I got questioned many times why I wouldn't wear makeup or why I didn't wear dresses all the time...Well, growing up with the media and the Internet, and things like that, I'm very thankful that my family is very open and told me I could be whatever I wanted to be, do whatever I want and they'll always support me. I'm always lucky and I'm very thankful for that. Then, I go on the Internet and I think about my future a lot, which I'm sure a lot of highschoolers do. It makes me feel like my gender or if I'm feminine or masculine is gonna hold me back from some things (begins to cry). I'm a very emotional person.

For Crystal, she feels obligated at times to conform to others' expectations about how she expresses her gender, even though that may bear little semblance to how she understands her own gender. She is worried that other people will judge her and it will be difficult for her once she leaves the comfortable setting of Academy and her parent's home.

Though in different ways, both of these girls' ideas about self and identity construction are influenced not only by the way they understand gender on a

personal level, but also by the way they understand how others and society construct and regulate gender. These are just two examples of the ways the young women that I worked with talked about navigating their own identity amidst competing images of what they should look, be, and act like.

GENDERING THE CLASSROOM

Gender was not just about the way young people talk and express themselves. There were many instances during my time at Academy that highlighted the way gender is presented in the classroom. As was discussed in Chapter 2, gender can be depicted in both the overt and hidden curricula. Frequently, the gendered curricula presented prioritized masculinity over femininity (boys over girls).⁶⁶ Young girls are often silenced and/or marginalized within the classroom (Heath 1999, Reay 2001). Female students often apologize for their opinions or offer disclaimers if they think what they are going to say is going to cause any problems. I saw this on a number of occasions while I observed at Academy. For example, while observing the Film class, one female student said “I know I’m not going to be very popular for saying this, but I am not a big fan of *Star Wars*.” This statement ignited chaos in the classroom. The class was unique from other classes that I observed in that there were more male students than female students when Academy has significantly more female students than male students. In response to this statement, one male student threw his hands up in the air and yelled “Go Away!” and began to storm out of

⁶⁶ While I utilize binary language, this is because it represents what was seen at Academy. I recognize that gender is more fluid than this.

the class. When the teacher asked him what he was doing, he responded “I can’t be part of this or I’ll yell or say means things.” Another male student followed up by saying “more men than women like *Star Wars*, it’s a sexist thing. Most girls are not smart enough to understand how great it is.”

When I was having lunch with four teachers (including the film teacher) from Academy, I retold the story and asked the teachers if this was a common occurrence (either the disclaimer from the female student or the response from the male student). The teachers were entertained by the *Star Wars* story and the drama it caused, but indicated that young female students apologizing or qualifying what they say happens often. Even though Academy is more than 70% female, the young women still fall into the trap of feeling as if what they have to say is not good enough. Because of this demographic, I saw these disclaimers and female students apologizing in class often.

Heteronormativity is also often reinforced within the hidden gendered curricula in the classroom. As Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh (2004) point out, “just as heterosexuality is a given in the classroom, so too are the binary categorizations of sex/gender and numerous other boundaried and dichotomous assumptions” (p. 153). Similar to what Pascoe (2007) found, there is a hidden discourse of heterosexuality that is threaded throughout discussions in the classroom. This is a prime example of the way heteronormativity is reproduced within classrooms.

While observing the theatre class, I watched as several of the students performed the scenes they had been working on. Below is an excerpt from my fieldnotes from my observations that day:

December 7, 2011: The theatre classroom is a large open space with black curtains. It is freezing in the room and there is a large radiator that makes significant noise. When class begins, the teacher turns off the radiator which makes the room even colder. All of the students leave their coats on. The students are rehearsing independent scenes that they have been working on. There are several scenes that depict relationships (traditional heterosexual relationships between man and woman). One of the scenes has a joke about a sex toy and all of the students laugh and begin to chatter. The teacher has to reign them back in. The second to last scene is entitled "I kissed a girl" and is performed by two female students. The girls begin their scene about two friends that are fighting. At the end of the scene, the teacher opens it up to the class to provide feedback. The class (and teacher and students who are performing it) think it is too long and are deciding where it is best to stop the scene. One female student suggests "you should cut it off before you tell the story about kissing a girl because no one wants to hear that story." A few students nod and one male student says "yeah". Neither the teacher, nor any of the students comment further.

These are not the only examples of the gendered curricula in the classroom. During my extensive observation at Academy, I noticed several instances of how normative gender standards were reinforced within the classroom. Academy (as will be discussed further in Chapter 7) claims to provide a safe place for students to be free to be themselves. While this is true in many ways, the hidden gender curricula often remains because many of the teachers and administrators do not correct or call attention to these things when they emerge in class (if they are even aware of it).

FEMININE BOYS AND MASCULINE GIRLS

Many of the students expressed the belief that, while femininity was not solely housed in females and masculinity was not solely housed in males, femininity and gender-atypical behavior expressed by boys was far more regulated than masculinity in girls. Biological males who are transgender or express gender-nonconformity are more commonly harassed and victims of verbal and physical abuse (Grossman and D'augelli 2006). In other words, according to the students I worked with, it was easier to be a masculine girl than a feminine boy. Even at Academy, which is an art school, femininity was still heavily regulated for boys. Part of the regulation of gender expression has to do with the conflation of gender and sexuality, and, gender expression is often based on social perceptions around their sexuality. For example, if a young girl is dressed in what is perceived as masculine attire, many do not read that as her gender identity, but rather that she is expressing her sexuality; that is, that she is a lesbian. This conflation is true even in the larger discussions of gender nonconformity. For example, while doing a Google Scholar search of "gender nonconforming," every article/citation/book that appears on the first search page is research on gender nonconformity and sexual orientation. There is an overall assumption that gender nonconformity is almost always linked to sexual orientation.

As seen in the excerpt below, for many students, people "read" their sexuality based on their level of accommodation to gender expectations:

Ryan: That was kind of funny, because my friends would come up and be, like, “Yeah, I thought you were going to be a total bitch.” I’m not. Also, about me liking girls, too, they were completely shocked when some people found out who didn’t know, because they’re, like, “You don’t look like you’re gay.” I think a lot of it does have to do with how you look, at least in people’s minds. When they see someone that’s, like, the first thing that pops into their head if a girl has short hair, she’s probably a lesbian

This excerpt was previously used to show how closely linked Ryan’s gender and sexuality are. Here, it is used to show the way appearance and dress are used as markers to judge/read someone’s sexuality. That is, that gender expression = sexual orientation. Stereotypes about sexuality and sexual orientation have influenced the way that gender is read. The stereotype that all gay men are feminine or effeminate and that all lesbian women are butch or masculine help reproduce the often-inaccurate ways gender expression is understood. The above quote shows the way that looks are used to label sexuality.

Many⁶⁷ of the students believed it was easier for girls to display masculine characteristics than it was for boys to display feminine characteristics. This seems to be representative of what the larger body of literature has noted (see Pascoe 2007). The excerpt below describes how some students believed that it is much easier for young girls to be masculine than it is for boys to be feminine.

⁶⁷ It is important to note here that only female students signed up for individual interviews. So while some of this data are from the focus groups where there were three boys, the rest of the data is from the individual interviews with ten of the girls. I point this out because the boys may have had a different perspective on whether expressing feminine qualities and styles of dress was more heavily regulated for them than expressing masculine qualities and styles of dress was for girls.

Charlotte: I think it's easier for women to have masculinity because of society. It's okay for women to be masculine, but it's not okay for guys to be feminine.

Sarah: Do you feel like there's more pressure for girls to be more feminine than there is for guys to be more masculine?

Charlotte: No. I feel like I guys have it harder.

Sarah: How come?

Charlotte: Because if guys aren't big and strong then girls don't wanna be with them.

Sarah: Why do you think that is?

Charlotte: I don't know. I guess, again, girls are pressured into thinking they have to be with a big, strong guy.

For Charlotte, the disconnect occurs because young girls are taught to look for certain characteristics in men and if they do not display them, they will not find love. For Crystal, her friend was bullied because he was assumed to be gay.

Crystal: Yeah. I do have a friend, he's a freshman. He came here in the eighth or seventh grade, in my grade. He's a very feminine guy, more feminine than some other guys here. He has like a high pitched voice too. I just remember that everyone thought he was annoying; everyone kind of bullied him for being feminine. I don't know why but I just remember him not having many friends. Then he kind of got mean towards people. Then we actually did this thing for a documentary called *Bullied into Silence*. It was about these teenagers that have been bullied and their stories and how we can stop bullying and how words hurt just as much as actions do. We were filmed for that and I know that he's in the film because I saw the trailer. I'm pretty sure it's premiering in Boston sometime this week. I don't know if I made it in, of course it was only the trailer. I remember what he said. Of course I really didn't get to see what he said but I saw what he said in the trailer and it was like it's not that easy to go up to a teacher and say you're being bullied. It made me feel bad because I was like people at [Academy] were doing this to him because he's more feminine than masculine. Even though some of the guys are really feminine instead of masculine, I don't know why he was just the target. I don't know if he is anymore. I still hang out with him, but he seems to be doing better than he was before. It was just really bad

last year for him. Me, I don't know. I've been told I wasn't feminine. I didn't know how to take it. I'm more of the organizer of dances than the actual dancer that goes to a dance with a date. I'm rather organizing prom than going with someone. I don't know. If I had no gender I would, like that's how people view me I think because, I don't know, I'm a mixture of both.

Sarah: Do you think he was bullied because people thought he was gay?

Crystal: Yeah. I heard many comments saying that he's gay; saying that he was womanly and that he was annoying. That he was, I don't know, like—but it was just the stereotypical things of like a gay person, and he's not gay. He has a girlfriend right now. I just remember it being so bad because he kind of has like a baby face and it's like really innocent looking. It's not very manly looking either. He has a very feminine voice and he has like curly hair. He kind of acts in feminine ways but he was still a nice person. He's still nice person. There was just a time where he got really mean to people because people were being mean to him. Then he got in trouble but I don't know what happened. Yeah, definitely people were telling me that they thought he was gay and that he could never get a girl, stuff like that.

So, even at an institution where students and staff continually talk about how Academy is a free space where students are able to be themselves, bullying still occurs at both Academy (and most likely at Conservatory) and it is often based on the gender expression of students and their assumed sexuality.

This can be very problematic because it reinforces the idea that gender non-conforming boys have it harder than gender non-conforming girls. While the youth I worked with may agree with this, it is important to not draw such a broad conclusion. Girls who express gender non-conformity are often just as heavily regulated as their male counterparts; girls are often victims of violence, regulation and policing because of their gender expression in the same ways boys are (Wyss 2004). Additionally, gender non-conforming students are not only

critiqued and regulated based on the fear that their gender presentation is their sexual identity presentation. Girls who take on masculine characteristics are not necessarily thought of as lesbian, (in the same way boys are) but rather as trying to “be a man” or are using masculine characteristics to get ahead. So, while people may comment on her sexuality (e.g. she’s “a dike” or “she’s so butch”) they are not necessarily reflecting upon her presumed sexuality but rather are critiquing her disregard for gender expectations. Similar to what Pascoe (2007) found when boys threw the term “fag” at each other, it was not always about specifically calling out sexual orientation, but rather about critiquing the other boy for not fitting appropriate gender expectations (not being man enough).

CONCLUSION

The way young people navigate masculinities and femininities is an important aspect of understanding how young people construct and navigate their own gender identity. This chapter looked at the way youth grappled with the many conflicting images they saw about appropriate gender behavior, as well as how they interacted with the hidden gendered curricula in school. Additionally, this chapter analyzed how gender expression is read by students and the seemingly ease with which young women express masculine qualities (or types of dress) versus the regulation that young boys face when they express feminine qualities (or types of dress).

For these students, many of the young women in particular, media influences how they understand themselves and how they read others. Fashion magazines, Disney movies, silly contests on Facebook that rate the beauty (and

worth) of girls – all of these influence how these girls make sense of their own identity, as well as the identities of those around them. Media frame the way these youth conceptualize and discuss themselves and their ideas. Young girls are taught early on to judge themselves against these standards, no matter how unreachable or unrealistic. The findings in this chapter highlight and reinforce media scholarship on how media disseminate images about gender and the problematic identity issues that arise.

These youth too had very differing ideas about the characteristics of masculinity and femininity and typically deemed masculinity as good and femininity as bad. Masculinity was thought of in terms of positive characteristics such as strength, bravery, intelligence, while femininity was thought of in either negative characteristics such as weakness, superficiality or in very stereotypical terms such as motherly. These differing notions are particularly interesting given that Academy is more than 70% female students.

The following chapter builds on the two previous chapters and looks specifically at the way Academy is constructed. Heralded as a “safe space” and “home away from home,” Academy is described as a utopian space where young people can experiment with their identity construction. While in many ways this is true, this chapter also looks at the different way students talk about Academy and how the school presents itself, and how it is presented by others.

Chapter 7

(UN)SCHOOLING GENDER

“I don’t know. I think it’s because it’s small, and it’s an art school. It brought in people that were pretty—like they wanted to come here to be open. Because of that, more and more people started coming here and that’s just how the population is.” –Charlotte

As was discussed in Chapter 3, charter schools have frequently been painted as a utopian place where administrators are free from the overbearing restraints of schools districts and students and parents are able to choose schools that fit their children’s needs, rather than being bound by district boundaries. These charter schools were heralded as autonomous institutions – many of which promoted themselves as places where youth could be “themselves” and were free to express themselves in a way not possible at other public schools. While several scholars have debunked the utopian ideals of the charter school movement because of the expectations it has left unfulfilled, the students and faculty I worked with still talk about Academy and Conservatory as utopian spaces where youth are free to learn how to “be themselves.”

This chapter highlights the way the students and faculty attempt to create and sustain their institutions as free spaces that promote youth identity construction. This chapter will provide discussion of the main themes that emerged in the focus groups and interviews about how students and staff describe Academy and Conservatory – how they talk about it in general, and in comparison to other schools. First, this chapter provides an overview of the way students and faculty talk about Academy (and to a lesser extent Conservatory).

Academy was frequently described as a “home away from home” and a safe haven for identity construction. While students discussed this in the focus groups, some of the individual interviews challenged these utopian ideals and pointed out contradictions in the way these youth spoke as a group and how they spoke in their interviews.

This chapter then looks at the way traditional hidden curricula are challenged (be that through dress code or other policy) by both students and administration with these schools. Dress codes and zero-tolerance policies are specifically analyzed to describe the ways Academy and Conservatory challenge standard notions about school dress and gender presentation standards, and the way these schools often seem to fall short in their implementation of policies. This chapter concludes with a discussion of how, while these schools are constructed as utopian spaces for young people to express themselves, they are not immune from some of the tensions and hidden aspects that reinforce inequality in schools. Looking specifically at instances and discussions of bullying, this portion of the chapter analyzes how, while students describe the lack of bullying and harassment at their school, they also contradictorily describe the presence of bullying in online spaces (such as Facebook) and the way students and administrators respond to this kind of cyber based bullying.

The previous two analysis chapters focused on the way these youth talked about gender, how gender influenced their daily lives, and how and what they are influenced by in their gender identity construction. This final analysis chapter brings together the previous discussions of gender and focuses it on the way

Academy (and to a lesser extent Conservatory) navigate and construct ideas about gender for the students who attend these schools. Academy has the ability to craft a new school culture partly because it is a charter school but also because it is an art schools. So while many charter schools have failed to live up to the expectations placed on charter schools as a whole, (as was discussed in Chapter 3), there are several ways these charter schools exceed the expectations when it comes to the politics around youth identities. Academy does schooling in a progressive, responsive way and part of this is due to the fact that Academy teachers and staff have autonomy to create their own rules and standards and are not necessarily confined to the constrictions of traditionally district bound non-art schools.

ISLAND OF MISFIT TOYS

Many of the students and staff liked to talk about how Academy was a place where students could be free to express themselves in a way that they were not able to at other schools. Several of the students had transferred to Academy because they thought it would provide them with a place where they could be themselves and avoid the hostility or harassment they experienced at other schools. Other students additionally commonly referred to Academy and places like Conservatory as places where students who did not fit in at other schools, who were victims of harassment or bullying, or who were creatively stifled at “normal” schools could feel safe and free. Even the teachers indicated that Academy was a place unlike any other and that they could not imagine going

back to work at a “normal public school.” As Sally claimed, “I would never want to work at a normal public school.”

The students talked several times about how bullying occurred at other schools, but that it was different somehow at Academy. For some of these students, that was the reason they chose to go to Academy and to escape bullying at other schools. As Charlotte describes below, she witnessed severe harassment and bullying by students at her previous school.

Charlotte: I can compare this school to [another Public High School]. There was one guy I knew who had the stereotypical gay male voice, and because of that, people every single day, sent messages of pure hatred. People used to tell him to kill himself. Everything he did, people were so awful. At this school, it’s just free and safe, like people come here and they start out kind of timid, but you see people grow into who they actually are, and not who they want to be, which I really appreciate at this school.

Because Academy and Conservatory are art schools, they lack some of the traditional hostile environments and spaces found in traditional district-bound high schools like gym/health class, sporting events/sports, shop, etc. Students who attend schools like Academy and Conservatory are passionate about the arts and therefore, it is not uncommon to find boys in the dance class and girls in set production. These spaces seem to offer students freedom from the traditional constraints placed on high school students in many of the highly gendered spaces of other schools.

FREE TO BE YOU AND ME

Academy was frequently presented as a utopian place – somewhere where students were free to discover themselves and were supported in that

journey of self-discovery. Students and faculty consistently talked about how Academy was different from other high school (often referred to as “public” schools though Academy is also a “public school”). These students reinforced the notion that charter schools are “safe spaces” in that they are free from some of the authority and boundaries that normal traditionally district bound public schools have to deal with. This section looks at the way students described Academy in order to illustrate the way that they consistently (particularly in the focus group) applauded Academy as a perfect place for self-expression, self-discovery, and identity construction. As Charlotte said, “I think I’m more free here. I mean I’m not really any different, but I feel like I’m a lot more open here. I can be whatever I wanna to be.”

Academy was also commonly discussed as a “safe space” where these youth are able to express themselves “freely” – they are able to become the person they are supposed to be. Academy is different from other “public” schools. In my interview with Katy Perry, she expresses how Academy allows her (and the other teenagers) to figure themselves out as they go through “hormonal states.” She talks about how safe Academy is for kids to “experiment”:

Katy Perry: [Academy] is a safe place that lets us as teenagers going through very hormonal states figure out who we are without telling us any certain thing. It’s like everybody has their own opinion as to what gender is and what it means to be gay, what it means to be lesbian, and what it means to be straight. Everybody kind of knows their opinions on that, but it’s a safe space to experiment with the different ideas that are going on your head, because a lot of the time, outside world, outside of our [Academy] bubble, there’s really no place to experiment without hearing someone else’s opinion. It’s like, even though we have opinion, we don’t

necessarily state it here.... Whereas at [Academy], it's okay to be different.

Similarly, Kay talked in the focus group about how Academy allows kids to be themselves and, rather than bringing out who "you want to be," at Academy, she is free to be who she actually is:

Kay: "I feel like the school helps you bring out not who you want to be, but who you actually are."

In her interview, Jack talked about how "open" she thinks Academy is. In her mind, because kids are allowed to "do drag both ways" Academy is letting kids freely express themselves based on how they identify themselves:

Jack: Not that I can recall, actually. [Academy]'s been very open. Like we've had students do drag both ways, and it's not a big deal here, which is nice. Yes, cuz I do believe that you should be able to act on how you identify with yourself, and if you identify with A instead of B, more power to you, you know?

Sarah: So you feel like here, students are pretty free to be whoever they wanna be?

Jack: Yeah, definitely. Here, it's different than it would be at like a public school. It's definitely more of an open environment for the students to act how they want. Again, that does lead to students who just [laughter] just indulge in their personal drama. It's not ideal. It would be more detrimental if student's weren't allowed to do that, so if a few people just go a little loopy, then just they go a little loopy. [Laughter] It's not a big deal.

Mia Stiles further claims that Academy is a "safe place to experiment" and that students who attend Academy do not have to fear being judged in the same way they may fear being judged at other schools.

Mia Stiles: It's such a safe place that you're able to be experimental, and you're able to like talk to your friends and learn different things because people don't judge you here. I think the new kids that come to the school,

like they think it's weird at first because normal high schools are a lot different.

Blackwing summed up the overall feel in the focus groups for Academy.

In the excerpt below he expressed how much he loves Academy, how he wishes everyone could have the same experiences he and his fellow students are having at Academy and, again, reinforces the idea that Academy is a welcoming place where you can “be who you are”:

Blackwing: Yeah, I love like talking to people and hearing all about how it's like a second home to people sometimes, and it's their first in a way, and that when people leave here, they leave in tears when they graduate or they end up moving. They leave in tears; I feel like that's a really powerful—and I love talking to people about it. I do recognize that it is a very—it's a welcoming place for people just to learn who they are. You don't have to come here and know who you are. It's okay if you—if there's things that—I mean there's things about my freshman year that I didn't know like why did I do that? It was so dumb, but it was okay. It's okay to learn and grow. The one thing I do want to say—I don't know what made me think of it, but over the years, I've also realized like as much as I want everybody I know and everybody that's out of high school, but I wish they had gone to [Academy]. I want everybody to come here, but I do realize at the same time, that it's not exactly for it. I don't know exactly what that means, like how you would tell—I have a friend who went here for a while and he left. We still keep in contact, and it's—at first, I got a little upset. I was like, “Why would you leave? Why would you go to a regular high school, especially after you've experienced something like [Academy].” There have been people in the past who like they leave, and they're like, “I don't know why I did that.” And they come back for even half a year. We would sit and talk about it, and it's just not like a fit. I mean he was more towards sports and he really wanted to do that. I don't know. Some people just appreciate the big scale school sometimes. My point is, I guess, that as important it is to know that [Academy] is a welcoming place for everybody and anybody, there's also—you have to realize it's not necessarily right for anybody, if that's just like timing in your life, or if it just doesn't work. If you keep that in mind, it becomes even a better place because then you realize there's also that difference.

As the excerpts above describe, many students feel that Academy is an ideal space for students to experiment and learn about themselves. Students are “free to be who they are” without fear or ridicule. Interestingly, many of these same students applauded Academy during the focus group but then were a bit more critical during their individual interviews. The dynamics of the focus group were such that very few students spoke ill of Academy and instead all the students who spoke in the focus group expressed that they felt that Academy was a unique space that provided freedom, liberty, and support. Part of this could be contributed to the fact that the SAC students are all representatives of the school. As a group, they may have been reluctant to criticize or challenge Academy (though there were no teachers or administrators in the room) but felt more comfortable being more candid about Academy in their interviews or in our informal discussions.

A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

In addition to students talking about Academy as a safe space where they can be free, for several of the students I spoke with, Academy also provided a home away from home. For some, Academy was their only home, either because they did not feel comfortable being themselves at home, or, being themselves at home had led to them being kicked out. This idea again supports this notion of Academy as a utopian space. Many students believed that at Academy they could be anyone they wanted to be, while elsewhere (be that home, church, etc.) they were being forced to be someone they did not actually identify with to make others happy. For many students, this idea of “being themselves” related to their

sexual identity and being open about their sexual orientation. For example, Kay, Lilly Jade and Ryan were able to be “out” at school, but were not out, or were only partially out at home.

In her interview, Kay talked about how she does not always feel comfortable being herself at home. One of the main reasons for this is because she is not “out” to anyone at home but her brother. In the quote below she talks about how she never has her friends come over because she does not feel like she can be herself (or at least the same self she is at school) when she is at home:

Kay: I don’t know if it’s my generation or what my influences are, but my person that I am at home—like, my friends get annoyed with it too cuz like I don’t always let them come over and spend the night. It’s always me going over to their house cuz I don’t feel comfortable or all the way me at my house.

Later in her interview she also claimed:

Kay: I personally, since I got to [Academy], I deleted my mom as a friend on Facebook, just because I don’t know, I felt more open and I started adding more friends from [Academy]. I felt the need to express myself and my gender in a more open manner. I deleted my mom, and then I hid a lot of things, especially from like all my family members. I have it so that they can’t see—oh, I’m gay, by the way—so that they can’t see everything that I post, everything that I say just because I feel like [Academy] is where I can be free and be open, but not necessarily in my own home.

During the focus group, Ryan was the first to describe Academy as a “home away from home” and to indicate that she actually felt more at home when she is at school than she does when she is at her home. Part of this, similarly to Kay, is that she does not feel that she can freely express her sexuality at home because her family’s religious beliefs conflict with her own identity. Here we also see a theme that emerged throughout the focus groups and interviews that described

Academy in comparison to “public schools.” Students frequently used “public schools” or “other high schools” as examples when talking about Academy and when applauding Academy’s lack of harassment/bullying and the way Academy provides spaces for youth to live freely:

Ryan: Just adding on to what you were saying, but yeah, [Academy] is my home pretty much. I look forward to coming here. I don’t want to say I hate going home, but I’d much rather be here than at my house because I don’t feel judged here. Everyone gets along. It’s a completely different environment than any other high school I’ve been to. I mean I was never around people who got made fun of, but they could be really cruel and really mean for no reason at all. I didn’t come out whatsoever, when I was in those high schools because I just didn’t feel safe. Thank God for [Academy] very much, so that’s all I think.

Though Academy is described as this ideal home away from home, several students did admit that it is not immune to “normal high school drama.” These youth accepted what they appeared to think was the inevitable pitfalls and drama of the high school environment and that while they were in this idealized space, they were not immune from normal high school issues including cattiness, clicks, gossip, and bullying, etc.

At the same time, some students feel that students at Academy are able to be too free which leads them to present their identities in a way that does not necessarily represent who they are. Some students feel that they have to be different at Academy from who they are at home. For example, Francesca talks about how, at Academy, students go a little crazy with their identity expression:

Francesca: I think it’s just like the school environment. Like at school you’re a little—you’re kind of pressured into being a little bit more like whoa. Here, it’s crazy, because you’re kinda pressured to be like a crazy person. You know what I mean? Like you’re very—and you’re pressured into being different so to speak, but then everybody starts to

conform to what different is, so then you wanna go back to being yourself. You go back to being yourself and then you're normal and then you feel kinda like you are different, which has always been the case for me.... Yeah. Yeah. Because here, everybody like—everybody's so like kind of—I don't know how to explain it. They're so like maybe, not necessarily pessimistic, but they're kind of—what word am I looking for? They're kind of like—I don't know. I'm gonna go against what everybody else—what all the adults say. Adults are stupid. I deserve to be treated as an equal. I'm just as equal as an adult, but I really don't feel that way. I actually feel like I do have time to learn and gain more wisdom from older people. A lot of people don't think that and so when I'm there, I'm gaining wisdom from older people and so are other people. I feel like I'm being more myself there, because I like to talk to older people and get more knowledge from them and stuff. I've always just kind of been a normal person. I've never tried to act out, based on what's cool here at Academy. I've always just kind of been myself and so. I've found that actually works out better than conforming to what everybody else does here. So, yeah. Well, I've just noticed—I've been here since 7th grade—and I've noticed that when people come, they're completely normal. I'll use a really, really simple example to start off. When I came, I had red hair, like I had dyed big red streaks in my hair. I was always kinda crazy, but I mean I could've changed or whatever. I've noticed that when people come to Academy, they'll have normal hair and a couple weeks later their hair will be blue, and it'll have pink in it and it'll be crazy and just like everybody's like, "Whoa, look at their hair." It's like there's 100 other kids who have colored hair. I've just noticed that at first, but I've also noticed a lot of people will say that their sexuality is like, I'm a lesbian and then—or I'm bisexual. Then the minute that a guy or—if it's a guy—a girl takes interest in them, they're all of a sudden very, very straight. It's like okay. Maybe it's the lack of male population here, but it seems like people say that they are a different sexuality than they really are. Then everything just kinda—the minute the opposite sex takes interest in them, they're like, "Oh my gosh. Come to me. Love me." So I mean—I don't know. I see that a lot. I mean it does change people. I mean people kind of feel like they have to be different in an aspect. They feel like since they go to an art school they have to be very expressive of the way they are, but I don't really think that. You just kind of—like to survive here, you have to be yourself. You just kind of have to walk around the halls knowing that you are yourself and nobody should be able to change you.

Francesca provides a much different picture here of Academy than some of the other students in the focus group. I think this may be partly why she was content

to just listen during both focus groups rather than speaking up. However, as can be seen from the several quotes I have used in previous chapters, she had quite to a bit to say on each topic we discussed during her interview. For Francesca, Academy does not provide the same freedom it does for other students. She instead feels like she is pressured to be more out there, more rebellious, “more, like whoa.” She believes that some students may be pressured to fit in with other students (whether through changing their hair color, acting crazy, or claiming a sexual orientation that may not actually be who they are). She thinks that going to Academy “changes people.” In complete contrast from many of the other students who seem to thrive at Academy and who find it liberating, Francesca seems to struggle with all of her expressive classmates.

Similarly, Jack, who only spoke up once during the focus groups, claims

Jack: Yeah, here, students definitely get a little bit [*laughter*] too involved in their gender identities and sexualities, especially with the trying to—almost I feel like people are just trying to rebel and just trying to be contrary, just because they’re trying to prove a point to whoever, like their parents, or just what they were told society is like, or maybe even an experience that they’ve had. I feel like people don’t—like in high school, they don’t even act on actual experiences they’ve had. I feel like they just—I don’t know. I just feel like teenagers are too dramatic.

She further claims that students at Academy are a bit too self-indulgent. She thinks “mainly here is that students are just a little bit too self-indulgent, which is something that you grow out of eventually, cuz like I said, I probably did that when I was younger too. [*Laughter*] I just grew out of it faster than my peers have, or most of my peers have.” Jack paints a similar picture as Francesca in that she thinks her classmates, in an attempt to be free and expressive, often take

themselves too seriously and indulge in identity construction that is a bit extreme. So, while many students applauded Academy for providing them a safe space to construct their identity, some critiqued the consequences and repercussions of providing students too much freedom to experiment with identity.

DRESS CODES

One of the many ways schools can reinforce normative conceptions of gender identity is through the creation and enforcement of dress codes. For this project, I analyzed several different school dress code policies and uncovered the varying ways gender (as well as race) are regulated and policed through these policies. Dress codes often serve the function to impose policies on the entire student body of a school; however, the enforcement of these policies is often uneven and serves to reinforce inequalities in school, meaning what is on paper is not always what happens in practice (Anderson 2002, Crockett & Wallendorf 1998, Pascoe 2007, Ferguson 2001). It is not only the enforcement of these policies; it is also the ways in which the policies are written. As can be seen from the excerpt below, which is drawn from one of the many districts I analyzed, the dress code policy is written to enforce normative notions of gender expression, as well as to restrict the dress of certain group members (i.e. racialized categories). These policies also enforce the gender binary, and, based on that, only two appropriate forms of gender expression. While they have removed gender specific language in recent years, these policies still remain very gendered:

Shirts/Tops: Must not include tank tops, spaghetti straps, halter tops, strapless tops, or racer back tops. Tank tops are any sleeveless tops with a strap of less than two to three inches with no bra straps showing. Must not have a neckline lower than four inches from the collarbone and must not expose cleavage. Must not extend in the armpit lower than six inches from the collarbone. Must not include any reference to a gang. Must not include any defamatory writing, obscene language or symbols, or symbols of drugs, sex or alcohol. Must not expose any part of the midriff when sitting, bending or standing. Must not expose **undergarments*** when sitting, bending or standing, unless covered by an acceptable overgarment, as defined in this section. Must not be see-through. Must not be ripped or torn.

Pants/Shorts/Bottoms: Must be worn at the waist at all times, regardless of the number of layers. Must not include any reference to a gang. Must not include any defamatory writing, obscene language or symbols, or symbols of drugs, sex or alcohol. Must be no shorter than four to six inches above the top of the knee when standing if shorts or skirts. Must cover the entire buttocks when sitting, bending or standing. Must not expose **undergarments*** when sitting, bending or standing, regardless of the number of layers. Must not be see-through. Must not be leggings/stockings worn without an overgarment. Overgarments such as shorts/dresses/skirts/long shirts must meet the four to six inch above the knee guidelines described in this section. Must not be ripped or torn completely showing skin higher than four to six inches above the top of the knee in the front or back. Distressed holes higher than four to six inches above the top of the knee are acceptable, unless skin is completely exposed.

Shoes: Must be worn at all times. Must be closed-toe shoes for physical education or any organized physical activity. Slippers are not allowed.

Accessories: Must not present a safety hazard to self or others at the administrator's discretion. Must not include any reference to a gang. Must not include any defamatory writing, obscene language or symbols, or symbols of drugs, sex or alcohol. Must not include hats or any other head apparel inside school building unless for pre-approved religious, medical or safety reasons. Applies to both males and females. Must not include sunglasses worn inside any building.

Other Guidelines: Must not include pajamas or other loungewear. Must not include undergarments worn as outer garments. Must not contribute to an atmosphere of threat, intimidation or negative peer pressure. Must not create an exposure in violation of any of the above guidelines when sitting, bending or standing. Must not display anything that is otherwise illegal to possess at school.

****Undergarment Definition:*** *An undergarment is any item specifically designed to be worn underneath other garments and is typically worn next to the skin. Undergarments include, but might not be limited*

to underwear, bras including sports bras, or other items that might be worn directly against the skin to cover the private areas of the body.

This is a prime example of the ways many dress code policies make gender transgressions, punishable and prohibited. A boy who dresses in a skirt would be considered in inappropriate attire not necessarily because the skirt was too short, but instead, because it is seen as inappropriate for a boy to wear a skirt.

Additionally, since most boys do not wear bras, the tank top and spaghetti strap rule is specifically designated to girls. Similarly, since boys tend not to “show cleavage,” this policy, though it does not specify specific apparel for girls, is specifically designed to regulate what girls wear to school. When I spoke with faculty at one of the traditionally district bound public schools, they informed me that the enforcement of these policies is at the discretion of the teachers. So, while the dress code is vague in many ways, for example, what counts as “appropriate,” teachers and staff are able to dictate what appropriate attire is. If a student is found to be in violation of the dress code, they are sent to the office and must change into clothes provided by the office (sweats and a t-shirt). These teachers indicated that more often than not, girls are sent to the office for being in violation of the dress code policy because the dress code for girls is much more restrictive than the dress code for boys. This is because of the perceived dangers associated with female sexuality (Duits & van Zoonen 2006). Whereas many of the district-bound public schools had lengthy policies delineating specific dress (sometimes so far as to delineate what was appropriate for “girls” and “boys”),

both Academy and Conservatory had more broad, and less gender specific, dress codes.

The dress codes, at Academy and Conservatory, on the other hand, were much more flexible and fluid. As can be seen from the excerpt below, the dress code at Academy is not gender specific, or, at least, much less gender specific than other schools. All students are held to the same standard of dress for dress at Academy and Conservatory. While this dress code too is left up for interpretation, students have far more freedom to dress the way they like, and though I was not able to see the enforcement of this policy, the way the policy is written allows for more flexibility and does not enforce normative construction of appropriate attire for girls and boys. Several teachers and administrative staff pointed out that it is not uncommon to see a boy in a skirt (or even tube top).

The policy at Academy provided a few general guidelines including:

Dress Code: No long trench coats, pajamas, bare feet, wallet chains, house slippers, visible underwear, clothing that is too skimpy or revealing,⁶⁸ clothing and accessories that depict gang behavior or glorify gang activity, hat, bandanas, hairnets, scarves, sweatbands, “do rags,” muscle shirts or tops with straps narrower than three fingers, t-shirts that carry profane, obscene, or offensive slogans or pictures, spaghetti straps, see-through mesh shirts, backless tops, halter tops, tube tops, tops that expose the stomach or cleavage , and sleeveless shirts that expose the sides, short shorts, and sagging pants.

As can be seen, Academy’s policy is much less restrictive than other district-bound public school. While they have similarities, Academy does not regulate dress in the same ways as other schools.

⁶⁸ Again this refers to the perceived dangers of female sexuality as discussed above.

Interestingly, while both Academy and Conservatory administrators discussed their policies as “gender neutral,” and made reference to the way cross-dressing boys are not regulated unless their clothing is “inappropriate,” as written, their policies are gender specific in certain ways. For example, similar to other school districts, only female-bodied girls have to worry about showing too much “cleavage.” Additionally, while students at Academy feel free to express themselves, both in behavior and dress, some students are highly regulated based on the way they dress. In my interview with Kay, she described an instance of certain students being harassed because of the way she dressed:

Kay: Yes, with a female who sometimes dresses more provocative looking for attention. There is a couple of girls who weren’t comfortable with themselves, and they just started sending all this hate mail to her like just spreading rumors like “Oh, she’s a whore, don’t talk to her,” and things like that. That’s just the way she dresses. She likes her open cut shirt, and she likes her butt hanging out like, that’s her. Yeah, she gets made fun of a lot for that.

Sarah: Does the school do anything about that?

Kay: I mean, I think once in awhile she’ll get like red—not red flagged, like she’ll get in trouble from the office for having her stomach being visible to a certain point or maybe wearing a tank top. For the most part nobody—I don’t think—well actually yeah, people really do—not just the staff, but like students just—they’ll pull her aside, “Hey, you know you really shouldn’t be wearing things like that.” It’s funny because a lot of times discipline isn’t always in the staff, it’s sometimes in the students too.

Sarah: Do the students who were sort of harassing her, did they ever get in trouble or did—was anything ever said to them?

Kay: They’ve gotten in trouble on different occasions, not just for this specific thing, but doing the same things to other people. None of them have been expelled or suspended, not that I can think of.

This excerpt in particular, depicts the fears that surround female sexuality and the way dress can be highly regulated for girls who dress too provocatively.

Students at Academy also dressed in a variety of conforming and nonconforming ways. Below are a few excerpts from my fieldnotes. Each time I visited Academy, I took extensive fieldnotes on the ways students were dressed. As can be seen from these excerpts, both male and female students dressed in a variety of ways that were often inconsistent with the dress code policy.

December 7, 2011: Observing the Theatre class. It is very cold in the classroom/theatre space. The teacher wears jeans and a gray hoodie. Students are dressed in a variety of different types of clothes: one female student is in jeans pulled down around her butt, a green beanie, and a brown blazer, another is wearing a black mini skirt, tights, knee high boots, biker jacket, long green scarf, and has very short hair. All of the boys have longer hair with bangs in their eyes. I see the same student from Starbucks that morning wearing a black zip-up hoodie with a Super Mario t-shirt and jeans. There is a very thin blonde girl wearing brown skinny jeans and a long brown sweater and she keeps referring to herself as Chelsea Handler. There is another female student wearing a black and white beanie, black sweater/hoodie, baggie black pants with safety pins, black/white scarf. She has very short bleached blonde hair

November 28, 2011: Observing the Biology class. The teacher wears jeans with black boots that have a small heel and a black blazer. Both boys and girls are allowed to wear hats, and most of the students in class are wearing them. I can see pink, orange, purple and blue dyed hair sticking out of the bottom of many of the beanie's and fedora's that are worn. Many of the boys also have long hair with their bangs in their eyes. One girl has shoulder length hair, bangs in her eyes w/ ribbon in her hair. She is wearing a floral dress and long beige sweater and has leggings on. Another girl with long brown curly hair is wearing dark rimmed glasses – black earrings – riding jacket, jeans and Toms. A boy with blue hair is wearing a beanie, jeans, converse, oversized sweater.

January 10, 2012: Sitting in the main office looking out the window as students come in for the morning. It is very cold outside so most of the students have their jackets, scarves, beanies, and caps on. Students vary in attire. Some have hoodies or sweaters on. A few students have shorts or skirts on. Two girls are wearing short shorts with black tights under

them. One female student wearing a mini-skirt, purple tights, and a tank top has on a scarf and Hello Kitty earmuffs. She looks freezing. A female with a red t-shirt, black dickies, white belt and dyed black Mohawk comes in. She is tall and looks even taller with her substantial Mohawk. She is very noticeable

Though I never saw an example of a student being disciplined for dress, or sent to the office to change, I did see several instances of students violating dress codes and no action being taken by teachers or staff. On my first day visiting, I saw two students wearing pajama bottoms, one of whom was wearing slippers. Additionally, throughout my participant observation I noticed students wearing scarves (particularly since I observed November – March), spaghetti strap tank tops and shirts (and pants) that exposed stomach, cleavage, and underwear.

What is also interesting, is that since Academy is an art school, many students take dance and theatre classes. I saw several of the dancers from the dance classes I observed remain in their leotards (almost all of which exposed quite a bit of cleavage). In addition to revealing clothing, I also saw examples of attire worn that would probably be restricted at a traditionally district bound public school. For example, on one of my observation days, I observed Mr. Smith's algebra class. When I sat down, I began to observe the way each of the students were dressed as they came into class. One young Hispanic⁶⁹ boy walked in dressed in baggy black Dickies, a black t-shirt with *Funny Bones Crew* (a rap group) logo on it, and a bandana on his head. At other schools, particularly traditionally district-bound public high schools, this attire would be considered

⁶⁹ This term was how his teacher described him.

inappropriate because of its connotation with gang activity and this student would therefore be forced to change his wardrobe. In this way, Academy does not reinforce racialized unequal policies.

While I was at Academy, students were dressed in a variety of fashions and would have been considered in violation of other school dress code policies. Part of this is because, as several teachers told me, unless the attire was considered “dangerous” or “extremely inappropriate,” or “disrupted classroom instruction,” teachers and staff believed that the students they worked with should be able to express themselves and their emerging identities as they would like. Students were allowed to have any color hair, as many piercings or tattoos, and dress as they would like.

It is interesting, however, that though the policy at Academy was very flexible and students seemed to be allowed to express themselves as they pleased, given that when you arrive at Academy, the first thing you see is a sign that reads “Are you following the dress code?” This sign reinforces the importance of coming to school dressed “appropriately.” It may be that because my interactions at the school were confined to the high school students and the teachers who worked with the high school students, the dress code took on more importance among the middle school students who also attended Academy. All students at Academy enter through the same door, and the sign may have been meant for the middle schoolers more than the high schoolers.

My observations were limited at Conservatory so it is almost impossible to say that this would be true of any day, and since the day I observed was

Valentine's Day, I am not sure if the dress that I saw was "normal" or special circumstance. While I observed students at Conservatory I saw similar dress to the students at Academy. I saw students with a variety of hair colors, students who wore their hair in Mohawks or other nontraditional styles. On the day I observed, I saw several female students wearing very short skirts (some tutu skirts) with red (or pink or black) fishnet tights underneath. However, Karen did speak several times about the fact that her school policy is "gender neutral" and that "boys can wear dresses." While the Conservatory policy was similar to Academy's in that, while it claimed gender neutrality, several of the policies were explicitly gendered (e.g. no showing bra straps).

ZERO-TOLERANCE POLICIES

As was noted in earlier chapters, there is significant scholarship on the ideologies that revolve around zero-tolerance policies. When I spoke with teachers at both Conservatory and Academy, they claimed their institutions had a "zero-tolerance" policy, especially for things like bullying. Even though Karen claimed to have a zero tolerance policy when it came to bullying at her school, during her interview she discussed a few examples of bullying in the past, and it did not appear that such harsh reprimands were enforced. She did, however, emphasize that, for the most part, students who do not fit in to the school (mostly encompassing those students who may bully) leave on their own or are given the option to leave or get expelled.

At Academy, on the other hand, teacher emphatically claimed that there was no tolerance of any sort of bullying. While sitting with four teachers at

lunch, they told me that because there is a wait-list for Academy and students are “dying to get in,” Academy is able to abide by a strict zero-tolerance policy because they always have other students who want to attend. Having a waiting list allows them to get rid of a lot of the “problem” students. If bullying occurs, they call parents and give the parents the option of withdrawing their student or having school expel them.

The rhetoric of zero-tolerance can be dangerous (Skiba & Peterson 1999, Morrison & D’Incau 1997, Casella 2003). While I conducted my research, I was reliant on the way students and teachers talked about the enforcement of student policies and conduct. I was not able to see enforcement activities first-hand, or see disciplinary files in order to corroborate the way students and teachers discussed bullying and disciplinary processes. Though both schools indicated that they had a zero-tolerance of bullying, there were several examples that emerged while I conducted my research that indicated that these policies were infrequently enforced. Additionally, bullying occurs both within and outside the school walls; thus, regardless of the specific policies followed and enforced within school grounds, students may still perpetuate or be victimized by such acts of violence and harassment.

Though students expressly stated that bullying and harassment did not occur at Academy, they often contradicted themselves and pointed out instances when had. As Amber points out, “I feel like there's prob'ly been times where maybe it hasn't been broadcast to the rest of the school and it's happened. I'm sure it's happened but definitely on a much less larger scale than it would at

another school.” Karen at Conservatory provided a clear example of how bullying had occurred and what the school did in response to it. Below is an excerpt from my interview with Karen:

Karen: I think I mentioned, when you and your chair were here last, when we had some girls take the male-to-female student into the bathroom and wouldn't let them out of the stall, because they wanted to see what they were. Those kids were suspended immediately. I had a parent conference and I said this is unacceptable. It's not your business how they identify themselves as and under no circumstance is it ever okay for you to go into a stall with another student. It doesn't matter what gender or anything like that. Then I conferenced also with the transgender parent and assured her that's not acceptable. I think it was about a week later one of those students withdrew and goes to [Public High] now, because it's just environment. She as not going to fit in if that's what she was going to do here and she knew that. She left, which is fine, really.

Karen further claimed in her interview:

Any kind of bullying, well, we have a zero tolerance. The challenging thing with bullying is that it's not undefined, I think over-defined. What a student brings home to parents is their perception and it could be totally bullying. Then, when we look back and we investigate, and that sort of thing, it's not bullying. It's two students who don't like each other maybe, who are going back and forth, and seeing who can cut them down faster and harder. They're kids and, unfortunately, they are still kids that do that. There are still parents that think it's normal for siblings to behave that way to each other, and we can't change everybody. We'll bring the students in here. We will mediate a conversation between them. If they feel comfortable, we'll involve the parents to come in. No parent would talk to a student without the other parent present, so we make sure that their rights are there. The school will always advocate for a student in their best interest if a parent isn't present. It's not a lot of bullying. I think at the middle school may be the most, and it's general sort of, I don't know. I can't even think of something. A new boy. Sixth grade it happens occasionally, a new student is getting bumped while they pass classes, and that sort of thing. They feel like they're getting bumped every time they pass a class or something like that, but I don't think there's anything significant. I think it's much less than in comparison to other schools, but it still happens, but I don't see it as being a problem. Students will get suspended if it's clearly a bullying situation, if they're using derogatory racial, sexual, anything like that kind of discriminatory

remarks. It will be conference and suspension. Those kids usually withdraw. They know they're just not going to fit in here if they're going to use—call Mexican beaners. We had one student like that and literally, after the parent conference, they left, because we don't teach our kids that's okay. Yeah, that's about it. We're pretty open door policy. Parents can email me anonymously or send in a note and report it, so that they're protected and nobody knows who told on who. We take it seriously and we'll investigate it, and then there's going to be consequences if it can be determined that there was really something going on.

So, while both Conservatory and Academy claim to have a zero-tolerance policy about bullying and harassment, these issues still exist within these spaces. There are several issues to point out with regard to these policies. Zero-tolerance policies provide a way for administrators and teachers at Academy and Conservatory to police incidences of bullying or harassment, but do not provide educational ways to intervene into the situation. One of the problematic things about zero-tolerance policies is that when schools just immediately remove a student due to behavior, they are not necessarily doing anything to address the behavior or to provide forums where students can talk about the behavior.

As was described above, students often talked about how things that occur at other schools, like bullying or harassment, do not occur at Academy. Many students talked about why they left other schools, or why they feel many of the students who attend Academy leave other schools for Academy. Lilly Jade also talked about her experience at a previous school. For her, coming to Academy allowed her to be more “herself” and provided a forum for her to get involved and provided a safe space for her to express herself both on an individual identity level, and also on a performance artistic level.

Lilly Jade: This school has—I can compare it to [a public school]...Compared to here, my family believes that when I came here, it kind of—there’s that aspect that they think, “Oh, [Academy] is the one that converted your sexuality. [Academy’s] the one who made you be bisexual or transsexual.” I told them no, actually, I’ve known since I was about four. Just because it’s so open here and you’re able to be yourself, I’ve also heard other students tell me that they’ve been accused the same way by their parents, by coming out. It’s like this school, you’re able to be whoever you are, and therefore, you want to be that at home, but sometimes you can’t. School here is a safe haven. Then they want to have a safe haven at home, and they should, and then they try to come out to their parents. Then they end up they can’t because their parents accuse the school here...

Lilly Jade’s comments bring up an interesting point about the rhetoric that surrounds these kinds of charter art schools. Many parents and others believe that it is the school that “makes” kids gay, or bisexual. According to several students, they heard this from their parents and friends at other schools. But, as Lilly Jade points out, to these students, it is not the school “making” them gay, but rather the school providing a forum wherein they can openly talk about and experiment with their identity. Similarly, Mia Stiles also remarked about how parents may fear that the school makes students gay.

Mia Stiles: I was just talking about what Lilly Jade said, like how some people—I was talking to my mom about how like I don’t think this school makes you gay or something, or bisexual. It’s such a safe place that you’re able to be experimental, and you’re able to like talk to your friends and learn different things because people don’t judge you here. I think the new kids that come to the school, like they think it’s weird at first because normal high schools are a lot different. I think because we’re able to pass it on to the next grades, that our school can stay a safe place and people can be fair, which is nice.

As Mia suggests, it is not uncommon for students attending Academy to talk with their parents (or other parents or community members) about how Academy allows students to experiment, and often, that leads to the fear that Academy will

“make” someone gay (or, more specifically according to these students, non-heterosexual).

The students I spoke with shared a variety of experiences with me about how they felt about their school and how for many, it provided a much needed space to be free, to experiment with identity, and to push the boundaries of expression. For others, however, they view Academy students as being somewhat self-indulgent and think that in some instances, the freedom to experiment (and the desire to experiment in order to fit in) make Academy students more likely to experiment in a way that may not necessarily reflect their true identity or feelings. What is particularly interesting is that while the students talked about incidences of bullying, they often underplayed them to make them seem less problematic, which enabled these students to feel safer at Academy than they had at their former schools. While the vast majority of the students I spoke with, particularly in the focus group, claimed that bullying and harassment does not occur on Academy’s campus, they did discuss instances of bullying that bleed beyond the walls of Academy and take place in the virtual universe of Facebook.

BULLYING AND THE POWER OF FACEBOOK

While discussing media with these youth, several talked about the importance of Facebook in their everyday lives. While Facebook was often discussed as a “great outlet,” as a “time-suck,” and as a place where students feel “like they can be themselves and express themselves,” the students also talked about the negative side of Facebook at Academy (and other social networking

sites more generally). Apparently, according to the students, Facebook is often used as an outlet for bullying for students at Academy. Several students said they encountered bullying by fellow students on the social media site. So, while students emphatically indicated that bullying does not exist at Academy, they also stated that it frequently occurs between students outside the Academy doors, on Facebook.

During our second focus group, I asked the SAC students what kind of social media they use and how they use it. While many students talked about the variety of social media outlets that they like and dislike, several discussed the kind of bullying that occurs on Facebook:

Katy Perry: I like going on there to see if anyone from our class is there, to see if they remember what the homework was. I mean I haven't done the homework yet, and it's due in three hours. I just find that that's kind of how I do it. When I see people go on and I see them using it as a way to harness their anger toward people and a way to bash other people, it seems really low, like you can't talk to people in person. I don't like that if you have a problem with me, come tell me about it. Don't write about it on Facebook. That irritates me.

In her individual interview, Katy Perry followed up on a comment she made during the focus group about how bullying may not occur within the walls of Academy, but it certainly occurs among students outside the walls:

Katy Perry: It's like a way of keeping your own personal thing, but everybody else can see it. My least favorite thing about Facebook, which I said in the group interview, is the bullying aspect of it. I think a lot of [Academy] is it's all about—we don't do bullying in school. You can walk down the hallways and probably won't see any sort of verbal or physical bullying, but when you go on Facebook, I know that there's a lot of ways that we talk to each other and bully each other through Facebook. Last year, there was a teacher that got fired. I had talked to our principal about her, and I was the one who was blamed for it. There was this big outcry about this amazing teacher, who only talked about her personal life

in class and thought of students as friends, and it was all my fault, and they bashed me. I came to school the day after she got fired, and I was in the bathroom, and the girls had said something about finding me after school and beating me up. I know this is never gonna happen, but it's all about behind each other's backs, so we're a family, but I don't secretly like that person sort of thing.

What is interesting about this quote, is that while Katy Perry admits that she feels like bullying occurs on Facebook, she does not consider the comment of another student about beating her up to be bullying. She explained to me this was because she did not take the threat seriously, but it is interesting how she categorizes different acts as bullying.

Additionally in the focus group, Blackwing discussed how he used Facebook and the way many Academy students and teachers use it. He provides a few interesting points about the interaction between students and teachers on social networking sites, bullying on Facebook, and the community it builds.

Blackwing: There's been a few issues here at Academy where things posted on Facebook have warranted like some kind of—what am I looking for—a punishment on school ground. It's like some people get suspended. Some of them get removed from certain clubs. It's something that's monitored, and some kids aren't even aware. I mean it's definitely a bad thing because people getting hurt, and I recognize that it's also—it could be a lot worse from things that I hear. On the other side, I feel like it's growing into such a good thing, too. For one, I do like to get in contact with all these old friends. Some friends even here like at school that I see all the time, but I don't talk to or hang out, I find it easier to approach them on Facebook and be like, "Let's hang out, or let's fix this." Also, one of my favorite things about just Facebook because that's pretty much the only thing I use—I mean there's like Tumbler, all these other cool things that I just can't keep up with—but the teachers, they create their own page. My chemistry teacher, she has her own page and sometimes she'll post like little funny things that happen with chemistry of physics. It's interesting to read. If you pay close enough attention to it, there's these extra credit assignments that she'll do on Facebook, and like oh, my God. Sometimes it's like you get one extra credit point for liking something and it's like the best thing ever. Another teacher here,

the math teacher, he has one, too, but I'm not one of the students, so I don't really know what happens on his. In that sense, it's a good thing, and there's like all these surprises. We have like bonding things with student leadership.

Though Academy is a very small school, Blackwing points out that sometimes it is easier to contact people via social media sites like Facebook than to interact with them. In an ever increasingly mediated age, this points to the importance and prevalence of social media (and media in general) in our daily lives.

Additionally, he refers to this space being an easier space for students to express their dislike, anger, hatred, etc., for other students. While he discusses the fact that students were punished (even suspended), when I spoke with faculty and staff, they did not share any of these stories. Even when asked directly about any issues on Facebook, several of the administration staff were unaware that teachers even have Facebook pages or that this kind of continual bullying is occurring.

Facebook not only influences these young people through direct bullying of Academy students by other Academy students, it also influences the way some of these youth construct their identity. In her interview, Crystal told me a story about how one day while she was on Facebook she saw a "Most Beautiful Teen Contest" where students posted pictures and then voted for one another. She was disheartened and discouraged by the contest because of the negative comments people were making about the photos of other teenagers that may not fit within the socially normative conceptions of beauty:

Crystal: On the internet, just yesterday, there's this thing on Facebook called Most Beautiful Teen Contest where you post your picture and then

how many likes you get is a vote. It amazed me because that was just the way—and I saw so many hateful comments about how people looked manly or how bad they looked and it was just so, it was kind of horrifying because all these people—to imagine these people’s self-esteem from all these people saying these mean things to them. Then to see this other girl that I guess looks like really perfect or whatever, and then she gets all the votes and other people are like what about personality and then—there’s just—it was just more of a hateful thing than it was intended to be. I don’t know if that was the creator’s intention because the whole thing seemed silly. It amazed me of how teenagers want to subject themselves to this criticism. Teenagers today—I’m not gonna say our generation sucks like everyone does, but teenagers today are very stereotypicalized. We’re not viewed as smart which is not true in some cases. We’re all like watching *Twilight* or we’re all dressing really badly and all the boys are gangsters or whatever. I don’t know; it just kind of makes me feel bad for people who are learning to be a teenager like the middle schoolers. Like trying to be role models for them, then again, just there so many things like Facebook and television and some music that are just pressuring them to someone other than themselves. It’s just getting worse because technology is advancing. You can be criticized in all different ways. You can be criticized by your best friend or someone you don’t know that lives in India that can come on Facebook and tell you you look bad. Even though it gives everyone a voice, it gives even the people who shouldn’t have a voice a voice.

For Crystal, this is one of many examples of media being used as a social control mechanism to reinforce stereotypical definitions of gender and sexuality. Not only do media outlets like Facebook control what young people think is beautiful, it also depicts young people in a unilateral way and constructs them as being less than they are. Additionally, as was described in one of her quotes highlighted previously in this chapters, Crystal believes that, though not as common as “other public schools” bullying and harassment do exist at Academy, and the bullying that does exist is about the same kind of things students tend to come to Academy to escape.

CONCLUSION

Gender is apparent in a variety of ways at Academy. Not only in the individual interactions of students – how they dress, how they talk to each other – but also at an institutional level. This chapter analyzed the many ways the students and teachers discussed, characterized, and made sense of Academy (and Conservatory) as a social space. For many of the students, Academy is heralded as a utopian space – a space where students are free to be themselves, are free to experiment in self exploration, and a space that is often more safe than their own homes. Students and teachers both talked about how they would never want to go to another “public” school and how Academy is a unique and inspiring place. For other students, however, Academy provides a space for students to express extreme identities and encourages many students to be more crazy or more “out there” than they actually are. These students described Academy as a place that promotes self-indulgence because of the freedom of experimentation it provides its students. Interestingly, these comments were made in individual interviews and not within the focus groups. This points to the power dynamics inherent in focus groups.

In addition to the way students and staff characterized Academy (and to a lesser extent Conservatory), policies about harassment and bullying were discussed (i.e. Zero Tolerance policies). These policies, while discussed by both students and staff were only discussed in relation to bullying and harassment. According to both administration at Conservatory and Academy, their schools are safe spaces where students (in particular gender nonconforming students) can

express themselves and therefore, any action taken against other students is acted upon severely and swiftly. Both schools talked about this in reference to the fact that because they have a long waiting list of students who want to come to the school, they can be quick to get rid of students who harass or bully other students.

The way the students and staff at both institutions characterize their schools is important because often, what they say is a caricature of what actually happens. So, while both schools talk about their institutions being free from bullying and harassment, it still in fact occurs (sometimes within the confines of school and sometimes on social media sites through cyberbullying). So, even though these schools are thought to be utopian spaces, they still have instances of violence and peer-to-peer and teacher-to-student conflict.

Chapter 8

CONCLUSION

First and foremost this study was focused on the youth who took part in it. Their voices and experiences not only guided the design and implementation of this project, but also the analysis. This project builds on the recent scholarship that focuses on critical youth studies (Best 2007) and reinforces the necessity of creating and implementing research with youth, rather than research that is conducted on youth. For the youth I worked with, being part of a research project and feeling like their experiences matter was an invaluable experience. These young people just wanted an outlet to talk about their lives, to relate to one another on topics that they do not necessarily get to address normally in school, and to feel like their experiences were part of something bigger. By employing a theoretical, methodological and ethical critical youth studies perspective, I was able to work more closely with the youth in a reciprocal way which influenced what I was able to uncover about their lives. Conducting research with young people was one of the most rewarding aspects of this research project. I feel very fortunate to have been able to work with some really incredible students. These students described themselves and their experiences in sophisticated and nuanced ways. They grappled with the contradictions of identity, challenged each other and themselves and provided descript and sometimes heartbreaking portrayals of what it means to be a high school student today.

I set out to discover how young people navigate gender, and the social expectations about gender, in their everyday lives as high school students

attending charter art schools. In order to discover this, I entered the field attempting to answer four research questions: (1) How do youth describe and make sense of gender?; (2) How do youth enact and navigate gender in various school settings?; (3) How do the official and hidden curricula shape youth ideas and enactments of gender; how do peers shape each other's ideas and enactment of gender?; and lastly, (4) How do youth navigate their many intersecting identities (race, class, citizenship, religion, and sexuality) in relation to gender? These questions emerged out of a thorough analysis of the existing literature on youth, gender and schools. While there has been ample multidisciplinary literature written about youth, gender, and schools, there are gaps that investigate if, and how, gender matters to young people. For example, while there is significant literature on gender, often, it neglects how adolescents experience gender, particularly how they define gender both for themselves, and how they read gender in others. Additionally, while there is quite a bit of literature on schools and schooling in the United States, and growing literature on charter schools, this literature lacks any discussion of how young people experience identity construction, particularly gender identity construction in schools.

In order to answer these questions I employed a variety of data collection methods including participant observation, focus group and individual interviews, the collection of school ephemera, and teacher on-line surveys. Considering my original research goals set out to answer several different kinds of research questions, the data collection methods allowed me to uncover both the way youth describe their experiences as well as how they enact their

experiences during their time at school. For example, by conducting participant observations, I was able to see how students interact with each other, as well as with staff and faculty, during a normal day at school. I was able to hear their conversations, see how they engage with their teachers, and also see and hear the gendered hidden curricula in school. Additionally, by engaging with teachers and students, I was able to not only understand how young people navigate gender in school but also how teachers understand gender both for themselves, as well as the way they think their students understand it. Using multiple methods of data collection allowed me to understand youth gender in schools in a variety of ways.

This study introduces the way charter school youth describe the role gender plays in their everyday lives at school. Collecting data from two separate art charter schools provided rich information about the many ways youth express their own identity, both for themselves and in relation to multiple others. By collecting data from multiple sources, I was able to uncover several important ideas that build on what others have researched in recent years including the maintenance of heteronormativity and gender binaries, the performance rituals of youth gender, bullying, harassment, and social reproduction of inequalities through school, and the role media plays in influencing ideas about and constructions of gender.

Gender is complex and contested and there are countless social and academic definitions. The way young people navigate gender is especially complex and contested because they are often viewed as either too vulnerable to

talk about their lives, or as too young to have a voice of their own about their experiences. This research set out to uncover how youth construct and negotiate their gender identity while navigating the rocky terrain of high school. I wanted this research project to provide a forum wherein young people could talk about their lives, talk about what matters to them, and talk about gender both with other students, as well as one-on-one.

As was described in the analysis chapters of this dissertation, gender, for many young people and adults, is hard to define. As was shown in Chapter 5, students and teachers have varying definitions of gender, which provide insight into the many miscommunications and contradictions that occur when talking more broadly about gender. Gender was thought of as either all about biology or all about social categorization. For example, students and teachers either thought that gender was a person's biological anatomy, or it was a social label that we use to categorize others. For a few, gender was more nuanced. These youth thought of gender as either a mixture of both the biological and social or as a completely different category. As Kay said, gender is, "well, my gender is me."

In addition to the fact that both these youth and teachers have differing definitions of gender, was the clear conflation between gender and sexuality. I found that when asked about gender, these students responded with answers about sexual identity. Though several other identity categories (like race and religion) were influential in the way these youth understood gender, sexual orientation seemed to be most relevant. As was extensively discussed in Chapter 5 and threaded throughout the discussions and Chapters 6 and 7, the teachers and

students at both Academy and Conservatory commonly discussed sexuality and sexual orientation instead of discussing gender, or, thought the two to be so similar they could not discuss them as distinct.

I set out to discover if and how gender matters to young people. However, gender is not created in a vacuum and it is not the only identity that influences young people in their everyday lives. As several scholars have already described, multiple other identity categories influence how young people are able to understand gender. For the youth at Academy, in addition to sexual identity, race/ethnic identity and religious identity also played key roles in how these youth made sense of themselves. For some students, racial identity was the most important identity category as it related to gender, and for others, religion played a stronger role in how they understand gender. As was analyzed in Chapter 5, these youth grappled with multiple intersecting identities and described their experiences in nuanced and often very sophisticated ways.

These youth also discussed the significant influence of media on their everyday lives and how it influences the ways they understand masculinities and femininities. As was discussed in Chapter 6, Disney, fashion magazines and commercials were all challenged and critiqued for providing an unrealistic image of what girls should have to embody. Femininity, for these youth, was thought of as “weakness,” while masculinity was viewed as “intelligence.” As the example of Crystal and Charlotte show, these ideas can be damaging to the way young women understand themselves and who they are supposed to become. For Charlotte in particular, her mother’s continual emphasis that she be all girl all the

time has created an ideal of femininity that is not only work (e.g. applying makeup, being happy, etc.) but also can have dangerous impact on her relationships. For example, she feels like if she is not pretty enough and not the happiest and most beautiful girl, she will never be loved. These youth both reinforced and challenged notions of emphasized femininity and hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987).

Conducting research in charter art schools provided a new lens for understanding youth identity construction. Charter schools often have more autonomy, and because these schools were art schools, they seemed to be more open to diverse presentations of self by students. This research builds on the previous work that has been done on charter schools that has focused on an institutional/structural discussion of charter schools rather than just an individual student discussion. While many of the findings that were presented in Chapter 7 are similar to those findings in traditionally district-bound public school research, many of the ways these youth defined and characterized their experiences were unique to their school (and possibly charter art schools more broadly).

Academy was described as a utopian place. For many of these students, coming to school was better than being at home because they felt that they could be themselves at school, where at home, they felt that they had to be someone else. Whether this was because of their sexual identity, or their gender presentation, these students felt that they had to change their identity presentation when they were at home, or pretend to be someone they are not. These students felt like Academy was a safe place where they could express themselves, a place

where they could not only be who they wanted to be, but be “who they are.” Many of the teachers and students described the way Academy allowed youth to experiment with their own identity creation without fear of judgment or harassment.

While both Academy and Conservatory staff and students claimed that their schools were “safe spaces,” “safe havens,” and places where students were “free to experiment,” these students presented contradictory images of Academy that challenged these ideas. In addition to being a “home away from home,” Academy was also a place where students were allowed to be too “self-indulgent” and where students were encouraged to be a bit too crazy. Some students felt that they were forced to express an identity that they do not feel comfortable with. As opposed to other schools where students often feel like they are forced to be more conservative, or their identity is somehow stifled, at Academy, some students feel like they are forced to be more experimental or more out there than they would be at a different schools.

Students additionally had varying perspectives about the existence and presence of bully and harassment at Academy. While teachers and staff at both schools frequently discussed their zero-tolerance policies and the swift enforcement of these policies, the youth at Academy described more subtle forms of bullying that occur both within the geographic space of school, as well as outside the school grounds on Facebook. While as a group, the students rarely discussed bullying or harassment that occurs at school, they did discuss the frequent bullying that occurs on Facebook. However, during their individual

interviews, many students described blatant occurrences of bullying. They, however, did not necessarily see it as such. For example, Katy Perry's story of overhearing two girls talk about beating her up in the bathroom, while many would think of this as bullying, Katy Perry did not describe it as such. Instead, because she believed that the students were not going to actually beat her up, she did not worry about it. Bullying occurred in a variety of forms, but unlike the way these students described bullying at other schools, they did not seem to think it was the same at Academy. For them, even if there was bullying at Academy, they still feel much safer and feel like they can be themselves in a way that they never could at other schools.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This research has shed light on several policy implications and the need for additional research. In Chapter 3 and Chapter 7, Academy and Conservatory discussed zero-tolerance policies as they relate to bullying and harassment. The policies were in place in hopes of curbing any kind of bullying or harassment behavior. However, as was discussed these types of policies can be dangerous. While they serve the function of policing misbehavior in some cases, they do little to educate students about this behavior. Students understand that certain types of behavior can get them expelled, but often there is little conversation about what this kind of behavior can look like, how to combat it, or how to educate students about issues of bullying, especially cyberbullying. Additionally, these policies tend to disproportionately punish and discipline

youth of color, particularly African American boys, as well as students with disabilities.

Additionally, while students at Academy frequently discussed their sexual identity and sexual experiences throughout this research, neither Academy nor Conservatory have sexual education programs. Though students are encouraged to experiment with their identity and the fluidity of identity, they do not have the education curriculum in place to discuss sexual health.

There is still much to be done on the ways high school students, particularly high school students who attend charter schools, negotiate their identities. Related fields need to understand more about how youth navigate their own understanding of themselves with the outside forces that impose different identities and ways of being upon them. This research touches the surface of an intersectional analysis of youth gender identity construction. Further research should be done on the similarities and differences in experience of charter school students and traditionally district-bound students, particularly when it comes to school policies related to harassment and discrimination, given that in some states charter schools are exempt from policies that regulate behavior in district-bound public schools. Additionally, more work should be done on how intersecting identities influence how youth understand their gender.

Because the youth and teachers in this study continually conflated gender with sexuality and sex category, future research should more specifically analyze how gender is distinct and similar to these categories and the significance of, and ramifications of, constantly conflating the two. This is particularly important

with policy implementations of anti-bullying and harassment. While many schools have anti-bullying policies, often the language in these policies further conflate gender expression with sexual orientation or do not include language for gender non-conforming students. Further research should focus on the specific ways youth understand gender and sexuality, how these are related and how they are different. Additionally within this analysis, further research should investigate how popular images and social commentary conflate the two in problematic ways.

Finally, research should further investigate implications of dress code and zero tolerance policies in charter schools in the same way it has been researched and analyzed in traditional high schools. Because art charter schools, for many, are commonly thought of as spaces where youth are freer to be themselves, bullying and harassment are frequently left out of the conversation. As was shown within this research, as a whole, most students discussed Academy as having no problems with bullying; however, when discussed further, there were several instances that students discussed that were clear examples of bullying.

Young people navigate a world with often-conflicting expectations about gender identity. For many adolescents, high school is a critical period of self-awareness, peer-influence, and identity construction. During this volatile period, young people explore how to express themselves in ways that range from conformity to non-conformity and transgression. This is particularly true when it comes to young people's understanding and expression of gender identity. For some youth, their personal form(s) of gender expression align neatly with social

expectations; for others, it does not. This project advances the need for research done from a critical youth studies perspective (both methodologically and ethically) and provides new insight into the types of language and practices used by youth to express, perform and "do" gender.

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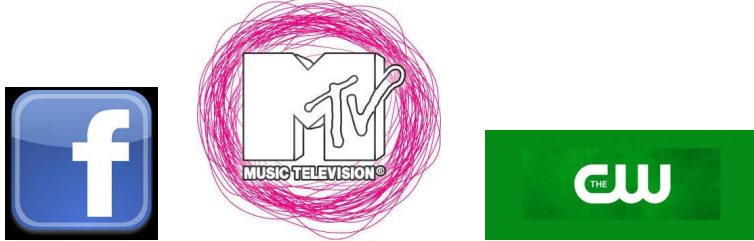
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APPENDIX A
RECRUITMENT FLYER

What does it mean to be a boy and/or girl? What does it mean to be masculine and/or feminine?



What kind of media (movies, T.V., Internet) do you watch/listen to?



Who is your



Interested in talking about any of these issues and being part of a group interview??

Contact Sarah at sarah.flett@asu.edu

APPENDIX B
ACADEMY DEMOGRAPHICS

Student Population as of 01/24/12
 By Grade Level (Filtered)
 Filters: Enrolled OR Pre-enrolled
 Head Count (main and ancillary enrollments)

Ethnic Codes:	<A>		<H>	<I>	<W>	<Total>
Grade Level: 07						
Male:	---	---	1	---	8	9
Female:	---	5	6	---	8	19
Total:	---	5	7	---	16	28
Grade Level: 08						
Male:	1	---	2	---	4	7
Female:	---	7	2	1	8	18
Total:	1	7	4	1	12	25
Grade Level: 09						
Male:	1	---	8	---	12	21
Female:	---	3	12	2	21	38
Total:	1	3	20	2	33	59
Grade Level: 10						
Male:	2	1	6	---	9	18
Female:	1	3	6	2	30	42
Total:	3	4	12	2	39	60
Grade Level: 11						
Male:	---	---	1	1	14	16
Female:	1	4	6	---	19	30
Total:	1	4	7	1	33	46
Grade Level: 12						
Male:	---	3	1	---	10	14
Female:	1	3	8	3	21	36
Total:	1	6	9	3	31	50
Code Totals:						
Male:	4	4	19	1	57	85
Female:	3	25	40	8	107	183
Total:	7	29	59	9	164	268

APPENDIX C

YOUTH ASSENT AND PARENTAL CONSENT DOCUMENTS

APPENDIX D
PRE-GROUP QUESTIONNAIRE

Pre-Group Questionnaire

Name: Please pick a pseudonym (a name that is not your own – it can be anything you want it to be). Please write that name down on the nametag and make sure to refer to yourself, and to the other people in the focus group by only the name on the nametag.

Alias/Pseudonym: _____

How old are you? _____

What is your sex (Male, Female, Other – please be specific) _____

What is your race/ethnicity _____

What grade in school are you in? _____

How much media do you watch/interact with per day? (This includes, but is not limited to, the Internet, television, movies, magazines, texting, etc.)
_____ (hours)

What kind of school and/or community activities are you involved in? (Sports, music, volunteering, etc.)

Who lives in your home with you? (Mom, Dad, Sisters, Brothers, Cousins, etc.)

Would you be interested in being part of an individual interview for this project? Interviews will be held in March and will be 30 min – 1 hour and will take place after school or at lunch.

I would like to be part of the individual interviews (please put a check mark)
_____ Yes _____ No

Would you like to help further with this research project? (please put a check mark)
_____ Yes _____ No

APPENDIX E
FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

12. Have you ever been, or know someone who has been bullied/made fun of because of the way they dress – specifically if they dress in a way that they are not supposed to based on their gender?
 - a. What were they wearing?
 - b. Describe what happened?
 - c. Who bullied?
 - d. What did school say about it?

13. Is there anything you thought I would ask about in this interview/focus group that I did not ask about that you would like to add?

Focus groups will end with each student being asked to write down a story or experience that has to do with what the focus group has talked about.

APPENDIX E
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Schooling Gender Interview Protocol – Student interview

1. How would you describe yourself?

2. In your life, who/what is the biggest influence on how you understand yourself and your identity?
 - a. Why/how
 - b. What it is they specifically do or say?

3. Does how you identify yourself or describe yourself change depending on who you are talking to?

4. Who do you hang out with most? What do you do?

5. When I say gender, what does that mean to you?

6. What images or words do you think of when I say masculinity?
 - a. What does it mean to be a boy/man?

7. What images or words do you think of when I say femininity?
 - a. What does it mean to be a girl/woman?

8. Where did you learn what it means to be a man or woman?

9. Can you describe a time or instance when you saw someone, or you yourself, did not fit into how gender is normally defined? What happened?

10. Why kind of media do engage with?

11. Can you think of any examples of how this school may define gender?

12. Have you seen student's bullied/made fun of because of the way they dress – specifically if they dress in a way that they are not supposed to, based on their gender?
 - a. What were they wearing?
 - b. Describe what happened?
 - c. Who bullied?
 - d. What did school say about it?

Is there anything you thought I would ask about in this interview that I did not ask about that you would like to add?

