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The Illusion Of Inclusion: Curricular Possibilities Amidst A Homonational Project

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Abstract

In recent years, the LGBTQ community in the United States experienced many policy changes. Certain political advancements, which promise newfound protections and rights for LGBTQ individuals, might be considered an exceptional accomplishment toward inclusion. There is a lack of research, however, as to how this model of inclusion underpinned by heteronormativity and its appendage, homonormativity, which typically privileges white, well-to-do gay men, is incorporated into curricular resources and the ways in which these depictions and manifestations tie to national interests. As more resources become available to address LGBTQ issues, especially in schools, it is imperative to examine the practices by which these ostensibly progressive approaches may unintentionally reinforce the optimization of some LGBTQ students' well-being to the detriment of other LGBTQ students – often along intersecting axes of race, gender, sexuality, and class. In particular, an area that warrants scrutiny concerns relations of power that inform conceptualizations of national LGBTQ "inclusion." This project investigates what types of subjectivities LGBTQ curricular resources (re)produce and how these resources can also resist LGBTQ normativities. By applying a theoretical framework critical of inclusion to mainstream examples of LGBTQ curricular resources, I expose current and emerging approaches to LGBTQ inclusion as limited or exclusionary practices, reinscriptions of existing oppressive power structures, and part of a much larger project, homonationalism, which transform homonormative subjects into model members of the country. I conclude by offering educators suggestions to further "undo" homonationalism, as they, alongside their students, contemplate curricular and pedagogical possibilities for challenging the notion that there is an exemplary mode of being in the classroom and the world.

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THE ILLUSION OF INCLUSION:

CURRICULAR POSSIBILITIES AMIDST A HOMONATIONAL PROJECT

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THE ILLUSION OF INCLUSION:

CURRICULAR POSSIBILITIES AMIDST A HOMONATIONAL PROJECT

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Michael J. Kokozos

DEDICATION

To the excluded and the (im)possibilities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABSTRACT

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In recent years, the LGBTQ community in the United States experienced many policy changes. Certain political advancements, which promise newfound protections and rights for LGBTQ individuals, might be considered an exceptional accomplishment toward inclusion. There is a lack of research, however, as to how this model of inclusion underpinned by heteronormativity and its appendage, homonormativity, which typically privileges white, well-to-do gay men, is incorporated into curricular resources and the ways in which these depictions and manifestations tie to national interests. As more resources become available to address LGBTQ issues, especially in schools, it is imperative to examine the practices by which these ostensibly progressive approaches may unintentionally reinforce the optimization of some LGBTQ students' well-being to the detriment of other LGBTQ students – often along intersecting axes of race, gender, sexuality, and class. In particular, an area that warrants scrutiny concerns relations of power that inform conceptualizations of national LGBTQ "inclusion." This project investigates what types of subjectivities LGBTQ curricular resources (re)produce and how these resources can also resist LGBTQ normativities. By applying a theoretical framework *critical of inclusion* to mainstream examples of LGBTQ curricular resources, I expose current and emerging approaches to LGBTQ inclusion as limited or

exclusionary practices, reinscriptions of existing oppressive power structures, and part of a much larger project, homonationalism, which transform homonormative subjects into model members of the country. I conclude by offering educators suggestions to further "undo" homonationalism, as they, alongside their students, contemplate curricular and pedagogical possibilities for challenging the notion that there is an exemplary mode of being in the classroom and the world.

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He found in the world without as actual what was in his world within as possible.

– James Joyce

CHAPTER 1: THE BEST LITTLE BOY IN THE WORLD

How is it possible that out of all the little boys in the whole world we got the best one?

— Unknown[1]

As a little boy, I dreamed of more inclusive spaces. I dreamed of a super-sized table in the cafeteria. I dreamed of everyone playing on the same kickball team. Even as I imagined these new ways to spend time with my classmates, I always had this sense I was looking from the outside in. I knew I would have to pretend if I were to be a part of the fun everyone else seemed to be having, all the while wanting to be wanted. Feelings of not fitting in, not being chosen, and not belonging permeated my childhood. As a young Greek, Syrian boy brought up in the Eastern Orthodox Church, living in a middle-class suburban neighborhood, I watched with worry fearing that I might be the only gay child in the world. Queer famous figures and renowned authors like Leonardo da Vinci and Langston Hughes were presented in my middle and high school classes without mention of sexual preference. My isolation felt all the more desperate when assigned books inundated with images of heteronormativity perpetuating heterosexual norms. As I stared at the texts, my sense of self never felt quite captured in a heading. Queerness was rendered invisible. I felt invisible.

And so like a tightrope walker I balanced blending in and not making waves, worried that I might be teased or beaten up for being gay. I never received a final grade of less than an A on my report card. I was deeply committed to community service. In

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[1] This is a common baby shower sentiment emblazoned on gifts and cards that is not attributed to any author.

fact, I was awarded the first ever Humanitarian of the Year at my high school graduation, runner-up for Best Personality in the yearbook. If I could just be smart enough, kind enough, and congenial enough, then the attention I received based on the way I talked or the way I walked or the way I liked and loved would matter less and less and less.

Now and then literature and especially the Internet threw me a lifesaver. In these worlds, I had a chance to meet others like me. This was seemingly apparent when I met another boy, Andrew Tobias (1973), who in his autobiography captures an unceasing commitment to honor his mom and dad, excel in sports, and successively make the honor roll as a means to hide the dirty little secret that he too is gay. A recently published study by Pachankis and Hatzenbuehler (2013) substantiates his story and tests the title of the coming out memoir as their hypothesis – *The Best Little Boy in the World* – which states that young gay men deflect the stigma of their sexuality by replacing it with ambition to have their self-worth tied to other markers of success. These boys overcompensate in brain, brawn, and beauty manifesting itself into an adulthood pursuit of perfection.

Today, more than 40 years after the publication of Tobias' memoir and 20 years since I started middle school, the Best Little Boy in the World is asked to COME OUT and share his unique perspective with others motivated by an inclusion discourse where sexuality ostensibly has broader acceptance. Recent "gains" in policy, for example, contributed to this inclusion narrative concerning the LGBTQ[2] community in the United

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[2] LGBTQ encompasses those who may identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, queer, and/or questioning without necessarily being confined by that term or even the broader initialism. Other authors prefer *queer* as a means to express sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression as a rejection of norms or labels associated with gender and sexuality (Barnard, 2004; Letts & Sears, 1999; Murray, 2015). I recognize that LGBTQ excludes a litany of "unarticulated, unimagined, uncategorizable, and unacceptable," subjectivities as well as those that thrive in its resistance to such classifications (Barnard, 2004, p. 10). It is the hope for this research that the imperfect term is

States. They include the repeal of *Don't Ask, Don't Tell*, several states prohibiting

discrimination in the workforce against LGBTQ employees, and the Supreme Court

same-sex marriage ruling. In response to the landmark Supreme Court decision,

Facebook feeds across the country turned a rainbow sea of colors in a striking display of

support for marriage equality. It might even be tempting to perceive such exuberant

solidarity and an onslaught of legislation addressing LGBTQ rights in the last decade as

an exceptional accomplishment signaling a watershed moment.

These progressive legislative advancements advocated by the gay and lesbian

rights movement play a significant role in LGBTQ normalization reinforced by a

commitment to children sitting in a classroom once like myself who can now imagine a

future where they are fully accepted. And yet queer theorists are vocal as to how this

"equality" movement and its success leads to the extension of benefits only to individuals

willing to conform and participate in the existing heteronormative framework exposing

how this tension divides those who are deemed socially acceptable and those who fail to

achieve such respectability (Conrad, 2014; Duggan, 2003; Puar, 2007; Spade, 2015;

Warner, 1993, 2000). Duggan (2003) defines the new normativity bestowed upon those

in the LGBTQ community who successfully navigate the white patriarchy as

homonormativity. Consequently, an area that warrants scrutiny concerns relations of

power that inform conceptualizations of national LGBTQ "inclusion" and how these

conceptualizations have an impact on other domains of society.

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further contested, explicating the complexity of its subjectivities particularly when it comes to other
identity constructs (particularly for the purpose of this investigation: race, gender, sexuality, class, and
nationality). Occasionally, I refer to the specific initialism as it is presented in the resources I introduce and
then analyze in later chapters.

Raising concerns about LGBTQ inclusion may seem like a counterintuitive way to advocate for the community. Such national inclusion efforts, after all, have proven to improve the lives of LGBTQ youth with a recent study linking the legalization of same-sex marriage to fewer suicide attempts (Raifman, Moscoe, Austin, & McConnell, 2017) and improvements in school climate (Kosciw, Greytak, Giga, Villenas, & Danischewski, 2016). The Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) calls upon schools to do even more to foster acceptance by promoting inclusion in light of stubborn, alarming trends of LGBTQ harassment (Kosciw et al., 2016). However, as more resources become available to address LGBTQ issues, especially in schools, it is critical to examine the practices by which these ostensibly progressive approaches may unintentionally reinforce the optimization of some LGBTQ students' well-being to the detriment of other LGBTQ students – often along intersecting race, gender, sexuality, and class axes.

For example, consider the recent deployment of children's picture books depicting gay or lesbian characters as white and middle-class while erasing representations of LGBTQ characters of color (Lester, 2014; Shannahan, 2010; Taylor, 2012). In hindsight, I recognize the contradiction inherent in both my adolescent reading practices and the texts themselves. While some LGBTQ texts spoke to my queer possibilities, as a whole their representations did little to help me understand and appreciate LGBTQ people and queerness as complex and multifaceted. Such a finding demonstrates the ease in which I stepped into the Best Little Boy in the World storyboard. I amassed cultural capital throughout my life by attending elite institutions like New York University and living in other countries, such as Turkey and Greece, as a Fulbright and Hellenic American Education Foundation (HAEF) fellow, respectively.

Here I am at the University of Pennsylvania, an Ivy League university, situating myself within a study that seeks to resist, once again, the notion that somehow my sexuality has made me inferior while understanding how I have increasingly been the beneficiary of its construction. Such a reflection makes me wonder how the Best Little Boy in the World narrative is sustained by the inclusion discourse eschewing if not rejecting other narratives of what it means to be LGBTQ.

For me, attending an illuminating conference a few years ago further elucidated these tensions where I was introduced to a provocative concept, homonationalism. The concept, coined by Jasbir Puar (2007), posits that homonormativity is part of a larger project that constructs and defines the terms of national belonging by extending rights only to the model gay subject or the homonational and theorizes that LGBTQ subjects may become "complicit with heterosexual nationalist formations rather than inherently or automatically excluded from or opposed to them" after they are accepted into the national imagination (p. 4). As one of those LGBTQ subjects, I want to hold myself accountable to the privilege I have been afforded and critically interrogate how race, gender, sexuality, class, and nationality intersect and collude as a homonormative ideology that continues to exclude a large swath of the LGBTQ community.

For example, I am concerned how homonormative ideology affects students in the classroom who may have also felt on the outside looking in, particularly those deprived of the same types of opportunities that have allowed me to approximate to the ideal with ease – the color of my skin, the amount of money in my savings account – shades of my queerness deemed amusing if not alluring in the age of the G.B.F., gay best friend. I want to use this position to deconstruct this privilege while also opening up spaces for

marginalized voices, although this can never replace those voices being afforded a seat at the table speaking their truth to power. Moreover, I will explore counter-narratives in this dissertation using my position to also expose, criticize, and further disrupt the homonational project.

I will expose homonormative ideology and the way in which this ideology is embedded as a necessary first step in revealing the depth of the problem. A dearth of research limits our understanding as to how homonormative ideology has been incorporated into LGBTQ educational resources and the ways in which these depictions and manifestations might be tied to national interests. This lack of research extends to the issue of how gender and sexuality are connected to other forms of social differentiation such as race and racism and class and classism (Kumashiro, 2001). Consequently, this project aims to fill some of this gap in the literature by taking a closer look at curricular resources to better understand how and what these resources communicate to LGBTQ youth as well as their larger audience.

This investigation is not only timely given the increased attention to LGBTQ issues in schools, but also essential given the ways current and emerging curricula will function as a socializing force, designed to standardize LGBTQ experiences in schools and society (Murray, 2015). Together, educators and students can challenge structural inequality moving from critique to transformation. By creating an inviting atmosphere to facilitate dialogue, for example, the classroom becomes a viable space for dismantling preconceptions, unraveling relations of power, and interrupting inequitable patterns and norms (Blaise, 2005; Britzman, 1995; Jennings, 2015; Kumashiro, 2001; McLaren, 2015; Page, 2016; Pinar, 1998; Rofes, 2005). These types of classrooms encourage students "to

question and selectively appropriate those aspects of the dominant culture that will provide them with the basis for defining and transforming, rather than merely serving, the wider social order," according to McLaren (2015, p. 149).

I will thus pay special attention to the ways in which these resources might enable or hinder expressions and identifications of queerness by raising the question as to the limits and possibilities of such efforts. Accordingly, a central question informs my research: what are the representations characteristic of current and emerging LGBTQ curricular resources? This question is broken down into a set of sub-questions:

- What types of normative LGBTQ subjectivities do these resources (re)produce?
- What subjectivities are marginalized or excluded from these resources?
- How might these resources resist normativity, particularly homonormative and homonational subjectivities?

The following is a roadmap of my dissertation. I begin this investigation in Chapter 2 by situating the constructs of gender and sexuality in school contexts by surveying quantitative and qualitative research related to the LGBTQ issues that have arisen in schools and has contributed to the demand for inclusion. The chapter concludes by declaring the need to be critical of what is being produced amidst emerging homonormative and homonational ideology and enactment. This chapter is meant to introduce the basis for an alternative, more critical framework that seeks to examine the intersections between LGBTQ issues and other forms of marginalization.

In Chapter 3, I present an alternative theoretical framework – a framework *critical of inclusion* or *critical inclusion* – explicating its five tenets. I begin by defining four key

concepts – power, discourse, subjectivity, and governmentality – that help me to examine the underlying exclusionary ideologies undergirding inclusion. I conclude with a section on methods detailing how I both code and ultimately "read" the curricular resources through my critical inclusion framework that align with and address my research questions.

In Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, I apply my framework to concrete, popular examples of LGBTQ resources. In Chapter 4 this applies to the worldwide phenomenon, the It Gets Better Project. In Chapter 5, I demonstrate how the creation of the homonational is *curricularized* through resources designed and/or promoted by mainstream organizations, such as GLSEN and Human Rights Campaign. These resources are replete with discursive homonormative processes, sites through which youth typically first gain a sense of understanding of what it means to be LGBTQ synthesizing a thematic analysis of videos, children's books, educator guides, lesson plans, and website content.

In Chapter 6, I maintain that LGBTQ acceptance is tethered to the exclusion of other social categories (e.g. race and class) and how in this framework acceptance is concurrently a form of rejection. By calling for a critique within the context of inclusion, this chapter summarizes the conditions that make the promise of belonging all but impossible and yet allows us to consider how LGBTQ youth, especially those most vulnerable, still flourish even in or despite a mainstreaming culture by highlighting examples of resistance or what I refer to *counter inclusion*. This resistance is highlighted by LGBTQ voices and contributes to an "undoing" of the homonational (Butler, 2004).

Finally, in Chapter 7, I conclude that normative framings of inclusion might "include" or represent an increasing number of LGBTQ youth, but that such framings

continue to reinscribe existing oppressive power structures. I consider ways educators might further disrupt the drive towards normalcy within political projects, as they, alongside their students, contemplate curricular and pedagogical possibilities for challenging the notion that there is an exemplary mode of being in the classroom and the world.

Limitations

One of the greatest limitations to this study is that I will not be able to speak to the ways in which students and teachers themselves engage with these resources; rather, this project seeks to offer a critique that I will use to consider new curricular approaches that may be useful to educators wishing to attend to the drawbacks of normalization, locating moments that accentuate "the deeply social or dialogic situation of subject formation, the processes of how we make ourselves through and against others" (Luhmann, 1998, p. 130). Consequently, LGBTQ youth and educators may engage with these resources in ways that also construct sites of regulation and resistance and even new subjectivities (Butler, 2004; Driver, 2008; Foucault, 1982; Luhmann, 1998; Rasmussen, 2006; Rofes; 2005; Talburt, 2004).

The question of if and how this resistance occurs is outside of the scope of this project. I am also aware that there are perspectives or implicit biases that may cloud my interpretations not the least of which are attributed to my positionality as a researcher (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002). The inherent subjectivity of the researcher is reflected in my readings of the text and the examples I decided to highlight, to name a few. My investigation is theoretical in nature, which begets the subjectivity of the data and the

presentation of my qualitative findings. This allows me to "release the imagination" –

"the capacity to invent visions of what should be and what might be in our deficient

society, on the streets where we live, in our schools" (Greene, 1995, p. 5). Future

research can capture the practical considerations that I have theorized.

I also don't see myself as an adversary to these organizations and their efforts.

This investigation recognizes all texts implicated in the tense, contradictory relationship

between inclusion and exclusion. While some texts might be used to demonstrate the

insidiousness of the inclusion agenda and its oppressive properties others can be wielded

to counter such efforts through their resistance storytelling. These are choices to be

made. And these choices always come at a price, intended and unintended. Within these

interstices, however, new knowledge can spark innovative approaches towards LGBTQ

support within and beyond classrooms in the country. In that regard, this dissertation

seeks to continue to push educators to be open to all possibilities.

CHAPTER 2: THE BEST LITTLE BOY ATTENDS SCHOOL

When someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing. Yet you know you exist and others like you, that this is a game done with mirrors. It takes some strength of soul — and not just individual strength, but collective understanding — to resist this void . . . and to stand up, demanding to be seen and heard.

— Adrienne Rich

In the chapter that follows, I synthesize the research of LGBTQ issues in primary and secondary school contexts, particularly as it relates to the curriculum. I begin by defining heteronormativity. I examine the breadth of educational research that painstakingly exposes the ways and extent to which schools and its resources are sites of heteronormativity. This includes quantitative accounts or statistical research that typically frames LGBTQ issues around bullying and school climate, as well as qualitative accounts of LGBTQ voices that provide a more specific accounting of how these heteronormative practices are enacted on a daily basis. I then turn to the ways in which many of the responses to these concerns are rooted in an ideology – neoliberalism – that accords inclusion through narrow, acceptable LGBTQ norms and depictions also referred to as homonormativity. This concept will be shown to mirror heteronormativity that likewise produces LGBTQ exclusion. Finally, I make the case that an alternative framework critical of inclusion is needed to reveal how crucial facets of exclusion are manifested, shaping LGBTQ subjectivities by delineating acceptability and respectability.

Heteronormativity posits that people fall into only two genders, man and woman, complementing their respective biology as male and female, and asserting heterosexuality as the norm – the permissible form of sexual being (Warner, 1993). Warner (1993)

explains that, typically, sexual orientation and gender expression are perceived as interrelated or even interchangeable. This perception that renders sexual orientation and gender expression indistinguishable puts forth the notion that one determines the other. This suggests that heterosexuality can be mapped onto the body that "correctly" represents its gender (Butler, 1990). Heteronormativity may then be described as a system of rewards and incentives and penalties that privilege heterosexual desire and behaviors excluding and even undermining a vast array of alternative sexualities (Sumara & Davis, 1999). Cisnormativity complements this system by assuming that all individuals are cisgender or denoting that gender identities correspond to birth sex ignoring and stigmatizing transgender identities. Homophobia and transphobia then can be understood as negative attitudes and feelings toward nonconforming individuals who are perceived threats to this system (Meyer, 2011).

Heteronormativity and cisnormativity is still entrenched in schools today with numerous studies pointing to the curriculum, especially the *hidden curriculum* – the totality of lessons or messages that are communicated to students often in an unintended manner – as largely responsible for exercising and ultimately reinforcing these hetero and cisnormative ideals (Davis & Robinson, 2010; Ellis, 2004; Irvine, 2002; Meyer, 2011; Murray, 2015; Pascoe, 2007; Snyder & Broadway, 2004). Both the formal and hidden curriculum work together to mandate compulsory even hyper-heterosexuality and gender performance (Blaise, 2005; Blaise & Ryan, 2012; Murray, 2015; Pascoe, 2007; Rasmussen, 2006). They work together to reproduce roles and expectations by labeling and categorizing, reifying and reproducing norms, and authorizing distinctly gendered, sexualized, racialized and classed rituals and spaces (Levine, 2002; Lipkin, 1999, 2004;

Meyer, 2011; Pascoe, 2007; Rasmussen, 2006). And for LGBTQ students, these facets of the curriculum are significant in shaping their sense of self worth.

The curriculum has a history of preserving and pervading heteronormative stories so that these stories are perceived as "natural" or "common sense" (Cart & Jenkins, 2006; Curwood, Schliesman, & Horning, 2009; Hickman & Porfilio, 2012; Kumashiro, 2004; Mayo, 2014; Sadowski, 2013, 2016). The accumulation of LGBTQ silence is deafening. Consider that LGBTQ heroes are practically nonexistent in the pages of social studies and history textbooks (Lapointe, 2016; Schmidt, 2010). For example, Temple (2005) applied a content analysis to high school textbooks and found that nearly 95% of its coded pages made no reference to queerness. Hawkins (2012) applied a content analysis to twelve contemporary U.S. high school textbooks finding a quarter of the books absent of LGBTQ portrayals. Science texts, structured by classification, taxonomies, groupings and labels also lend themselves to dichotomous understandings of sex, gender, and sexuality (Bazzul, 2012; Bazzul & Sykes, 2010).

This is inherent to both mainstream psychology and biology textbooks too, maligning gay and lesbian content as a disorder or dysfunction (Hogben & Waterman, 1997; Macgillvray & Jennings, 2008; Snyder & Broadway, 2004). An investigation into sex education textbooks in rural schools also revealed that when it comes to sexuality there is a clear distinction between what is considered "normal" and "abnormal" (Irvine, 2002). Complex LGBTQ portrayals are rare in children's literature too (Lester, 2014; Shannahan, 2010; Taylor, 2012). These are but a few examples that illustrate the ways in which curriculum is connected to power normalizing LGBTQ invisibility and perpetuating a hostile climate in the process (Mayo, 2014).

Pascoe (2007) highlights this hostility in her ethnography of a California high school, finding that it was quite common for students, male students, in particular, to engage in homophobic joking behavior she likens to a game of hot potato. "Fag" is frantically tossed from one student to the next in hopes of avoiding the label and is a defining part of what she describes as "sexualized processes of confirmation and repudiation through which individuals demonstrate mastery over others" (p. 14). These slurs challenge masculinity via accusations of gayness, which is equated with being "feminine," which is equated with being less (Birden, 2005; Landreau & Rodriguez, 2012; Meyer, 2007; Pascoe, 2007). Fag has become such an emotionally charged word that its sting is not meant solely to castigate those who might be gay, but even the staunch heterosexual making the word an especially powerful disciplinary weapon (Pascoe, 2007).

The impact of heteronormativity in education can also be seen in the breadth of statistical research that frames LGBTQ issues around bullying and harassment or what Cover (2012) refers to as "unliveable lives" focusing on the rampant bias and the suicidality that it provokes against those that bend the rules of hetero and cisnormative logic (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2014; Himmelstein & Bruckner, 2010). Striking statistics are shared by GLSEN – the leading organization committed to improving school climate for LGBTQ students – recently releasing a groundbreaking study that reveals the extent to which a homophobic and transphobic climate is noticeable as early as in elementary school (GLSEN and Harris Interactive, 2012). The study reveals a prominence of name-calling among students, such as "that's so gay!" with gender nonconforming students as the primary targets of the disparaging language. Further, the statistics are even more

alarming at the middle and high school level finding that nearly 85.2% of LGBTQ students report verbal harassment (70.8% because of sexual orientation and 54.5% because of gender expression) and nearly 27% report physical harassment, 13% physical assault because of their sexual orientation and nearly 20.3% report physical harassment and 9.4% physical assault because of their gender identity at the secondary level (Kosciw et al., 2016). It might not come as a surprise that given these covert and overt messages the CDC reports that more than 40% of LGBTQ students have contemplated suicide and 29% reported attempting suicide in the last year (Kann, Olsen, McManus et al., 2016).

Needless to say, these school climates hinder student growth and learning. LGBTQ student harassment contributes to lower GPAs and these students are less likely to pursue higher education, undermining students' prospects (Kosciw, Palmer, Kull, & Greytak, 2013; Kosciw et al., 2016). School exclusion causes many LGBTQ youth to suffer psychologically, negatively impacting their school experience as well (Robinson & Espelage, 2012). And yet Robinson & Espelage (2012) have found that these disparities are not solely attributed to bullying, calling upon educators to attend to school climate in a more holistic manner beyond contemporary bullying discourse. Such research complicates the Best Little Boy in the World narrative raising questions as to what other factors, such as race and class, contribute to navigating schools successfully to and beyond graduation. Research, for example, points to the fact that LGBTQ youth of color endure disparate surveillance and policing in schools and relatively greater incidents of harsh school discipline contributing to school pushout, a domino effect towards the school-to-prison pipeline (Burdge, Hyemingway, & Licona, 2014; GLSEN, 2016).

While quantitative research offers a glimpse into the negative consequences of heteronormativity on LGBTQ-identified and perceived students, qualitative research provides a more specific accounting of how these processes are enacted on a daily basis. For example, in *Telling Tales Out of School*, GLSEN founder Kevin Jennings (1998) compiles essays of LGB students revisiting their school days and discovering that life after high school has been a process of "unlearning the basic lesson of hate yourself!" (p. xiv). The narratives reveal how little school culture has changed in the past thirty years and intimately portray homophobic-fueled accounts of bullying alongside the complex process of "coming out" and self-acceptance as a means to cope with the stinging power of normalcy. Sadowksi (2009) also examines LGBTQ youth experiences in schools by profiling six queer voices like David, who stopped raising his hand in class or participating in extracurricular activities to avoid harassment after his guidance counselor advised him to act more masculine, and Lindsey, who didn't come out as a lesbian until after a suicide attempt because of constant abuse and shame she constantly experienced at home and in school. A qualitative study conducted by Grossman et al. (2009) concludes that LGBTQ youth distance themselves from school because of harassment exacerbated by a lack of community and social support.

These stories of woundedness are not limited to students either (Lipkin, 1999; Rasmussen, 2006). Jennings (1994) also accounts for openly gay and lesbian teachers describing their experiences with queerness in schools and amassing tales nearly every decade (2005, 2015). In the first edition, Jennings (1994) ruminates about his own teaching tale:

> The whole experience of working at Moses Brown [school] was difficult.
> Having grown used to freedom at Harvard, I couldn't adjust to the closet
> in Providence, a small city where you frequently run into students and
> parents in the course of daily life outside the school. The attitudes that my
> first encounter with the headmaster evinced hardly disappeared as time
> wore on. In one faculty meeting, an advisor encouraged the faculty to stop
> students from harassing a boy they had nicknamed "Veg," short for
> vegetable, because of his phlegmatic demeanor. "Better a veg than a
> fruit," the Head quipped in response. (p. 22)

DeLeon and Brunner (2013) explores painful accounts and enduring "cycles of fear"
among lesbian and gay teachers and administrators as they reflect upon their identity and
the impression management that comes with choosing to discuss or not discuss their
personal lives and the dilemma as to whether or not to reach out to perceived LGBTQ
students. The implications of these ingrained practices of aggressively emphasizing or
diminishing one's sexual orientation as an educator are widespread. For example, lesbian
and gay educators report high levels of stress because of this constant negotiation of their
sexuality in the workplace (Lineback, Allender, Gaines, Mccarthy, & Butler, 2016).

This phenomenon speaks to how, beyond the resources that are accessible to
them, teachers as the bearers of information are implicated in the delivery of the hidden
curriculum. Hetero and cisnormative standards can't be unmasked when teachers refuse
to address gender and sexuality in the classroom because of fear of retribution or because
they deem these issues as fraught with controversy. According to the research, reasons to
press the mute button include perceiving gender and sexuality talk as the domain of
parents or that such talk conflicts with messages of religious institutions (Irvine, 2002).
A lack of training and homophobia has also been deemed as reasons to neglect LGBTQ
issues in the classroom (Letts & Sears, 1999; Woog, 1995). Further, teachers of all
genders and sexualities express fear or discomfort facilitating such topics, burying them

within the curriculum so as not to call too much attention to issues that may lead to a disruptive environment (Birden, 2005; DeLeon & Brunner, 2013; Page, 2016). These deflections are compounded by limited efforts by curriculum developers to integrate LGBTQ content into teacher education preparation (Murray, 2015).

By navigating the heteronormative curriculum with fear or apathy or a lack of preparation, educators do not question or examine how gender and sexuality shape daily behaviors on conscious and subconscious levels nor the ways in which gender and sexuality is interconnected with other core constructs, such as race, ethnicity, class, dis/ability, and nationality. This isn't to suggest that individual educators, for the most part, intend to perpetuate hetero and cisnormativity; rather, they are a part of a larger system, which places a value on hegemonic gender and sexuality binaries and presentations. However, with the mainstreaming of gay rights through policies such as marriage equality, these excuses are becoming less acceptable to mainstream society leading to the proliferation of new curricular resources to support teachers in addressing these issues. The lack of systemic study of these resources provides the rationale for my investigation aiming to fill in some of this gap.

In targeting this gap, I recognize schools play a pivotal cultural role in dictating and controlling student behavior, reinforcing gender and sexuality binaries whose implications include pervasive harassment of those that do not conform to the scripts. These quantitative and qualitative accounts are the basis for advocating for new approaches to foster a more positive school environment in schools for LGBTQ students. A tailored LGBTQ curriculum helps students achieve a higher rate of academic success and a greater sense of self-confidence (GLSEN, 2011; Kosciw et al, 2013; Kosciw et al.,

2016). Other studies report positive impacts of an inclusive curriculum too, including reduced rates of homophobia (Knotts & Gregorio, 2011) and transphobia (Greytak, Kosciw, & Boesen, 2013). Numerous educational researchers move beyond the traditional lesbian and gay studies approach of revealing the problem and then suggesting that LGBTQ content be added to the curriculum to attack what contributes to the problem in the first place, pointing to the social, cultural, and historical constructions of categories like gender and sexuality as a means to thwart processes of normalization (Britzman, 1995; Kumashiro, 2000, 2001, 2004; Meyer, 2007; Pinar, 1998). Kumashiro (2004), for example, accentuates the importance of learning as a process of knowledge disruption that is treated as "common sense."

This curricular approach understands the portrayal of LGBTQ students as the "Other," if at all, legitimizing its opposite, what is *not* LGBTQ. Sometimes referred to as "queering the curriculum," these alternative approaches explore the intersection between critical pedagogy, poststructural feminism, and queer theory and provide teachers with new ways of supporting how students see the world. Teachers, according to Kumashiro (2000, 2001, 2004), ought never be comfortable with static notions of identity; rather the pedagogue embraces the ever-changing process of the self-reflexive enterprise pursuing new curricular methods that aim to work towards new understandings, which Britzman (1995) describes as "refus[ing] normal practices and practices of normalcy" (p. 227). Through processes of deconstruction or interruptions to dominant narratives that are perceived as truth, knowledge is conceptualized as "partial" with counter-narratives revealing illimitable, multifaceted truths and ways of being in the world (hooks, 2010). Although refraining from prescription, Kumashiro (2000) offers four "examinations" to

challenge normative thinking and approaches in schools: "education for the Other, education about the Other, education that is critical of privileging and Othering, and education that changes students and society" (p. 25). These voices like Kumashiro and Britzman will return as they play a special role in shaping my curricular and pedagogical worldview in Chapter 7. For now, they serve as a contrast to the dominant normative approach to LGBTQ education, which argues that to combat harassment and promote inclusive practices, educators must base their appeals on "LGBTQ students [as] a knowable population to justify change in schools" (Talburt, 2004, p. 116-117). Such prominence speaks to the likelihood that inclusion will be positioned as an essential remedy. In this anticipation, situating inclusion within a larger political context is a necessary next step to understand how this remedy emerges and which facets of queerness will likely be accorded its benefits.

Neoliberaling Norms: From Heteronormativity to Homonormativity

Recent efforts to promote the politics of LGBTQ inclusion are situated within the broader context of neoliberalism. According to Harvey (2007), progressive causes have been reconstituted as they participate towards the consumer and cultural mainstream, articulating neoliberalism as a "well-being [that] can best be advanced by liberating individual freedoms and skills within an institutional entrepreneurial framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (p. 2). Flores (2013) deploys neoliberalism as a form of governmentality, further explaining it as follows: "the merging of macro-level policy shifts and the individual-level production of subjects to fit these political and economic changes" (p. 503). In this way, neoliberalism

functions as the pervasive regulation of social relations, macro policies abstracted by defining who belongs by who is considered to have value and this desire to have value becomes embodied.

Neoliberalism in this context reflects the ways in which the gay and lesbian rights movement connects with consumerism and translates to the demobilization of the community as its most palatable members participate in capitalism in exchange for "inclusion" (Tilsen & Nylund, 2010). Tilsen and Nylund (2010) argue:

> [A]lthough the assimilationist rhetoric of neoliberalism promises equality for 'all,' in reality, only gays and lesbians with enough access to capital can imagine a life integrated within North American capitalist culture. It goes without saying that 'all' actually refers to normative citizen subjects with a host of rights only afforded to some (and not all) queers. (p. 69)

Duggan (2003) defines the new normativity bestowed upon those in the LGBTQ community who successfully navigate the neoliberal order as homonormativity, which she defines as:

> [A] politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions — such as marriage, and its call for monogamy and reproduction — but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption. (p. 179)

Homonormativity becomes a useful concept in that it helps to launch a critique of contemporary LGBTQ culture and politics, its complicity with broader frameworks and the exclusions that, however unintentional, are produced and which can be damaging to vulnerable youth who would benefit most from this newfound promise of inclusion. When Duggan (2003) identified homonormativity as the contemporary framework for LGBTQ progress effectively reducing it to a consumption driven community she went at

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length to situate how the semblance of such progress operates within the norms of exclusion or what Cover (2012) decries as the basis for a "homonormative queer culture." Such a culture, according to Cover (2012), "produce[s] and reinforce[s] a set of exclusions that is utilized to police the borders of queer community in order that it appear palatable, desirable, and profitable for wider neoliberal sociality" (p. 336).

According to Harvey (2007), these exclusions sustain themselves by donning a "benevolent mask full of wonderful-sounding words like freedom, liberty, choice, and rights, [that] hide the grim realities" of these exclusions (p. 119). For example, the gay and lesbian rights movement works within this ideology as a means to appeal to the nation – "look, we are just like you!" – but differs significantly from its early 1970s radical genesis calling upon the dismantling of institutions and rebuilding them without delineating roles of gender and sexuality (Cover, 2012; Duggan, 2002, 2003; Warner, 1993, 2000). The gay and lesbian rights movement thus relies upon essentialist normative constructions of sexuality and gender so as to present a "safe" and recognizable LGBTQ representation that does not challenge homonormative exclusions (Cover, 2012; Duggan, 2002, 2003; Epstein, 1987; Hanhardt, 2013; Warner, 1993, 2000). Rather, the politics of inclusion is about gaining a "piece of the pie," justifying these pieces as bites of "freedom," "liberty," "choice," and "rights" (Cover, 2012, p. 122). These small bites at normalcy rather than upending the current system situates neoliberalism as an extension of previous liberal efforts at "assimilation" and "tolerance" (Cover, 2012) repackaging it in even friendlier and more contemporary of terms – "inclusion." That is, you are now allowed, perhaps even encouraged, to retain your uniqueness and yet only particular shades of queerness are deemed acceptable.

Cossman (2007) speaks to these mild shades of acceptable queerness by pointing

to the homonormative example of the TV show, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* – a show

in which gay men are portrayed as gods in domestic matters: design, fashion, and

grooming. The show is a literal and figurative makeover show, making over "straight"

men and ushering in the age of metrosexuality whereby heterosexual men, the center of

the show, co-opt gay culture by refining their masculinity while touting liberal and

consumerist perspectives (Westerfelhaus & Lacroix, 2006). The premise, for example, is

that tailored suits and coiffed hair and beards – a clean, tidy masculinity – will translate

to success in a romantic partnership. Cossman (2007) describes this process as a

becoming: "It is about the process of becoming recognized subjects, about the practices

of inclusion and membership" (p. 2). And LGBTQ forces can be wielded to teach others

how to fit this new model – how to act; how to behave; how to consume; and how to not

be *too* sexed (Cossman, 2007). Cossman (2007) furthers that this becoming:

> [O]perates its own technologies of inclusion and exclusion and constitutes
> subjectivities through these technologies . . . the new modality of sexual
> citizenship is always on border patrol, guarding the boundaries of good
> citizenship by producing and excluding the bad. (p. 3)

One way that neoliberalism has shaped the project of LGBTQ inclusion is through

the promotion of same-sex marriage (Warner, 2000). The LGBTQ community gained

access to an institution that represented exclusion for far too long, and now marriage is

promoted as a new normal. "Same-sex marriage killed the radical queer," begins

O'Shaughnessy's (2015) recent critique of LGBTQ advocacy, framing LGBTQ inclusion

as a newfound form of regulation enshrouded in the neoliberal rhetoric of normativity

and visibility. This normalized ideal of marriage is not a critique of marriage itself, but

its commodification to gain access to civic institutions in prescribed ways ultimately results in limiting those who fall outside of this framework. For example, while traditionally white, middle-class gay men have emerged as highly successful agents in the new global economy – The Best Little Boys in the World – much of this success is contingent upon (1) being normative in all other terms and (2) adapting to a normative model of what gay sexuality means (Duggan, 2003; Rubin, 1984).

This represents an insidious duality of government actions – extending same-sex marriage under the Constitution as a fundamental right and then stripping back on strides toward inclusion in the examples of college admissions and immigration policy. Consider the Supreme Court decision to exclude the use of race in admissions or to consider a race-neutral alternative to creating "diversity" or the Senate passing a repeal of *Don't Ask, Don't Tell* while the *DREAM Act*, which would have offered immigrants who entered the U.S. under the age of 16 and lived in the country for a minimum of five years legal standing, failed. Interestingly, the Williams Institute estimates that 30% of adult undocumented immigrants also identify as LGBTQ (Gates, 2013). In fact, many DREAMers, who were brought to the US at a young age and are fighting for a pathway to citizenship, are publicly out as LGBTQ. Lal (2008) presents the story of LGBTQ undocumented people, undocuqueer, who played a prominent role in the immigration reform movement. In these examples, it is apparent which LGBTQ bodies are more likely to receive national legitimacy and thus a greater sense of belonging and those that will continue to endure a relegated status.

These hurdles remain invisible through the emphasis on free market capitalism. Neoliberalism advocates for individual responsibility while ignoring the sociopolitical

projects and histories that obscure these types of structural oppressions advanced by cuts

to social spending, privatization, and deregulation (Duggan, 2003; Nguyen, 2017). The

repeal of DOMA, for example, reveals neoliberalism's tendency to frame issues around

incentives bestowed upon those who properly participate and commit to the nation and

how once these "rights" or benefits are acquired justice can be claimed as achieved

(Spade, 2015; Stern, 2015). By "recognizing non-normative couples *both* with and

within its legal order," says Stern (2015), discussing the legal "progress" leading up to

the landmark same-sex marriage ruling, the country can allege victory: "the state's long

history of economic, structural, and symbolic violence directed at LGB bodies has been

undone" (p. 172). The message is that the country has become more inclusive and that

these are exciting times even when the "progress" "enfranchised *some* and

disenfranchised *many*" (Stern, 2015, p. 172).

The essence of neoliberalism also relies upon the illusion of "autonomy" all the

while flattening difference in the guise of unity to justify the importance of an "inclusion"

strategy whose stronghold prevents genuine mobilization (Duggan, 2003; Harvey, 2007;

Warner, 1993). This illusion becomes an effective filter to produce exemplary

individuals and is the disquieting consequence of neoliberalism: the *appearance* of

progress (e.g. racial or gender or sexual). This has most recently been exemplified by the

overexposure of Neil Patrick Harris, the beloved child star of Doogie Howser, M.D. Neil

Patrick Harris is hailed as a fluid actor balancing the role of everyman in *How I Met Your*

Mother and an indefinable gender in Broadway's *Hedwig & the Angry Inch*. He and his

partner, David Burtka, model prominently on a NYC billboard for the stylish clothing

company, *London Fog*, all the while making media rounds expressing that they would

have continued surrogacy until they both had a biological child. Neil Patrick Harris *is* the poster child for the Best Little Boy in the World or what Audre Lorde (1984) describes as "white, thin, male, young . . . Christian, financially secure," commenting on hegemonic whiteness and masculinity (p. 116).

Inclusion and exclusion operate then as two sides of the same coin. "Inclusion produce[s] the very exclusions they are meant to cure," Britzman (1995) once wrote. Consider Caitlyn Jenner and the national attention she received for appearing on the cover of *Vanity Fair,* in an interview with Diane Sawyer, and the documentary, *I Am Cait*, which chronicles her life after her gender transition. This attention contributed to a lauded increase in transgender visibility. Yet, the outpouring of love given to Jenner has been met with critical response by trans activists not surprised that a wealthy, former 1976 Summer Olympics decathlon winner has become the recognizable and sought after face of a movement while the alarming rates of incarceration, homelessness, and violence toward trans women of color each year are ignored (Pilkington, 2015). In fact, an investigation launched by the Southern Poverty Law Center highlights that transgender women of color might be the most victimized by hate violence in this country with a staggering rate of suicide among the transgender population as a whole at 41% (Terry, 2015). This semblance of progress illustrates a sense of American support of trans belonging all the while obscuring major trans issues and silencing the majority of trans women of color speaking on behalf of these issues.

This move from hetero and cisnormativity to the production of homonormativity is an essential shift in disrupting the longstanding paradigm of gender and sexuality research in schools especially as this agenda becomes increasingly more institutionalized

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yet in purported service to the broader LGBTQ community. An understanding of
neoliberalism helps to situate the homonormative politics in educative settings and allows
me to question the attempts at a more inclusive approach that might mean gains for a
select few fitting the aforementioned Audre Lorde litmus test (i.e. "white, thin, male,
young," etc.) reinforcing inequities on the basis of who can actually participate and
belong in and beyond the classroom.

The task for me is to continually interrogate and challenge the curricular resources
that are exercised and circulated throughout educative spaces. For me, the issue is not
how to adopt a framework that seeks to answer how one might "include *more* [emphasis
added] people within existing norms, but to consider how existing norms allocate
[inclusion] differentially," as Butler advises (2009, p. 6). Rather, I seek to develop and
apply a framework that demonstrates the ways in which we categorize and put people
into boxes so that they can be regulated, monitored, and policed. In this way, we can also
understand how the Best Little Boy in the World is constructed and with that construction
theorize the role that this ideal and the accompanying stereotypes play in maintaining the
social order as an ideological strategy.

A call for inclusion "within a narrative form of progressive history in which in
which inclusion is seen to be natural outcome rather than critiqued in terms of the types
of inclusions," should thus be met with skepticism if not rigorous deconstruction (Cover,
2012, p. 141). Cover (2012), for example, succinctly captures five forms of exclusion in
his research: (1) racial and ethnic exclusion; (2) gender conformity; (3) physical
conformity or, as he elucidates, the relationship if not obsession between "men and
fitness;" (4) the non-affluent; and (5) what he states as "queer youth . . . excluded

particularly in the homonormative politics of queer community" (p. 127). His research

demonstrates that processes of inclusion can be as overt as outward rejection, but also

more subtle like conflating a member of a community as feeling like they belong in that

community when in fact they may not see themselves as having the capacities to be

included in LGBTQ communion because of the constraints of homonormativity.

Cover's research opens my eyes to the implications of the neoliberal

manifestation of inclusion and the ways in which it constructs homonormativity. His

research led me to identify ways in which efforts at inclusion manifest exclusion. These

examples inspired the basis for five key tenets of an alternative framework for examining

these processes beyond heteronormativity. These tenets reveal the contingent and

constitutive categories and conditions upon which inclusion is built ultimately

determining the types of subjectivities that do and do not qualify. In the next chapter, I

provide an overview of my methodology, including the theory that inspired my

framework and the methods I applied in my research.

CHAPTER 3: THE ILLUSION OF INCLUSION

Inclusion, or the belief that one discourse can make room for those it must exclude, can only produce, as Butler puts it, "that theoretical gesture of pathos in which exclusions are simply affirmed as sad necessities of signification."

— Deborah Britzman & Judith Butler

In the last chapter, I situated the constructs of gender and sexuality surveying both quantitative and qualitative research related to LGBTQ issues in primary and secondary schools contributing to a call for inclusion and foregrounded by research exposing the problems with heteronormativity. I concluded Chapter 2 by arguing for a need to be critical of examining LGBTQ issues in educative contexts beyond a heteronormative lens amidst homonormative ideology and enactment, which also focuses on taxonomizing individuals into larger categories where they continue to be regulated, monitored, and policed. I thus argue for an alternative framework that I refer to as *critical inclusion*, which involves methodological and theoretical components that I introduce below.

Critical inclusion underscores how normativity is produced through the reification of race and class hierarchies and the conditions these categories and its intersections create that make certain types of inclusion more possible. In the last chapter, for example, I demonstrated the ways in which neoliberalism functions as a means to envelop certain types of LGBTQ individuals who are capable and willing to participate in both the consumer and cultural markets of society as a manifestation of these categories and conditions and whose queerness is thus deemed acceptable. This examination allows me to identify the discourses that emerge in curricular contexts ultimately constructing exemplary LGBTQ students thereby excluding a large swath of the community.

Queer inclusion, as I will demonstrate, is already a fraught ideology predicated on normalizing identities into existing frameworks. I thus have chosen not to adopt or develop a framework that seeks to answer how one might "include more [LGBTQ youth] within existing norms, but to consider how existing norms allocate [inclusion] differentially" (Butler, 2009, p. 6). Chapter 2 revealed how these frameworks often minimize or ignore other marginalizations based on race or class at the expense of LGBTQ acceptance (Kumashiro, 2001; Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004). My conceptualization of inclusion then is that it requires an "endorsement of and participation in a constellation of norms and social structures that extend beyond sexuality and gender but are nonetheless tethered to both" (Jennings, 2015, p. 453).

I propose five key tenets that provide the basis for a critical inclusion lens, which I explicate throughout this chapter. Because these constellations are culturally specific and because I situate these constellations within the context of U.S. nationalism my framework is articulated through a U.S. perspective.

The five key tenets I propose are as follows:

I. Mainstream institutions are integral components to the process of subjectification that produce governable subject positions to fit the political and economic needs of society.

II.   White supremacy is a fixture of society and its institutions; therefore, attempts at inclusion are embedded within the production of whiteness as the norm to which all subjects should aspire.

III.   Mainstream institutions shaped by normative views of gender and sexuality make any attempt at inclusion complicit in the reproduction of heteronormativity and cisnormativity.

IV.   Normalizing discourses intersect in complex ways to enact policies that maintain the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.

V.   Recent efforts at LGBTQ inclusion represent a nationalist project that incorporates certain queer subjects while excluding the majority of the LGBTQ population.

By exposing the foundational and often hidden discriminatory, exclusionary ideology that manifest in society, I will show how inclusion projects are produced as a product of various interactive normalizing processes. I treat each tenet and the overall framework as an exploratory conversation through which I pose this guiding question: how might we enable educators to expose how structural inequality constructs and shapes subjectivities particularly as it relates to the intersection of LGBTQ issues and education? This understanding can serve as a basis for a response, either in practice or in future research.

I. Mainstream institutions are integral components to the process of subjectification that produce governable subject positions to fit the political and economic needs of society.

A critical inclusion perspective begins by defining the process of subjectification as a means to complement the larger political and economic context of neoliberalism. As a dominant mode of thought, neoliberalism masks and reinforces its structures of domination through its current modus operandi, inclusion, by positioning marginalized groups as *needing* to be included into the dominant ones. Neoliberalism transforms individuals into "normal" or "good" subjects by having them adopt identity norms and practices associated with a consumer lifestyle and through granting various rights, necessitating a process of subjectification.

Subjectification mainly builds upon Foucault (1980, 1982) and thus adopts a poststructural view of four key concepts – power, discourse, subjectivity, and governmentality – and elucidating their relationships. For Foucault, power is not repressive, but rather productive (1980, 1982, 1995). Power is produced through discourse, which Foucault defines as "a system of dispersion between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices" that form a "regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations" (Foucault, 1972, p. 38). Discourse thus creates reality: the words and representations used to describe and categorize LGBTQ populations shape our commonly held perceptions – "regimes of truth" – within a discursive system of varying formations. Further, discourse "governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about . . . it also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others" (Hall, 1997, p. 72).

The productive nature of power leads to the discursive construction of

subjectivity, which refers to the commingling of a subject and discourse – the ways in

which individuals are constructed through discursive processes in conscious and

unconscious ways making them intelligible (Butler, 1997a, 1997b; Foucault, 1980). As

Foucault (1980) states:

> The individual is an effect of power, and at the same time, or precisely to
> the extent to which is that effect, it is the element of its articulation. The
> individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle. (p.
> 98)

With Butler (1997b) disclosing that subjects are, "[v]ulnerable to *terms* that one never

made, one persists always, to some degree, through categories, names, terms, and

classifications that mark a primary and inaugurative alienation in sociality" (p. 28).

Consequently, individuals exist as a result of social conditioning less inclined to

challenge "regimes of truth." To do so, according to Butler (2005), is to "risk

unrecognizability" (p. 23). These "truths" are also met with a "passionate attachment,"

which means that, for most people, there is no questioning of the social conditioning as

an almost deterministic facet of identity development because the development is seen as

a natural progression honed by individual choices (Butler, 1997b, p. 7).

Foucault (2004) introduces the term governmentality, as a means to explain this

"passionate attachment" by which subjects become governable – monitored and regulated

to behave through established norms and expectations. He demonstrates how it is

possible to govern subjects indirectly and from afar as he sheds light on how institutions

and their practices, including education and schooling, play a role in subjectification as

he analyzes power as exercised through systems of surveillance communicating rules of

conduct explicitly and implicitly. His descriptions of power in *Discipline and Punish* (1995), for example, conjure Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, a rotunda design for a prison built so that each subject is separated and invisible to the other subjects with an enclosed watchtower at its center so that inmates never know when they are being watched. The allusion is meant to complement his conceptualization of power as manifesting itself throughout sites of social control from classroom design to a textbook and as capable of imposing and internalizing disciplinary and regulatory practices.

Applying the framework of governmentality to LGBTQ subjectification allows for a critical examination of the ways in which subject positions are produced to fit the political and economic context of neoliberalism. This framework also aims to provide tools for understanding the ways in which homonormativity is substantiated in educative contexts, specifically curricular resources as it codifies inclusion as a means to produce a knowable reality linking LGBTQ subjects to content in particular and meaningful ways. In the rest of the chapter, I theorize the construction of homonormativity through an analysis of the accompanying categories and conditions at play in delineating acceptability and respectability and ultimately maintaining the social order.

II. White supremacy is a fixture of society and its institutions; therefore, attempts at inclusion are embedded within the production of whiteness as the norm to which all subjects should aspire.

I begin with the construct of race for two important reasons: (1) to acknowledge the ways in which queer theory has perpetuated racial exclusions in ways that center on whiteness (Barnard, 2004) and (2) because race and racism are important analytical

concepts for making sense of the context of inclusion and its dimensions at a structural

level (Heilig, Brown, & Brown, 2012). Vaught (2012), for example, argues that race is

central to understanding the ways in which education policy has been wielded to drive a

wedge between white communities and communities of color. The phenomenon of U.S.

institutional racism, which, according to Gilmore (2007, p. 28), is defined as "the state-

sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability

to premature death," has been painstakingly researched and documented (Alexander,

2010; Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Delgado & Stefancic, 2013, 2017; Omi & Winant, 1994;

Somerville, 2000).

Critical inclusion focuses on the ways race is a foundational sorting device used

to marginalize people of color in society (Omi & Winant, 1994). This system pervades

every aspect of social life by treating white as "normal" and whiteness as desirable

(Heilig, Brown, & Brown, 2012; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). As an example, hooks

(2015a) argues the following:

> [W]hile it is true that the nature of racist oppression and exploitation has
> changed as slavery has ended and the apartheid structure of Jim Crow has
> legally changed, white supremacy continues to shape perspectives on
> reality and to inform the social status of black people and all people of
> color. (p. 114)

White supremacy is an even more effective political term to explore the ways in which

race-based oppression continues to be perpetuated and maintained in a systemic and

institutionalized manner (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Reflecting on the advantages of

whiteness, Harris (1993) coined the phrase "whiteness as property." As a metaphor, Ball

(2011) advises to entertain the implications of its opposite: blackness associated with the

absence or *limited* access of opportunity such as ownership and other types of economic

benefits. "And if property, be it whiteness or any other form is essential to social stability, it also means that black access to property is anathema to the social order," according to Ball (2011).

White supremacy produces institutionally sanctioned discourse that perpetuate processes of racialization that reify the marginalization of communities of color (Omi &Winant, 1994). Racialization is thus an integral component to the processes of governmentality discussed in the previous tenet. Individuals are immersed in conscious and unconscious interactions of relations of power exercising and circulating discursive formations, and with those regulations, the individual comes to embody a sense of self and a notion of the "Other" from the purview of race (Berger & Luckmann, 1991).

There are many ways in which these white supremacy practices are enacted in educative settings perpetuating what Alexander (2010) describes as new "rules of the game," as a process of "preservation through transformation" (p. 21). These "rules of the game" are sustained by various interlocking discourses that maintains the value-laden white-black binary (Heilig, Brown, & Brown, 2012) that include coding "good schools" as white (Bonilla-Silva, 2017), labeling students of color "at-risk" and the over enrollment of students of color in "special" education (Conner, Ferri, & Annamma, 2016). These racialization processes are coupled with incessant white-is-superior messages and the whitewashing of race (i.e. the practice of excluding the importance of discussing race and racism) in textbooks (Heilig, Brown, & Brown, 2012; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Consider how much attention is given to "meritocracy," the "achievement gap," "high-stakes testing," and "accountability," which relies upon state standards that codify racial knowledge, reinforcing race-related institutional

disadvantages (Heilig, Brown, & Brown, 2012). Such discourses allow the myth of meritocracy to become an acceptable basis for racial exclusion (Heilig, Brown, & Brown, 2012; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012; Wechsler, 2014).

Rather than address the ways in which race operates in schools and society and its costs, the system clouds these concerns by pursuing creative means to uphold white supremacy (Heilig, Brown, & Brown, 2012). While there are several key historical events that are often cited as proof of an inclusive, progressive anti-racist agenda within the public school system (e.g. the hero-making of Martin Luther King Jr. during his leadership of the Civil Rights Movement), scholars have demonstrated that racial progress is often a byproduct of projects that benefit white populations (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013, 2017) often hidden behind laws and policies presented as "race-neutral" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013, 2017; Heilig, Brown, & Brown, 2012; López, 2003).

This is exemplified through the process of interest-convergence, which claims that eradicating racism is neither a moral nor altruistic enterprise. Critical race theory scholar Derrick Bell illustrated this point in his analysis of the landmark ruling, *Brown v. Board of Education*, declaring the establishment of separate schools based on race as unconstitutional. The 1954 decision by the Supreme Court was one of the most crucial events in American educational history overturning *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) by declaring the practice of segregating schools by race to be unconstitutional and paving the way for blacks to be included in public schools (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2013). In contemporary society, this court case is typically looked upon as a precedent in the progressive narrative of schools gradually becoming spaces that meet the needs of all students, such as those with special needs and facilitating this inclusion, for example, by

making necessary changes to a curriculum and providing additional support as evidenced by the proliferation of the "benefits of inclusive education" online.

This inclusion, however, according to Bell, resulted more from the self-interest of elite whites than the desire to help disenfranchised blacks. Segregation, according to Delgado and Stefancic (2013), increasingly became a barrier to further industrialization and international credibility against Communism (Rosenberg, 2008). In that regard, Bell posits that white supremacy is a means by which to advance white interest that unceasingly adapts to its historical context. Despite that ruling, the *March on Washington for Jobs & Freedom*, and the resulting education policy changes, schools are now more segregated than they were in the 1970s (Orfield, Frankenberg, Ee, Kuscera, 2014; Rothstein, 2014). Students of color also tend to be segregated from the general population in schools with dis/ability status or "emotional problems" (Connor, Ferri, & Annamma, 2016). As Alexander (2010) fittingly explains in *The New Jim Crow*, by citing ample evidence of racism today, specifically the mass incarceration of men of color, especially black men: "we have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it" (p. 2). The Children's Defense Fund (2007), for example, demonstrates how this criminalization manifests in schools with black students three and four times as likely to be suspended or expelled, respectively, compared to their white classmates.

Interest-convergence is maintained by a colorblindness discourse, "a public consensus that personal and cultural traits, not structural arrangements, are largely responsible for" who rises and who falls (Alexander, 2010, p. 247) and that these "traits" have nothing to do with social stratification and the racist policies and practices that circulate throughout institutions and its power structures by placing blame on the ethics

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and/or character of people of color (Alexander, 2010; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). How can white supremacy exist, after all, and need to be overturned when the likes of Barack Obama, Oprah Winfrey, and Laverne Cox rise from disenfranchised positions to the apex of their professions? These exceptional cases reveal the success of inclusion as a silencing mechanism as well as purported data or facts or anecdotes, which seek to uphold the success of those inclusions. Any failings on behalf of the country, such as the mass incarceration of black youth (Alexander, 2010) or the high rates of homelessness among LGBTQ youth of color (Badgett, Durso, & Schneebaum, 2013; Hanhardt, 2013), can then be interpreted as a personal fault rather than attributed to institutional factors, according to Sensoy & DiAngelo (2012), whereby society absolves its responsibility.

In summary, this tenet is a foundational starting point to examine the significance race plays in efforts at inclusion with its many formations reified and deployed in society. This tenet asserts that race is socially constructed with whiteness as the norm to which all subjects should aspire. A concept like interest-convergence is particularly helpful in demonstrating the ways in which new political and economic motivations become prerequisites for the "inclusion" of new subjects. Exceptional black subjects, for example, can be recruited into the neoliberal fold while maintaining whiteness as the gold standard and claiming that racial injustice can be isolated to only the most egregious acts of prejudice and discrimination. A robust analysis of race coupled with aspects of queer theory in theorizing the social construction of gender and sexuality adds to the complexities and, at times, insidiousness of the politics of inclusion; it also illuminates the ways in which white supremacy is ingrained in educative contexts ultimately treating

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race as highly relevant and playing a pivotal role in privileging the inclusion of white queer identities.

III. Mainstream institutions shaped by normative views of gender and sexuality makes any attempt at inclusion complicit in the reproduction of heteronormativity and cisnormativity.

Institutional discourses not only reinforce the value of whiteness, but also reinforce the value of heteronormativity. Importantly, the production of heteronormativity is inextricably linked to the production of white supremacy. Therefore, my centering of race in critical inclusion is an effective means to centralize white supremacy as that from which heteronormativity is co-constructed and co-naturalized (Somerville, 2000). For example, Somerville (2000) has shown that "the classification of bodies as either 'homosexual' or 'heterosexual' at the same time the U.S. was aggressively policing the boundary between 'black' and 'white' bodies," inextricably linking the two in scientific (i.e. sexology) and popular culture (e.g. silent films) discourses during the turn of the nineteenth century (p. 3). These discourses provided language to explain homosexuality by designating what was a "normal" and "abnormal" body inscribing anxieties about "mixed bodies" as a way to articulate the "invert" or someone who appeared as neither feminine nor masculine and how these bodies whether it be "mixed" or "inverted" fell into camps of "perverse" desires (Somerville, 2000). That is, race, gender, and sexuality have always been constitutive in society in ways that reinforce both white supremacy and heteronormativity. I separate the production of normative views of race and gender and sexuality so as not to obscure their important

distinctions and to avoid the problematic parallels as if somehow being gay or being black is the same thing while obscuring individuals who might inhabit both identifications (Barnard, 2004). Therefore, I examine their function separately and then in the next two tenets I examine their intersections.

As discussed in Chapter 2, heteronormativity, is predicated on dichotomous categories producing two sexes – male and female – and two genders – masculine and feminine – existing to fulfill complementary roles and placing stock in other norms such as hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity, the latter signifying women as subordinate and oriented around men accommodating their interests and desires (Blaise, 2005; Warner, 1993). This subordination is sustained by the systematic control of men over women. And so like whiteness, heterosexuality and masculinity operate as a norm functioning as the gold standard of sexual preference, orientation, and/or expression (Duggan 2003; Halberstam, 2005). There is also the normative assumption that all human beings are cisgender or that their gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth. This contributes to the erasure of trans identities. These gender and sexuality normative processes are essentializing, perpetuating reductive binaries such as straight-gay, male-female, cis-trans and in that regard, like non-whiteness or white-black specifically, the latter terms come to signify a lack of value.

At the core of heteronormativity and cisnormativity is an idea of gender essentialism that suggests that gender differences are biologically innate. Butler (1988), however, challenges this biological model of identity and posits that the subject is socially constructed through a reiteration of norms that are discursively produced through relations of power that she describes as performativity defined as:

> [A] *stylized repetition of acts* . . . which are internally discontinuous . . .[so that] the *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief. (p. 519-520)

Butler is challenging the notion of identity as an act or a choice, arguing that any identity designation or alignment has meanings that are specific and restricting resulting in reproduction as individuals step into the imposed upon conventions of those categories.

The regulation of gender as articulated by Butler has historically gone hand and hand in with regulation of sexuality. And yet a defined homosexual subject position is fairly new. Foucault (1978) notes that the naming and medicalization of homosexuality manifesting itself as a lower rung in the sexuality hierarchy is a recent phenomenon, noting that in the 1800s the "psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality" constituted the framework that produced the concept of "the homosexual" (p. 43). Recent years witnessed the move from "homosexual" to "gay" – a departure from the stigmatized and medical association of a physical and/or mental disorder, conflating homosexuality with moral decline and thus challenging perceptions of exceptionalism, to one of validation.

This validation allows the gay man, and the white gay man more specifically, to find a greater voice and influence in the social order. Duggan (2003) thus moves the conversation away from a discussion of heteronormativity to a discussion of homonormativity in the wake of this "progress," which she describes as reinforcing heteronormative expectations of the gender binary and its temporality of promoting, among other things, the "sameness" of the gay and lesbian agenda to their straight counterparts. The nuclear family was then positioned as the ideal with those coming

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close to these normative arrangements as reaping the benefits of those conformities. Rubin (1984), for example, discusses the way gays and lesbians have fought to be accepted by society through conforming to some rules of what society deems "good" sex. Rubin defines "good" sexuality as heterosexual, marital, monogamous, and reproductive. Consequently, homonormative gays and lesbians are the most readily accepted by society precisely because they fit into all but one of the requirements of "good" sexuality. The fewer "good" sexuality terms that apply to an individual's sexuality the more deviant it is considered.

The rise of homonormative discourse as part of efforts to advocate for LGBTQ communities is precisely the type of discursive shift that a critical inclusion framework is hoping to understand. This move toward homonormative discourse illustrates the ways that counter hegemonic movements like the gay and lesbian movement can actually reproduce central hegemonic norms like whiteness and heteronormativity (Duggan, 2003; Spade, 2015). These central hegemonic norms increasingly shape the gay and lesbian movement, according to Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz (2005), arguing how the agenda:

> [C]ollaborates with a mainstreamed nationalist politics of identity,
> entitlement, inclusion, and personal responsibility . . . abandoning a more
> global critique of capitalist exploitations and domination, state violence
> and expansion, and religious fundamentalism and hate. (p. 11)

Muñoz (2009) describes this agenda as "pragmatic" as "the anemic political agenda that dominates contemporary LGBT politics in North America today" (p. 19). Muñoz (2009) argues that the movement shuns transformation by destabilizing institutional forces inherent to queer theory thinking in exchange for assimilation mainly concerned with cultural currency and economic mobility. Hence, a crusade that seeks to

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be as similar as possible to their heterosexual counterparts resulting in the right to serve

and the right to marry as the two prominent civil rights issues of the last decade.

However, efforts like marriage, which privilege the hetero and homonormative

nuclear family excludes those who cannot reproduce or cannot afford to participate in the

conventional trappings of family life. These efforts might explain why pragmatists

effectively erased trans issues from the LGBTQ agenda (Spade, 2015). Spade (2015), for

example, describes the ways in which cisnormativity relegates trans issues around rights

such as marriage equality and hate crime legislation that do little to nothing to alter the

structural barriers confronting the majority of trans people:

> Trans people are told by the law, state agencies, private discriminators,
> and our families that we are impossible people who cannot exist, cannot
> be seen, cannot be classified, and cannot fit anywhere. We are told by the
> better-funded lesbian and gay rights groups, as they continually leave us
> aside, that we are not politically viable; our lives are not a political
> possibility that can be conceived. (p. 19)

This perspective aligns with Center for American Progress recently reporting that "the

quality of life of many black gay and transgender people remained relatively unchanged

over the last decade despite the significant gains the gay and transgender movement

achieved" (Moodie-Mills, 2012, p. 1).

In summary, inclusion offers some expression of gender and sexuality leeway

when these expressions can be normalized within existing social structures. The critical

power of this tenet then is to consider what is lost when certain things are gained.

Critiquing heteronormativity and cisnormativity as a basis for inclusion highlights how

many people are already excluded – who do not fit or refuse to fit – and the pressure it

asserts for those who also struggle to maintain the norm to adopt homonormative

practices. Thus, critiquing heteronormativity and cisnormativity as the basis for inclusion is about questioning the idea that gender and sexuality correlations are deemed as the only normal, natural, good and/or permissible expression and orientation. Critical inclusion points to the ironies in the ways that current and emerging normative versions like homonormativity seek to replicate those same ideas in ways that marginalize many members of the LGBTQ communities, which it purports to defend. For example, by aligning the movement within the broader neoliberal context of society, which privileges whiteness and other normalizing discourses, such as class, certain members gain institutional access they were once deprived because of the perception of their acceptable, respectable gender and sexuality.

IV. Normalizing discourses intersect in complex ways to enact policies that maintain the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.

Scholars are increasingly examining the ways in which normalizing discourses produced through systems such as racism, sexism, heteronormativity, nationalism and other forms of social differentiation are constitutive of one another (bell hooks, 2005; Brockenbrough, 2014, 2015; Conner, Ferri, & Annamma, 2016; Eng, 2010; Petzen, 2012; Puar, 2007, 2011; Smith, 2004, Spade 2015). Although these normalizing discourses ought not be considered the same, there are important intersections between types of oppression (Brockenbrough, 2014, 2015; Collins, 2000; Crenshaw; 1991; Ferguson, 2004; Smith, 2004; Spade, 2015). These normalizing discourses increasingly result in queer visibility mediated by an emphasis on consumerism and consumption and empowering certain types of LGBTQ subjects to participate in and promote the U.S.

economic agenda (Eng, 2010; Spade, 2015).

The saliency of these categories can lead to an erasure of these intersecting subjectivities in organizational, literary, and media representations (Avila-Saavedra, 2009; Barnard, 2004; Ferguson, 2004; Halberstam, 2005; Lester, 2014; Sender, 2001, 2004; Taylor, 2012). Recent research into LGBTQ children's books buttresses this hegemonic view (Lester, 2014; Shannahan, 2010; Taylor, 2012). Such tactics are anchored by homonormativity translating queer spaces as white and middle, upper-class (Hanhardt, 2013; Ingram, Bouthillette, & Retter, 1997; Nero, 2005), dominated by representations of gay white middle, upper-class men (Barnard, 2004; Sender, 2004).

For example, "queer culture [is] dominated by those with capital: typically middle-class white men" (Warner, 1993, p. xvii). Sender (2004) argues that even though the market seeks to be inclusive of the queer community by adopting broader initialism (e.g. LGBTQ) in its advertising, "in reality bisexuals and transgender people remain largely invisible both in the routines of market formation and in the image of the gay market these routines help to produce," including LGBTQ people of color (p. 164). She contends that this gay market is further exacerbated by research replicating ideological exclusions that are mainly built upon the perspectives of white, middle-class gay men. These claims, historically, have led to a large focus on heteronormativity within the movement while neglecting other systems of oppression at work within LGBTQ communities, such as racism (Barnard, 2004; Hanhardt, 2013; Ingram, Bouthillette, & Retter, 1997; Kumashiro, 2001; Nero, 2005).

Adding to the problem, much of this approach relies upon the notion that LGBTQ youth must be able to access and participate in inclusion through prominent spaces within

the gay market (e.g. bars and dance clubs) suggesting a certain level of financial capability. In addition, it also suggests that this participation will mitigate any sense of isolation. This manifest itself through discourses of "safety," that suggest that certain spaces like NYC and San Francisco are more "safe" and accepting of LGBTQ individuals. The idea is that why would anyone choose to live in a repressive, isolated rural environment, closely associating the process of "coming out" as finding a sanctuary – where alternative expressions of gender and sexuality are considered unfathomable (Gray, 2009; Gray, Johnson, & Gilley, 2016). These claims bear the ubiquity that only urban centers can accommodate LGBTQ life: the city is a metaphor for community and acceptance or what is referred to as *metronormativity* (Halberstam, 2005). These claims perpetuate a rural vs. urban binary and conflate the latter with LGBTQ visibility and belonging, obscuring the financial realities implicit in such movement and neglecting that even in "safe space" paragons like New York and San Francisco homonormative subjects push out LGBTQ people of color through "queer gentrification" (Hanhardt, 2013).

Another way that homonormativity is reproduced is through the development of impossible standards of appearance (Atkins, 2010). Cover (2015) illustrates "the context in which fitness, slimness, hair and skin grooming and other elements coterminous the performance of the 'fit body' are achieved through commodified goods and services, further bolstering the triangular linkage between non-heterosexual masculinity, fitness and finance" (p. 11). Imagine what it must feel like to come into contact with a barrage of these images – white, glamorous, fit gay men – on the cover of magazines and as leads in theater, television, and films. Imagine the expectations of what it means to be queer even before you have developed a sense of an LGBTQ self. And so even when the white,

middle or upper-class gay man is successfully included, his appearance categorized as

mentally and physically healthy are prerequisites for inclusion while sustaining enduring

corrective forces to maintain that mentally and physically healthy appearance (Atkins,

2010; Cover, 2015).

These examples demonstrate that to be gay is not merely about exploring or

expressing same sex desires, but also an alignment with hegemonic images of LGBTQ

intelligibility in the hope of fitting in. This construction demonstrates how

homonormativity connects to a much larger capitalist agenda – "buy this, take that, drink

this, eat that" – contributing to the mythical discourse of gay affluence sustained by its

dominant media representations of white queerness, according to Teunis (2007). The gay

affluence discourse eliminates even more members of the LGBTQ community by

producing a set of aesthetics through consumption and a proliferation of data that

supports that LGBTQ people have ample disposable income couples with stereotypes like

gay men love fashion, love shopping (Brown, 2009):

> Some of the most ingrained public images of LGBT people are their
> cosmopolitan, highfalutin lifestyle; gays, so the story goes, live in
> gentrified urban neighborhoods like The Castro in San Francisco or
> Chelsea in New York, eat artisanal cheese, and drink $12 cocktails.
> (McDermott, 2014)

Inclusion builds a bridge towards conformity if people are willing to perform its

requirements set against an idealized appearance as the only way to really fit in, that is, if

they are willing to spend and consume, and yet the LGBTQ affluence myth balloon is

popped with findings that LGBTQ individuals experience higher rates of food insecurity,

1.7 times more likely to receive food stamps (Gates, 2013), and experience higher rates

of poverty compared to their straight counterparts (Badgett, Durso, & Schneebaum

2013).

In summary, this tenet seeks to affirm how norms and categories are deployed, how norms and categories are co-constructed, and acknowledge how constantly shifting relations of power offer a more nuanced understanding of the interconnections among different types of oppression (Collins, 2009; Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 1983; hooks, 2015a; 2015b; Smith, 2004). But it also helps to elucidate how the Best Little White Gay Middle to Upper-Class Boy in the World is appealed to and emerges as its highly successful agent in a consumer-driven society. A critical inclusion framework needles the interlocking, mutually constitutive threads of systems of oppression rendering visible the normative and material structures inherent in all systems of oppression while sewing it through the construct of nationalism (Puar, 2007). Spade (2015), for example, discusses how nationalism is taught most effectively in school classrooms and textbooks, a patriotic narrative that the U.S. is the best country in the entire world and because of its history as advancing civil rights through the law is no longer a perpetrator of subjugation. Through this understanding of exceptionalism and jingoism, the creation and deployment of the homonational subject are illuminated.

V. Recent efforts at LGBTQ inclusion represent a nationalist project that incorporates certain queer subjects while excluding the majority of the LGBTQ population.

The complex interactions between various forms of normalization can be understood as part of a broader project of producing nationalist subjects to fit current political and economic imperatives. With this in mind, tenet five contributes further to

examining the inclusion discourse around the implications of normalization and state

decision-making of corporeal value by fleshing out this process in regards to LGBTQ

lives by explicating homonormativity and applying the concept in a nationalized context

(Puar, 2007; Spade 2015). For example, Puar (2007) describes a strategy by LGBTQ

individuals to become accepted to dominant society – a form of acceptance that does not

fundamentally challenge the values and norms of the dominant culture. This tenet

bolsters Puar's (2007) when she claims that LGBTQ individuals demonstrate their

alignment with dominant values and morals as a means to earn rights and conforming to a

model of subjectivity known as homonationalism.

Consider the discourse during the fight to repeal *Don't Ask, Don't Tell,* a policy

that prohibited the discrimination of closeted LGB service members and applicants, while

barring open or "out" candidates from service, and only recently lifting its ban on openly

serving transgender personnel. Opponents derided the repeal as a threat to national

security while advocates appealed to public sympathy touting and displaying images of

white gay men who were just as patriotic as their straight counterparts, both groups

eagerly wanting to serve their country. They had to prove they were just as impassioned

to fight "monstrous" threats to America (Puar & Rai, 2002).

Puar and Rai (2002) explain how these monstrous threats are reflected in popular

U.S. portrayals of the terrorist illustrating a conception of the monster-terrorist-fag triad.

This triad draws upon Foucault's historical explorations of how modern society

delineates normal and abnormal subjects. According to Foucault (2003), the monster is a

striking deviation to the "normal" – combining the "impossible and the forbidden" (p.

56). Puar and Rai (2002) characterize a contemporary example by highlighting a bin

Laden in a cartoon wearing a turban and being sodomized by the Empire State Building. This portrayal constructs the ultimate adversary to the United States whose organization, al-Qaeda, under his leadership, claimed responsibility for the September 11 attacks. In this image, bin Laden is feminized, homosexualized, and Islamified: he is THE MONSTER (Puar & Rai, 2002). In opposition to the monster is the subject that can be normalized and disciplined – subjects woven into its social fabric, the "docile patriot," "called upon in the name of patriotism" (Puar & Rai, 2002, p. 136).

According to Puar (2007), the terrorist plays a crucial role in constructing the national identity of the U.S. (Puar & Rai, 2002). The figure provides a contrast to the proper patriotic subject who can feel superior in opposition to the monster-terrorist-fag. This contrast is reminiscent of other humiliations or abjections of black bodies including Sarah "Saartjie" Baartman or depictions of sexually deviant black male monsters from which white men must defend the chastity of women (Puar & Rai, 2002). These powerful images seek to immediately conjure the appearance of the proper LGBTQ subject vs. subjects that will undermine American superiority making the compelling case that monsters, whether they be the terrorists (i.e. uncivilized, homophobic, misogynistic Muslims) today or some other "Other" tomorrow, will always be lurking, hiding underneath our beds to promote a sense of national cohesion and belonging.

Puar (2007) further hypothesizes that the homonormalization of the gay and lesbian rights movement serves as a nationalist agenda to leverage an exceptional vision of America. It wasn't long ago that homosexuality was perceived as the antithesis to a U.S. national identity, after all. Gay men were once described in the aftermath of World War II as an "alien infestation" (Edelman, 1992) accused of spying during the McCarthy

era, their "morals" pointed out as a sign of their susceptibility, (D'Emilio, 1983; Johnson, 2004) and as scapegoats for the AIDS crisis (Patton, 1990). And so just like Obama's path to the White House doesn't symbolize a post-racial society, a few legislative accomplishments do not equate to a post-queer society. In that regard, "post" progressive posturing in a white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist society frustrates the potential for an honest look into inequality by masking the relationship between historical and contemporary realities.

Beauchamp (2009) effectively illustrates this point by demonstrating how U.S. terror rhetoric has been a means to excuse violence against trans bodies that do not fit the norm. Whoever does not conform to a "white, middle-class, able-bodied, heterosexual" stereotype is singled out, and vigilantism towards these groups is legitimized (p. 357). Many people who identify as LGBTQ are acutely aware of this isolation, where a sense of belonging for some, reflects the marginalization of others. Beauchamp (2009) states:

> Calling the potential violence and violations against travelers 'unwitting abuses' suggests that authorities enacting these measures cannot be blamed for carrying out policy intended to protect the general public from the threat of hidden terrorism. Such a framework neatly sidesteps any broader criticism of the routine abuses of immigrant, Arab and Arab-appearing individuals that have been justified in the name of national security, and implicitly supports the state's increased policing of 'deviant' or apparently dangerous individuals. (p. 362)

A recent example is when President Donald Trump included these sentiments in his Republican National Convention nomination acceptance speech:

> Only weeks ago, in Orlando, Florida, forty-nine wonderful Americans were savagely murdered by an Islamic terrorist. This time, the terrorist targeted our LGBTQ community. It's no good — and we're going to stop it. As your President, I will do everything in my power to protect our LGBTQ citizens from the violence and oppression of a hateful foreign

ideology. Believe me! . . . As a Republican, it's so nice to hear you
cheering for what I just said. (Politico Staff, 2016)

The Republic platform, however, includes some choice words: "We believe that

marriage, the union of one man and one woman must be upheld as the national standard,

a goal to stand for, encourage, and promote through laws governing marriage." Since the

tragedy at the Pulse nightclub, and with Trump's election, there have been increasing

attempts to paint ISIS as the threat to LGBTQ global rights by lawmakers who

simultaneously disavow their responsibility for physical and symbolic violence towards

LGBTQ bodies represented in their corresponding policies like the support of North

Carolina's bathroom bill, which forces transgender individuals to use bathrooms

corresponding to their sex assigned at birth.

This paradox represents pinkwashing, a strategy attributed to the means by which

Israel claims progressivism as they support LGBTQ rights, but deny the rights of

Palestinians and asylum seekers – many of whom no doubt identify as LGBTQ (Puar,

2010a). Coined by Breast Cancer Action, the term speaks to the ways in which

companies profit off of their support for people with breast cancer (e.g. pink ribbons, t-

shirts, jewelry) (Think Before You Pink, 2017). Similarly, pinkwashing can also be

applied to corporations that profit off the promotion of LGBTQ rights by appearing

LGBTQ-friendly and further demonstrating the grip of neoliberalism as it commodifies

the community. Commercialization, for example, has been one of the critiques leveled at

annual pride parades (Ross, 2016). Take a look at last year's gay-pride-themed, six-

layered rainbow cookie by the snack company, Nabisco:

Figure 1: Oreo Celebrates Pride

Between Facebook rainbow overlays and limited edition rainbow Oreos and Doritos, an attachment to social media experiences and enjoyment of these products now come with the sense that "equality for all" is truly within reach isolating sexuality from other marginalizing axes of racial, gender, class, and national subjectivities. With increasing political and commercial support for the LGBTQ community, there is no need for those who are most likely to benefit to challenge institutions; in fact, these newly "included" LGBTQ individuals may even look at these institutional disrupters as troublemakers who need to "get with the program." Moreover, homonationalism speaks to ways in which the country now understands itself as inclusive of *certain* gay and lesbian subjects, and in which *select* LGBTQ people conflate contributing to the nation as belonging to societal norms. Homonationalism, like all nationalism, hinges on the production of "Others" and this brings together many of the aforementioned points in an assemblage – racial, gender, sexual, class, and nationality – "Others" who fall outside of the normative criteria of belonging (Puar, 2007).

The history of the U.S. instrumentalizing LGBTQ rights is substantiated by recognizing its progress as exceptional (Puar, 2007). In this context, the homosexual body becomes a tool of sexual exceptionalism, which "signals distinction from (to be unlike, dissimilar) as well as excellence (imminence, superiority) suggesting a departure

from yet mastery of linear teleologies of progress" (Puar, 2007, p. 3). For example, commemorating "gay rights" by designating a space near the Stonewall Inn in the Greenwich Village neighborhood of NYC, the historical site of the gay liberation movement, not too long after a film, *Stonewall*, was accused of whitewashing the struggle by leaving out key black and Latinx transgender heroes (Smith, 2015). This is particularly ironic because those who were on the frontlines during the Stonewall riots were drag queens and trans women of color (Conrad, 2014) like Marsha P. Johnson and Silvia Rivera. The U.S., according to Puar (2007), can point to this commemoration to the rest of the world and position itself as a progressive nation especially now that it has successfully recruited respectable gay "docile patriot" bodies as its poster children.

Puar (2007) illustrates the ways in which discourses manage desires and create hierarchies that ultimately strive to separate good national subjects from the bad ones (Butler, 2004; Foucault, 1982; Rubin, 1984). This tenet conceptualizes homonationalism as the assimilation of LGBTQ people into an ideal nationhood producing LGBTQ subjects that can be made useful to the country. Whereas homonormativity helps the subject function more easily in society, homonationalism is the distinct production of LGBTQ subjects that serve the assets of the country. This tenet elucidates the advancement toward the greater incorporation of gay and lesbian people into full American belonging, which requires a keen and critical eye, especially when considering how the system will play a more active role in applying its legal successes to other ideological apparatuses such as education.

Therefore, this study seeks to explore how such developments emerge in curricular resources that explore LGBTQ issues. Fundamental shifts in how LGBTQ

youth are represented in culture have already taken place with much of this material surrounding the inclusion of younger LGTBQ characters in film and television (Davis & Needham, 2009; Kohnen, 2015; Pullen, 2012, 2014; Villarejo, 2014). More and more LGBTQ representation is taking place in the education arena, however. Developing these tenets has been essential to my understanding of the privileging of certain identities and also theorizing whose identities are more likely to be privileged in these resources and incorporated in the guise of social progress, inclusion, over time. This critical inclusion framework facilitates the critical "reading" of LGBTQ educational resources. The reading of this content incorporates a system of methods that provides a guide to the analysis of the exclusionary phenomena and its practices maintaining the precariousness of LGBTQ belonging. These methods, which include my sampling and coding procedures, are explored in the final section below.

Methods

My investigation transforms curriculum into text and can be seen as the social, political, and cultural formations of subjectivities. I seek to understand the ways in which these forms of representations and relations of power take place, the assumptions behind them, and the kinds of meaning-making they reveal about the country. Analyzing texts complementary to my research questions is key and such an approach can be traced back to Foucault (1972) who described such a process in his *Archaeology of Knowledge* metaphorically as an excavation of the practices that produce and maintain a given archive, or collection of resources and their traces during a particular period. Texts are

the "material traces" that remain from the practice of meaning-making – evidence of how others make sense of the world (Dunn & Neumann, 2016; Foucault, 1972).

The methods and procedures I undertake to complete this research builds upon the Feminist Poststructural (FPS) methods and techniques employed by Allan (2008, 2010) in her analysis of higher education policy documents, an analysis also influenced by concepts like power, discourse, and subjectivity. For this reason, I treat curriculum as an expansive term that manifests itself in formal and informal ways: "[t]exts should be understood broadly to include anything that carries a discourse, such as images, performances, and so forth" (Dunn & Neumann, 2016, p. 3). I do not look at curricula merely as lesson plans in a textbook, although lesson plans are examined; rather, I include all types of resources that educators adopt for the purpose of teaching and learning and shaping understanding of LGBTQ subjectivities (Blaise & Ryan, 2012).

I thus contemplate curriculum development as a process of social construction – a series of decisions that evolve within a sociocultural context offering glimpses into how we look at and transmit knowledge, but also how we look at, shape, and create subjects. I imagine this framework and methodology as more of a map: a guide to follow the advice of Edelman (1994) and Halberstam (2005, 2011) and other queer theory scholars who refuse to draw upon bodies of critical theory "to a set of guidelines one might apply to automatize a queer logic, and to a stable and singular body of knowledge that supposes a . . . minor identity" (Britzman, 1995, p. 216). I thus choose key resources that speak directly to my questions – prominent LGBTQ activist organizations, many of them national organizations, whose resources are readily available to educators online and whose efforts at LGBTQ inclusion take place in the United States. I am familiar with

these resources as an educator having worked with teachers to address LGBTQ issues in the classroom; although, I also decided to undertake a survey of LGBTQ resources. Keyword and Boolean Internet searches were conducted using terms and phrases such as: LGBTQ resources; LGBTQ education; LGBTQ literature; LGBTQ lesson plans; LGBTQ resource guides.

This process yielded a curated list of approximately 15 primary resources with accompanying sub-resources that can be found in the Appendix. In the end, each resource met the following criteria: it was available online, written in English, and LGBTQ-themed. Finally, I chose resources that were created in the span of the last decade. In that regard, I applied purposeful sampling as a method to answer my research questions. Purposeful sampling "leads to selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of research" (Patton, 2002, p. 46). Because of my purposeful sampling, I am fully aware that the resources located in the Appendix do not alone create or shape the homonational subject and/or its ideology nor do I necessarily cover each resource in great detail. Rather, I explore certain resources and overall themes as discursive essences of a larger inclusion project. In sum, a critical inclusion framework and accompanying methods allow me to understand texts as shifting snapshots of the time and space they emerge as they are seen, touched, felt, and processed (Dunn & Neumann, 2016).

After determining my resources for analysis and through the application of my critical inclusion framework I conducted an analysis that generated prevalent themes (Creswell, 2013). While there is no way to prescribe a critical inclusion reading of texts

such a method aligns itself with questions of normativity, "destabilizing particular understandings of the nature of the human subject and subjectivities, power relations, the nature of knowledge and the manner if its production" (Browne & Nash, 2010, p. 12). With that said, to provide a more focused basis to my critical inclusion process of "reading" the selected sample of texts, I engaged in a coding process of my archive. The first phase of the coding process deductively locates concepts a priori – highlighting text segments that specifically align with my research questions and theoretical concepts (e.g. homonationalism) that allow me to organize my data into broader issues and themes (Allen, 2008; Maxwell, 2005). I then repeated the coding process in a second phase "to further refine and focus" and "bringing segments of text that . . . relate to the same content" (Allan, 2008, p. 60). Repeated readings allowed me to pay attention to "silences" and "absences" (Allan, 2008) typical of the representation of queerness in a school curriculum today (Mayo, 2014).

Overall, this process involved a more intimate relationship with the data, more thoughtful in its (re)arrangements as "themes, patterns, and stories . . . emerge on multiple levels" (Allan, 2008, p. 60). Such a process allowed me to examine relationships across texts, intertextuality, and this conversation was powerful in its implications than the resource(s) of any single organization. Taken together, I (1) made connections among them; (2) developed constellations of meaning; and (3) identified subjectivities discursively constituted by these curricular resources (Allan, 2008). Drawing on my critical inclusion theoretical framework and analytical techniques employed by Allan (2008, 2010), LGBTQ subjectivities discursively constituted by LGBTQ curricular resources were identified. By investigating the articulation of

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LGBTQ issues and proposed remedies to these problems, I contextualized educative

content as it is produced and circulated. This process allowed different themes to emerge

from the analyzed curricular resources. I interpreted these themes through my critical

inclusion framework.

Putting It All Together

A critical inclusion framework reveals the explicit and implicit normative

practices articulated within the texts I examine. This framework clarifies how curricula

render some crucial facets of identities – race, gender, sexuality, class, and nationality –

as more visible or valuable than others producing discourses that affect certain members

of the LGBTQ community differently and in material ways not the least of which is who

is deemed worthy of inclusion. Such an approach neither searches for absolute

definitions nor guidelines to determine the most deserving of neat, essentialist depictions

of the U.S. paragon; rather, it brings the tensions of the production of subjectivities to

life. Up to this point, I necessarily apply a critical inclusion framework in earnest;

however, Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 recognize the tensions in this work that spark

curricular and even pedagogical possibilities.

A critical inclusion framework recognizes that inclusion, and by extension

exclusion, circulates interdependently often in neutralized and invisible ways to uphold

constructs that are positioned as normal. Consequently, it has the potential to be

extremely valuable in discovering everyday neoliberal rhetoric and standards of what

LGBTQ is acceptable and what is not into the public imagination; it seeks to be critical of

current curricular practices, including progressive ones, imbued with overt and covert

messages, coming together to make certain perspectives or subjectivities more relatable and/or accessible than others. I now turn to the curricular resources themselves and my analysis. Specifically, in Chapter 4, Chapter 5, and Chapter 6, I apply my framework to concrete, popular examples of LGBTQ resources, including the It Gets Better Project and its user-created YouTube videos in Chapter 4 and curricular resources designed and/or promoted by various LGBTQ activist organizations, particularly GLSEN & HRC, which include images, stories, lessons, videos and website content in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6. I bridge these sections to an area of proposed future research and provide a few evaluative practices for educators in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 4: CREATING THE HOMONATIONAL

The hardest thing in this world — is to live in it. Be brave. Live. For me.

— Buffy the Vampire Slayer

In Chapter 3, I introduced and outlined my critical inclusion framework by first defining the process of subjectification and elucidating the interconnections among key poststructural concepts – power, discourse, subjectivity, and governmentality. I also described the five tenets of my framework. These tenets examined the factors through which inclusion has been theorized by examining the relationship between ideology and institutions. More specifically, critical inclusion scrutinizes the ways in which normative discourses collude to produce a national LGBTQ acceptability worthy of inclusion and that this worth is rooted in the ideologies of white supremacy, heteronormativity, capitalism, and homonationalism. I developed and proposed a framework that calls into question the promise of inclusion offering its tenets as a lens to uncover and elucidate quotidian neoliberal rhetoric delineating what categorical-based behaviors and practices and its intersections are deemed acceptable in the public imagination and as to how that might manifest in curricular resources. I do not discredit the hard fought progress and achievement earned by LGBTQ advocates as I engage in my analysis of the exclusions promoted by homonationalism. In fact, having described my methodology, theoretical framework, and methods, I now turn to the resources themselves and my analysis that further fleshes out this distinction between critical inclusion and sparking curricular change. My resource summaries and analyses are broken into three chapters: creating the homonational, curricularizing the homonational, and undoing the homonational.

In this chapter, I bring the homonormative and the homonational to light by analyzing one of the most popular worldwide online video projects seeking to "give hope to LGBTQ youth" and inspiring the changes intended to improve LGBTQ lives known as the It Gets Better Project (IGBP). The IGBP absolves educational settings of the obligation of supporting LGBTQ youth by promoting the belief that the situation of these youth will somehow get better later in life. While the IGBP attempts to offer hope to LGBTQ youth, it participates in the project of homonormativity. Thus, the IGBP is a notable case for the purpose of this critically inclusive investigation for many reasons. The IGBP reflects designed and articulated knowledge and modes of being in and outside the boundaries of schools that play a significant role in shaping conceptions of LGBTQ subjectivities. It is pivotal in supporting the coming out of LGBTQ students and in its attempts at solidarity, the IGBP provides a sense of LGBTQ legitimization and national progress. Ultimately, my critique of the IGBP is strategically sustained by theoretically framing what LGBTQ subjectivities are produced in efforts at LGBTQ inclusion, but not a critique of the organization's strides to improve LGBTQ lives.

My roadmap for this chapter is as follows. First, I summarize the background of the It Gets Better Project. Then, in five sections I explore the conditions of possibility for queerness produced in these videos. These five sections highlight major IGBP themes constructing the homonormative and homonational subject, and are as follows: (1) "coming out," (2) normative configurations of gender and sexuality, (3) whiteness, affluence, and consumerism, (4) nationalism, and (5) the illusionary semblance of collective social progress. Select videos capture aspects of these major themes as gleaned from an analysis of one hundred of the most popular videos designated and collected by

Montague-Asp (2012) in an IGBP content analysis. I also selected, analyzed, and highlighted videos based on the related videos pane. For example, a U.S. military video that leads to other examples of national defense participation. As a living campaign, new IGBP videos are intermittently added and thus the themes the project invokes can change. For example, as recently as March 31, 2017, a Canadian trans model, Gigi Gorgeous, brings attention to *International Transgender Day of Visibility*, an annual holiday dedicated to celebrating trans lives and raising awareness of discrimination faced by transgender people worldwide. My own familiarity and engagement with the campaign as well as the literature critical of its messaging have been incorporated to anchor thematic analysis and help point to effective examples. Finally, I will consider some of the implications of the project as I transition to Chapter 5, which illustrates the ways in which the homonational subject is further deployed in current and emerging curricular contexts, or what I refer to as *curricularizing* the homonational. Moreover, I argue that while this campaign seeks to and often does provide hopeful messages to LGBTQ youth, its mechanism of inclusion remains imbued with covert if not overt messages of normalization reinforcing notions that queerness is acceptable in society when it is substantiated or when it co-exists within the exclusionary properties as described in my critical inclusion framework.

I should note from the onset that I also encountered videos created in the name of the IGBP that refuse the general hegemonic narrative of the overall project in ways that undo the homonational subject. I refer to these materials as "sites of resistance" or *counter inclusion* to illustrate the complex ways that particular projects can be taken up and re-appropriated and challenge a deterministic analysis of the IGBP or any other

inclusion project. In fact, these examples hit home that any curricular resource has the potential to teach us about and then disrupt the social order. Some of these videos will be analyzed in Chapter 6. In this way, the aims of the IGBP project should be celebrated for contributing to a national dialogue about the plight of LGBTQ youth and opening up spaces for alternative narratives including critiques of the project itself that seek to explicitly challenge the emergence of homonationalism.

Background

On September 21, 2010, prompted by a string of LGBTQ suicides and the tragic loss of 15-year-old Billy Lucas serving as a tipping point, author and nationally syndicated sex advice columnist, Dan Savage, launched the It Gets Better Project (IGBP). The IGBP began as an online YouTube campaign featuring LGBTQ adults reflecting upon the happiness that awaited them after leaving behind the toxic environment of their upbringing and schooling and sharing these messages with LGBTQ youth struggling with their sexuality. The campaign "was created to show young LGBT people the levels of happiness, potential and positivity their lives will reach – if they can just get through their teen years" (It Gets Better Project, 2016).

Since then, IGBP's IT GETS BETTER! serves as an anti-bullying movement motto as it seeks to promote school safety for LGBTQ youth. In fact, Savage (2011) claims that he was motivated to create IGBP as a way to help make up for the lack of anti-bullying programs and Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) in schools. The program has exploded to include over 50,000 YouTube videos and has been watched more than 50 million times all over the world (It Gets Better Project, 2016). The main YouTube

channel organizes its videos into categories, such as: It Gets Better: Sports; It Gets Better:

Law Organizations; It Gets Better: Medical Community Groups; and It Gets Better:

Military, Service Members and Veterans. Singers (e.g. Ke$ha, SIA, Justin Bieber),

personalities (e.g. Kermit the Frog, Ellen, Stephen Colbert), and actors (e.g. Zachary

Quinto, Chris Colfer) populate the roster of individuals expressing their support by

submitting a video to the campaign.

Dan Savage's inaugural video features him and his partner, Terry Miller, who not

only share their personal stories about being bullied as gay teens, but the exciting twists

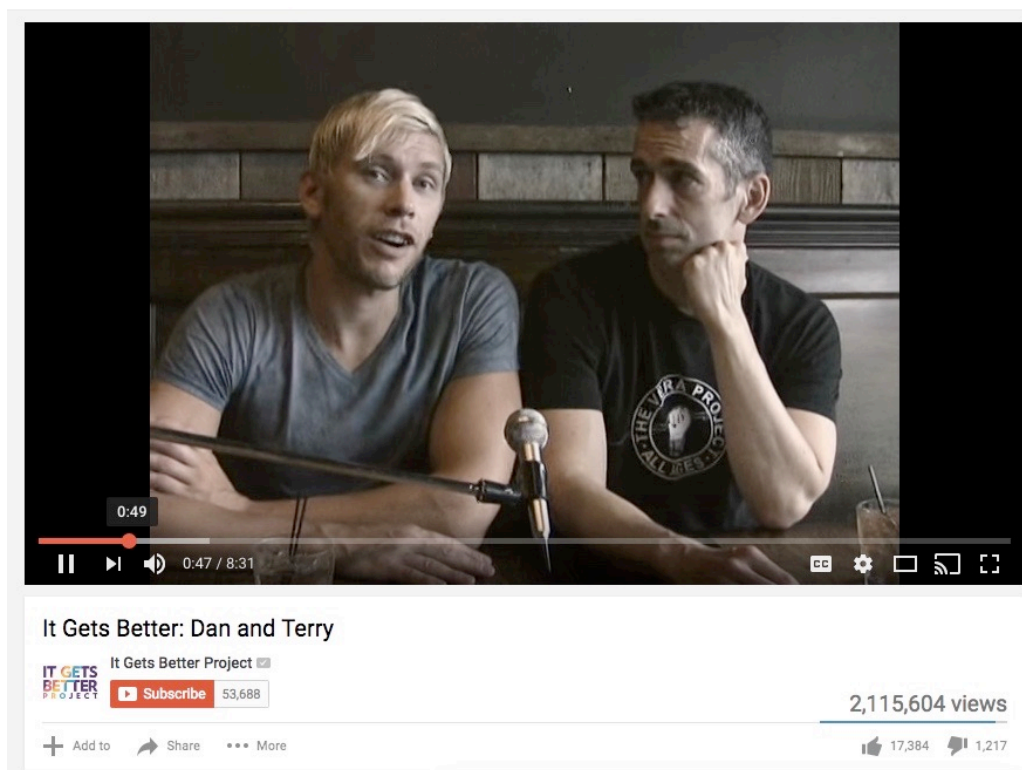and turns thereafter that have lead to a joyous life they once never imagined.

Figure 2: Dan Savage (Right) & Terry Miller's (Left) Inaugural IGBP Video

Miller and Savage (2010) offer anecdotes like a trip to a Paris bakery at sunrise and a snowboarding weekend amidst the sharing of family photos as a means to offer proof that surviving high school will eventually lead to better days ahead. Their adopted son DJ is an especially moving addition as Savage reflects upon fatherhood as once out of the realm of consideration. Miller claims these memories are what have made it "so worth sticking out the bullying and the pain and the despair of high school." Savage (2010) declares:

> One day you will have friends who love and support you. You will find love. You will find a community. And that life gets better. The bigots don't win . . . And once I got out of high school they couldn't touch me anymore.

The video concludes with both men professing their happiness to be alive directing youth to the IGBP website where they can get immediate assistance (i.e. suicide prevention resources) and/or get involved the campaign.

This involvement mainly focuses on contributing a video to the campaign. Instructions are provided on the website, a list of talking points to ensure that only "safe" (re: "safe messaging policy") videos are added to the queue. This is achieved by avoiding "offensive, vulgar or violent content," describing "suicide in a positive way," or leading "a viewer to experience anxiety, depression or feelings of isolation and despair." Rather (It Gets Better Project, 2010):

> Be positive! . . . Remind LGBT youth that they are unique, that they should be proud of who they are . . . Emphasize individual and collective responsibility for supporting the well-being of LGBT people . . . Speak authentically and from the heart.

This "safe" messaging is an instrumental introduction in the production of the homonational subject by establishing what is considered the proper way to present

oneself, an "authentic" story sanitized by its avoidance of "offensive, vulgar" content (It Gets Better Project, 2016). The homonational subject is further created by forging a relationship between intelligibility and the coming out process.

Come Out, Come Out, Wherever You Are

An IGBP participant declaring their sexual orientation or gender identity publically may be construed as having come out, a process emphasizing the (in)voluntary disclosures LGBTQ youth make undergoing a "crisis" of sexuality as they move through developmental stages towards a sense of resolve and self-acceptance, according to psychologists (Cass, 1984; Troiden, 1988). This narrative weaves throughout IGBP as LGBTQ youth are repeatedly asked to COME OUT and share their unique perspective with the world. This theme, however, has repeatedly been criticized; challenging educators to consider limiting the relationship between inclusion and discourses that rely upon the closet and coming out as an oppressive rhetorical device (Rasmussen, 2004; Samuels, 2003).

Such a seemingly simple and declarative demand, for example, overlooks the complexities that are mediated by these processes and the privileges that might exist for those who can and those who can't or those who won't or don't want to "come out." In that regard, the IGBP campaign is aimed at those who can meet the conditions of protection presupposing family support and financial stability as well as the self-esteem that comes from likely already fitting in. While certainly not always the case, "coming out" is a privilege that reifies the notion that LGBTQ youth cannot be happy or complete until they leave and close the closet door. In this way, the IGBP is dominated by the idea

that it is necessary to confess one's sexuality. In her video, financial advisor and talk show host Suze Orman (2010) asserts, "it only gets better when you're willing to be honest." A group of Canadians (2010), advocating for coming out, exclaim this assertion in their video more in depth:

> First of all, I was scared to death, for no good reason, as it turns out . . . [t]here's coming out to your friends. There's coming out to your, you know, family. There's coming out to your parents. There's coming out to your workplace . . . and coming out to yourself. So, it's a process . . . I consider the process of coming out as liberation. Freedom. It's very liberating to come out. It's very liberating not to have to lie. If you're not out, you are lying all the time . . . I won't allow myself to be bullied anymore. But that has come from being confident in who I am and accepting who I am.

Coming out of the closet is portrayed as *the* game changer – a turning point toward a happy and/or successful in life. For example, controversial gay blogger Perez Hilton, who has been accused of being a bully by posting unflattering celebrity pictures and gossip online, recounts his trials with acceptance at an all-boys private school. One example he provides is a time when a theology teacher claimed ten percent of the population was gay but insisted this was in no way a statistic reflective of his classroom: "[y]ou boys are not like everybody else." Perez, speaking in the third person, expresses how he would have loved to have a model like himself in the media, whether you like him or not, to: "create something from nothing . . . and not have to be something he's not . . . Perez Hilton is very gay and proud of it. So you should be proud of who you are . . . you were made this way."

Another popular video is made by Brian Gallivan (2010) known for his portrayal of *Sassy Gay Friend*, a character based on the web series of the same name that transports himself to intervene in the lives of famous women in literature or history succumbing to

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tragic fates (i.e. if they only had a sassy gay friend to question their decision-making they would have been fine). Gallivan like Perez attended a conservative private school and recounts how much he tried to fit in hindering his eventual pursuit of acting and improvisation by deflecting its "gay" associations. He didn't go on his first date with a man until 24, but when he did:

> [I]t was so great . . . it felt so good to just go out with somebody that I really liked. And I immediately regretted all that time I wasted trying to fit in . . . being something I wasn't . . . I know we wait because we are scared . . . try to find those couple of people or more who are trustworthy who you feel can help you . . . everyone I came out to my relationship got better. My family. My friends. It's great!

In a way, the video provides a blueprint as to how to begin to become an acceptable LGBTQ member of society centering on the regulatory discursive themes of coherence, confession, and pride.

The necessity of coming out or coming to terms with one's sexuality can be understood through Foucault's (1978) reflections on confession and power, which he traces to the Christian demand that all individuals must confess every action, feeling, and thought that related to sex. Foucault argues that the confessional discourse of sexuality is therefore extremely important to Western society, throughout history as well as today. He contends that there is power in this discourse through the impression of a liberating and empowering act when in fact there is a susceptibility of participation through the procedures of that confession: the confession is a crucial part of allowing oneself to be regulated and monitored by the norms of institutional forces. In this way, the general narrative of coming out in the IGBP can be understood not as a tool of liberation in the way that it is often explicitly discussed in the videos, but rather as a tool of regulation.

In the context of the LGBTQ movement, individuals are compelled to confess a sexual identity through the regulatory procedure of the closet (Sedgwick, 1990). Foucault (1978) states: "One confesses – or is forced to confess" (p. 59). Those who put pressure on others to confess receive what Foucault deems to be the "speaker's benefit" (p. 6). The "speaker's benefit" grants power to activists who encourage others to come out as they find pleasure from believing they act as liberators, freeing others from hiding their true selves. Pressuring others to come out as sexually identified subjects assumes everyone has a sexual identity that is buried within the self, just waiting to be realized and unleashed. Similarly, Foucault (1978) contends that confession is encouraged in Western society because of its perceived importance to one's sense of self:

> The obligation to confess . . . is so deeply ingrained in us that we no longer perceive it as the effect of power constraints upon us; on the contrary, it seems to us that truth, lodged in our most secret nature, 'demands' only to surface that if it fails to do so, this is because constraint holds it in place, the violence of a power weighs it down, and it can finally be articulated only at the price of a kind of liberation. (p. 60)

Coming out means fitting into a sexual "truth" that is also imagined, socially prescribed, and pre-determined. In the process of confession, Foucault (1978) argues people become bound into webs of power in which they must increasingly police and discipline themselves. This self-policing and discipline is what creates the impression of properness and goodness and ultimately exceptionalism. These normative measures are reinforced by who appears in IGBP, who is most encouraged to come out and thus who is deemed most deserving. Puar (2010b) notes in a *Guardian* article, for example, that:

> [T]hings are indeed, better, especially for a particular class of white gay men . . . [the project] is based on an expectation that it was supposed to be better. And thus IGB might turn out to mean, you get more normal.

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A result of prescribing to a coming out narrative is that it encourages those who choose this path to seek other normative channels of acceptance, and thus further drives a desire to pursue marriage and other forms of inclusion – even as this choice is made in subconscious ways that does not intend to create a schism between those who do not follow this prescriptive path.

First Comes Love, Then Comes Marriage . . .

The process of coming out and becoming "more normal" is an essential device to conflate inclusion with those who are encouraged to enter a newfound family and while hitherto LGBTQ leaving little room for bisexual, transgender, and/or questioning sexual and/or gender identities resisting the exploration and complexity of gender and sexual fluidity that may be experienced throughout a heteronormative life. According to Rose (1999) the subject "render(s) his or her life meaningful, as if it were the outcome of individual choices made in the furtherance of a biographical project of self-realization" (p. 12). Coming out further extends itself as fitting into a community without necessarily understanding or appreciating its diversity marking the next turning point in the IGBP narrative: to be a part of the dominant LGBTQ community is when it gets "really" better. This is abetted in a few ways including the lack of IGBP representation among bisexuals and/or transgender persons and persons who do not conform to any sexual identity category such as asexuals or pansexuals.

Rubin (1984) argues that sexuality, like gender, is political and is "organized into systems of power, which reward and encourage some individuals and activities, while punishing and suppressing others" (p. 209). The rewards are given to those who are

capable and willing to fall in line with homonormativity (Goltz, 2011) – graduate high school, find a partner, get married, have kids, become grandparents, etc. Darren Hayes (2010), the former lead singer of the pop duo Savage Garden, shares that in his heart he always wanted to find a partner and have a child although he was lead to believe that wasn't an option. Amidst mental health struggles yet a supportive network of family and friends, he finds the "love of his life" raising his hand to the screen – "this is my wedding ring" – and says that five years later he can pinpoint the celebration of his civil partnership as the "happiest day of [his] life."

Savage and Miller exemplifies this normalization as its poster children not only exemplified by their maleness, whiteness, able-bodiedness, and upper classness as Puar (2012) refers to in *Guardian*, but also the homonormative gifts Savage and Miller (2010) mention throughout their inaugural video. One of these gifts is Savage and Miller's son, DJ. Children are frequently invoked in the IGBP as evidence of homonormative success, without mentioning the valid alternatives of childlessness, almost as if to suggest children are the means to domestic bliss, which illustrates that a certain homonormative prescription promotes getting better more than others. In a video by the Feather Boa Fathers (2010), for example, a group made up of more than 100 gay families, a dad reiterates the common assertion that one "can be gay and have a family" while another exclaims "that being gay is not a hindrance . . . it's not wrong . . . anything is possible" while raising up his infant son. In another video, a Canadian gay white couple of almost twenty years, Sean Blane and David Rosen (2010), discuss their respectable jobs as a diplomat and a doctor and their thrilling travels that have taken them all over the world. David adds:

> We have two children whom we adopted when they were babies. They
> are now six and ten . . . we are very busy as parents. Never did either of
> us imagine in high school that we would be gay *and* parents.

The IGBP success is therefore exemplified through having a monogamous partner and a family with children.

The challenge stemming from extending access to the heteronormative institutions of marriage and child rearing to same-sex couples, though extremely important, is the extension of other normative expectations such as monogamy and reproduction and the alienation of different LGBTQ choices. I do not claim that getting married and having kids is more wrong for an LGBTQ couple compared to a straight couple, that somehow a gay couple getting married should be looked at as any worse or any better as a straight couple. I do not mean to describe LGBTQ individuals who choose to get married and have kids as traitors. Rather, I want to bring attention to the ways in which these processes of normalization are quick to spread. For example, by evaluating success in terms of monogamy and reproduction for gays and lesbians, the IGBP videos promote homonormativity. This encouragement further tethers homonormative couples to the normative order who may now feel more normal because of the benefits they receive from participating in its sanctioned institutions, while inadvertently relegating individuals who are single or who choose to be open in their partnerships or who are unable to afford adoption or other expensive means to have children. These homonormative messages also propagate what Ahmed (2010) describes as "compulsory happiness" – this is what it takes to lead a happy life – and in that regard, the campaign conflates the prospects of it gets better with inclusion into its normative familial plot line.

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On Whiteness

Normalization of queerness is further exacerbated by its erasure of intersectionality, which Johnson Jr. (2014) attributes to the tendency to portray the LGBTQ community as consistently and cohesively white. In fact, Johnson Jr. (2014) samples the IGBP and deems 85% of the participants as white. An IGBP content analysis of the 100 most viewed videos complements this figure documenting the overwhelming frequency of white participants, nearly 80% (Montague-Asp, 2012). With its narrow focus, IGBP belies various intersectional realities eclipsing the devastating issues facing LGBTQ lives today like violence towards transgender communities of color. Johnson Jr. (2014) fittingly and provocatively describes the IGBP movement as a "whitening device" spotlighting the noticeable absence of people of color. This dearth of representation communicates a message to youth of color about their value, according to Johnson Jr. (2014):

> No offers are made about how to survive the daily assaults and indignities that accompany the racial discrimination that accompanies the homophobia that queer youth of color must endure and navigate. (p. 285)

The first person of color to appear in a YouTube search (i.e. rather than visiting the IGBP website or its main YouTube channel directly) other than President Obama is singer Janet Jackson and not until scrolling down a few pages down. This result seems to represent racial tokenism and exceptionalism rather than reflect a relatable experience for most individuals who are not world leaders or superstars. This limitation would lead someone to believe that the discrimination endured in these communities based on sexuality is of low priority or even that people of color do not identify as queer let alone the depth that would need to be considered as to how different facets of identity interact to contend with

other dangers in one's school or community (Johnson Jr., 2014). Sadly, it perpetuates the

neoliberal dimensions of the project as pointing to the success of inclusion by

exemplifying a few notable exceptions while expanding upon its consumerist appeal (i.e.

buy Janet Jackson CDs) and obscuring the larger issues faced by the black community.

These issues include how family dynamics might make it particularly difficult for youth

of color to express dimensions of queerness, especially in a context where their blackness

or brownness might make it difficult for them to find acceptance within the LGBTQ

community (Mays, Chatters, & Mackness, 1998; Pritchard, 2013).

As a result, the overreliance on the homonormative subject is a missed

opportunity to provide openings for underrepresented subjectivities to have a voice and

serve as role models. For example, according to the Media Insight Project (2015),

Hispanic and black adolescents are more likely to turn to YouTube for news compared to

their white counterparts. Also noteworthy is that many of the high-profile suicides that

prompted the IGBP involved white teenagers with a lack of sustained coverage in 2009 of

similar incidents involving two 11-year-old boys of color in Georgia, Jaheem Herrera and

Carl Joseph Walker-Hoover – bullied because of their perceived sexuality and

committing suicide within days of each other.

Queer intersectionality acknowledges the paradigms of race, gender, sexuality,

class, and nationality and a number of other factors that create distinct, individual

narratives. Essentializing queerness and linking it to whiteness falsely universalizes the

LGBTQ experience. Moreover, the racial tokenism implicitly communicates the message

that racial discrimination should take lower priority, is somehow less of a priority than

discrimination against sexual minorities, and/or that somehow racial discrimination gets

better too. Structural inequalities endured by LGBTQ communities of color adds

additional hardships and barriers to sufficient income and opportunities for personal and

professional advancement (McCready, 2004, 2010; Sadowski, 2016).

Money, Money, Money!

In addition to a focus primarily on gay white men, there has also been strong

corporate support for the IGBP. Corporations, including Gap Inc. (2010), Disney (2011),

Google (2015), and Pixar Animation Studios (2010) have explicitly supported the

movement. Darla, a lesbian producer, explains in a Pixar (2010) video, "[t]hank

goodness we hung around and found each other and created this familial tribe of people."

A Facebook employee takes on the stereotype of being gay and an aspiring performer or

interior designer: "We do all things. I mean I work in online advertising sales. And we

have engineers. And we have people who do all kinds of valuable things. So, um, just

remember that." This example emphasizes the ways in which LGBTQ members of

society contribute beyond stereotypes, contributing most powerfully with earning power

often presented innocuously as the "thrill of discovering what your career is" (Apple

Employees, 2011).

Aspects of the better life are often described in in terms of geographical location

privileging urban centers over rural areas and professional opportunities that will

inevitably lead to fulfillment and tremendous financial gains. Cover (2012) explains:

> The inevitable, temporal moment of leaving school is depicted as the
> pivotal point at which 'it gets better' through the motif of escape, in
> addition to it being the moment of a shift into young adulthood. That is,
> escape from school and simultaneously, escape from being a queer
> 'youth.' (p. 64-65)

This "geographic escapism" (Cover, 2012; Johnson Jr., 2014) and metronormativity (Halberstam, 2005) is a common theme. Many of the videos advocate for LGBTQ youth to move to cities like New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles – cosmopolitan cities that are often considered safe havens and where their sexuality will ostensibly have broader acceptance. For example, author Cameron Tuttle explains how not only did she fall madly in love in NYC, but how NYC offered her a chance to meet "tons of people who were a lot like [her] – squeaky clean, annoyingly mainstream overachievers who just happened to be gay" (Savage & Miller, 2011, p. 131). While it is wonderful that these people found their tribe, as in yet another example of seven lesbian and gay professionals working for PricewaterhouseCoopers (2011) relating their negative school experiences in contrast to a "better life," this view is limited in its very construct of inclusion that excludes others:

> Things changed for me when . . . I moved to New York City. I realized
> that really the world was different, and New York City was a good
> example of that diversity . . . I now live in a great city, I have a great job
> and a great boyfriend. . . . And now I'll have the opportunity to transfer
> internationally for my career and get even more experiences out there. So I
> want to tell you it does get better, and the best is yet to come . . . I work
> for an amazing firm that is a front-runner and a leader in everything
> related to diversity and inclusion. Life does get better. It gets way better.

The myth perpetuated by celebrities and corporations and even places themselves profiting off of these indirect IGBP alliances juxtapose getting better with escaping one's present circumstance. These allyships to certain urban enclaves as safe havens even translate into effective tourism campaigns: you are accepted here which means we will gladly take your money. Consider Philadelphia's 2003 and ongoing LGBTQ marketing campaign, which spends millions of dollars to attract gays and lesbians from the U.S. and

Canada to spend money at eateries, bars, historical sites, and annual events. Described on

their website, Visit Philly, as "one of the best for LGBT travelers to get their history

straight and their nightlife gay" (Visit Philadelphia, 2017).

Figure 3: "Philadelphia. Get Your History Straight and Your Nightlife Gay" Marketing Campaign

Philadelphia, with its 2016 perfect score on the Human Right Campaign's Municipality

Equality Index – a measure of how U.S. cities are legally, politically, and culturally

LGBTQ inclusive – appeals to visitors showcasing the *City of Brotherly Love* as both safe

and fun. But this implies that once you arrive you are accepted the same way and

suggests that once you come out you will be embraced by the LGBTQ community

because queer spaces are welcoming to everyone.

To speak of "community," according to Ingram, Bouthillette, and Retter (1997),

begs the question, "[w]hich one?" a deception as this monolith appears inclusive of

queers of color with researchers like Hanhardt (2013), for example, on how LGBTQ

"safe spaces" are shaped in ways that marginalizes queer people of color along racial and

class lines through means like privatization and policing. Of particular note was the fact

that she documented the marginalization of queer people of color within the so-called

"safe spaces" of New York City and San Francisco, cities that are thought to be models of LGBTQ inclusion. Moreover, escape doesn't always translate to acceptance, and these options are not always available, financially or for other reasons. With limited options, the sense of isolation and of feeling trapped can only be compounded by the implication that there must be something wrong with the person who does not migrate to the city, further alienating those who are already marginalized.

We Want You! Enlisting the Homonational

The ills of alienation can be cured by social acceptance, in this case, projecting the ideal of one who contributes to society, The Best Little Boy in The World, the loyal homonational. Building on the momentum of highlighting places all over the world by promoting its international videos, for example, IGBP deployed programs to benefit LGBTQ youth on six continents. On the international tab of the site, for example, a message to Russia's LGBTQ youth (2013) is prominently placed in the wake of the country banning LGBTQ "propaganda:" "You are beautiful, inside and out," the video begins. The out and proud homonational serves as a role model to other countries as to what they too should expect from their countries. The companion book, *It Gets Better: Coming Out, Overcoming, and Creating a Life Worth Living*, foregrounds the explicitly political tone of IGBP and the broader role America and its exceptionalism plays in this campaign with the first contribution expressed by former President Barack Obama. Obama affirms:

Figure 4: President Barack Obama's IGBP Video

It will mean that you'll be more likely to help fight discrimination – not just against LGBT Americans, but discrimination in all its forms. It means you'll be more likely to understand personally and deeply why it's so important that as adults we set an example in our own lives and that we treat everybody with respect. That we are able to see the world through other people's eyes and stand in their shoes – that we never lose sight of what binds us together. As a nation we're founded on the belief that all of us are equal and each of us deserves the freedom to pursue our own version of happiness; to make the most of our talents; to speak our minds; to not fit in; most of all, to be true to ourselves. That's the freedom that enriches all of us. That's what America is all about. And every day, it gets better. (Savage & Miller, 2011, p. 1-2.)

At the time the video was seen as a symbolic gesture given that up until that point the administration had yet to appeal court rulings against *Don't Ask, Don't Tell* barring LGBTQ members from openly serving in the military. Yet given legislative changes regarding LGBTQ rights and IGBP critiques thus far, it's by no means a leap to see how

the President implicitly positions LGBTQ American bodies as powerful tools in fighting discrimination abroad and globally. Without explicitly endorsing LGBTQ advocates who denounce discrimination over those who do not speak up, the President invokes the need for the homonational to promote U.S. ideals. Human rights rhetoric, for example, often narrates and justifies nationalism as Western subjects seek to "learn" about the cultures of the "Other" as they also delegitimize or decry forms of gender and sexuality constructions that do not align with their own (Puar, 2007).

These nationalistic motivations are exacerbated by the enlistment of the homonational through the prominence of its military apparatus videos. The It Gets Better: Military, Service Members and Veterans page, for example, contains 18 videos ranging from 7,000 to over 300,000 views. A group of American soldiers, sailors, and airmen deployed to a base in Bagram, Afghanistan, released a video on behalf of the military. "Whether you're gay, straight, bisexual, transgender, genderqueer – whatever, no one should be put down because of who they are," a female service member says, culminating with Lady Gaga's *Born this Way* playing in the background over a montage of service people carrying an "It Gets Better" cardboard sign (Outserve BAF, 2012). In the most popular video in the collection, Gay Cop, Gay Marine (2010), JD, a law enforcement officer of 15 years, and Allen, a Marine Corps staff sergeant, agree that "[y]ou are perfect and wonderful exactly as you are" ending with the "it gets better" tagline and a kiss:

Gay Cop, Gay Marine - IT GETS BETTER!
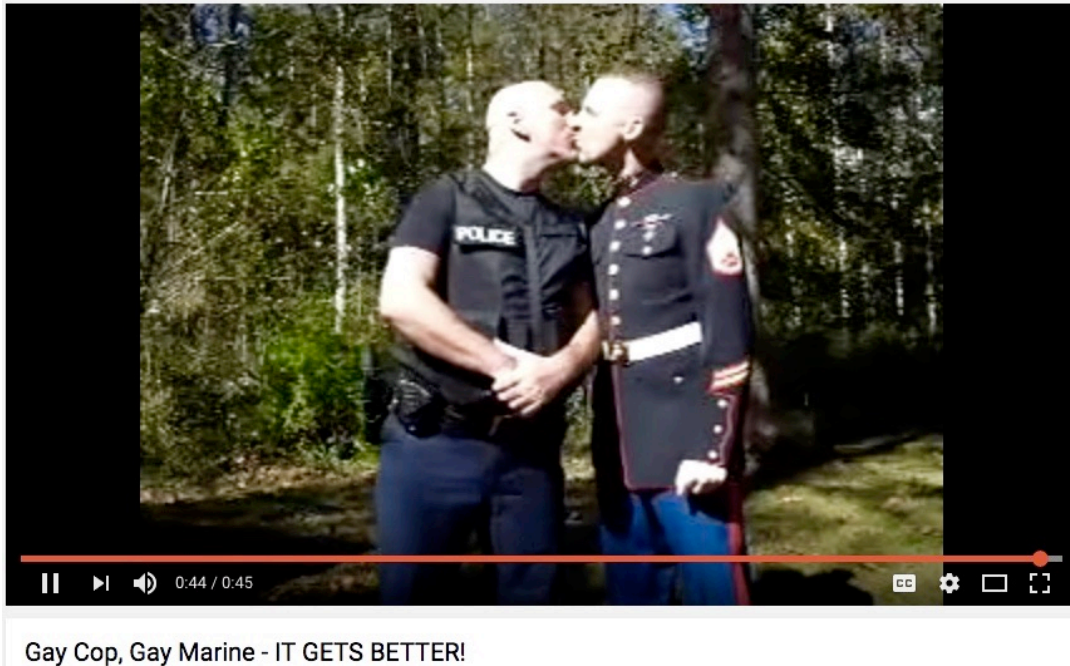
Figure 5: "Gay Cop, Gay Marine" IGBP Video

This tacit agreement between the national service and homonormative subjects seeks to target specific LGBTQ youth to help – LGBTQ youth that will grow up to be useful defenders of the country who just happen to have relationships with people of the same sex.

Other prominent politicians like former Vice President Joe Biden (2012) and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (2010) reinforce the relationship between queerness and patriotism. A measured House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (2010), for example, makes the following appeal:

> In America's rich history, we've overcome barriers and obstacles before: for women, and for religious, racial, and ethnic minorities. And we are doing it again for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Americans. During this challenging time for so many, you should know that I am on your side. In the Congress, we are striving to advance our nation's pledge of equality, our heritage and our hope. That is why we passed a fully-

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inclusive hate-crimes bill, ensuring protections for the LGBT community alongside all Americans. And now it is the law of the land.

Taken together, these videos draw a queer patriotic picture with the U.S. as a benefactor by granting rights to marginalized communities as an indication of its exceptional progress. And yet what the Speaker excludes from this exceptional contemporary articulation of American history is that Senate Democrats were willing to pass the hate crime legislation – the *Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act* – as a rider to the *National Defense Authorization Act* (fiscal year 2010). On the one hand, the law is more inclusive of actual or perceived gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and/or dis/ability attacks. On the other hand, the law advances American interest in its promotion of militarism abroad. This paradox is problematic as a single piece of legislation is used to address the issue of targeted violence against the queer community and folds into a much larger military project including billions of dollars allocated for military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Support for LGBTQ rights domestically translates to global violence complicity by increasing war expenditures and resulting in countless casualties around the world and represents another example of pinkwashing in political action.

Individualistic Framings, Illusions of Social Change

The IGBP campaign strives to overcome LGBTQ injustice solely by appealing to the resilience of LGBTQ youth while overlooking the social forces that bring about these injustices. The theme of perseverance, for example, is prominent and captured when actor Neil Patrick Harris (2010) states: "you can act with strength, you can act with

courage, you can act with class, and stand tall, be proud of who you are." Singer and

American Idol runner-up, Adam Lambert (2010), asserts: "if you give them the power to

affect you, you're letting them win . . . you have to be strong . . . it gets better, but it's up

to you."

The theme of perseverance is particularly curious given that many "straight"

voices have chimed in too. Stephen Colbert (2010) talks about what it was like being

"picked on" in schools and taking bullies head-on that devalues the unique plights of

queers by claiming 'I get what you are going through too' all the while the data boldly

points to its prevalence towards (perceived) queer youth (Kosciw et al., 2016). Kim

Kardashian (2010) alongside her gay best friend shares:

> I know that I can't directly relate, but I feel like everyone feels alone in
> their own way or feels bullied and, um, like when I am at home, and
> sometimes I look on the Internet, and I'll see comments about people, you
> know, calling me 'fat' or, you know, everyone has something negative to
> say.

While the representation of broad allyships is encouraging, this type of rhetoric turns the

IGBP focus to the victim's struggle and the problems of the individual, taking attention

away from wider societal or cultural issues. By turning the struggle to the individual, the

problem of heteronormativity is depoliticized conflating heteronormative violence with

"not fitting in," and conflating being different with LGBTQ victimization.

Consider this news-making example, the first and only NFL team to produce an

IGBP in 2012 by members of the San Francisco 49ers (2013), representing a city deemed

by many as the "gay mecca." The video begins: "There's nothing easy about being

young. About being yourself. About being *an individual* [emphasis added]. Everyday

brings different changes and challenges. That help you define who you are." Not long

after the team's participation, however, a former 49er was revealed to be gay prompting

homophobic remarks and undercutting the message of support for LGBTQ youth. One

player, Brooks, disavowed his participation by claiming he was part of "an anti-bullying

video, not a gay video." Sadly, this admission is supported by the one-minute splicing

that makes just one mention to the LGBTQ community by player, Dante Whitner: "The

San Francisco 49ers are proud to join ItGetsBetter.org to let all LGBT teens know: It gets

better." This characterization is challenging because even though it is valuable to have

an advocate denounce a culture of bullying, this endorsement at the same time minimizes

the connection to gay discrimination particularly within a facet of American culture

rampant in homophobia (Denison, 2015). The issue is that it fails to recognize why it is

important to be both an anti-bullying and an anti-gay discrimination video. While Savage

has removed the video from the site, it can still be found online.

The IGBP prominence of positioning people in power and privilege like

politicians, celebrities, and sports players speaking to youth who may or many not

identify as LGBTQ is also an example of misguided, status quo "trickle-down" social

justice (Spade, 2015). Instead, Spade (2015) advocates that social justice must focus on

the stories of the most vulnerable and worst manifestations of the implications of an

oppressive society. Nair (2011) critiques these limiting and problematic approaches in

regards to framing LGBTQ suicidality around bullying discourse, stating:

> The current rise in the reports of queer youth suicide does not signify
> either an epidemic or a crisis. What we are witnessing is the ongoing
> reality of what it means to be queer in a world where we forego
> complicated, systemic analyses of our issues in favor of simplistic and
> sentimental rhetoric about love and bravery conquering all . . . the long-
> term work of preventing these suicides in a systemic way can only happen
> if we consider queer youth as more than just queer. If we are to address the

issue of queer suicides, we need to think long and hard about actually addressing the depth and complexity of the problem without resorting to magic pill arguments. (p. 12)

Bullying in these representations is articulated as the facts of school life as if the aggressive behavior will magically disappear in adulthood. IGBP calls upon LGBTQ youth to manage their own resistance such as through an act of strength in the face of bullying or the act of seeking help rather than through cultural change or intervention in the norms of the institutional culture. For example, a collection of celebrities from Anne Hathaway to Jenny McCarthy in the *Trevor Project* (2010) submission, an organization providing youth with immediate suicide prevention, publicize these services, reiterate six times to "call the Trevor Project" and that it is a confidential, toll-free, 24-hour hotline. These efforts by the Trevor Project provide vital and often life-saving support to LGBT youth alleviating suicidal ideation, a viable alternative for students struggling with their gender and sexuality, especially within a school setting that may not be a fully supportive environment. While this service is a wonderful supplementary resource for LGBTQ youth, its limitation in the pursuit of collective change is that it primarily addresses the short term concerns of the individual unable to more fully address the long term realities that situates the caller in a culture of despair in the first place.

Conclusion

IGBP has received strong feedback for encouraging LGBTQ youth to remain resilient in response to homophobia especially manifest in schools. However, the project has also received critique for heavily focusing on the well-to-do white gay man whose life appears only better if he finds a partner, moves to the suburbs, and has a child (Cover,

2012; Pullen, 2012, 2014; Tseng, 2010). Its discourse offers the tempting possibility that the embodiment of the Best Boy in the World archetype – fit, well-dressed, good-looking, married, and rich – is well within reach underpinned by genuine hopes of belonging. But the IGBP also illustrates the ways in which homonormative sexuality is deemed most acceptable and thus imposed upon in American society (Duggan, 2003).

In other words, the IGBP seeks to normalize the experiences of privileged LGBTQ couples. The campaign also privileges homonormative relationships founded on monogamy and having children. Tseng (2010) critiques the project for "reminding queer youth that high school ends and the bullying stops: you'll move to an urban gay enclave, meet the man of your dreams, and have a wonderful, sparkly, magical life." Therefore, it gets better only for those who want to conform to a version of "normal" or create the "normal" for the Best Little Boy in the World rather than destabilize the role normalcy plays in terms of making room for certain representations of marginalized genders and sexualities.

The IGBP contradicts its message that it's 'ok to be different,' ignoring the plight of multiple stigmatized identities let alone the social forces that construct an exemplary queer identity by valuing conformity and assimilation. Puar (2010b) furthers that "[IGBP] promotes a narrow version of gay identity that risks further marginalization" by targeting "liberal handholding" and "upward-mobility" messaging she likens to the neoliberal motto of "pull yourself up by the bootstraps" (p. 1). By paving a narrow path towards liberation for those who adhere to these regulated categories, the IGBP message communicated is that it only gets better for some. While the intended message tells young LGBTQ individuals that they, too, will be able to have fulfilling relationships and

families in the future, it teaches these individuals that they must wait until adulthood to be safe or recognized or legitimized and the message that only a few, certain type of LGBTQ individuals belong is taught early on, ever-present in the curricular resources that promote the homonational narrative.

CHAPTER 5: CURRICULARIZING THE HOMONATIONAL

A book about two people who fall in love, two penguins raising a chick or a teenage boy deciding whether and how to "fit in" can become a dangerous presence if the two people both happen to be princes, the two penguins both happen to be male, and the teenage boy happens to be gay.

– Renee DePalma & Elizabeth Atkinson

Alongside qualitative and quantitative accounts of LGBTQ harassment in schools, the It Gets Better Project (IGBP) has played an instrumental role in further promoting inclusive practices in educative settings. Since the IGBP, there has been a proliferation of LGBTQ resources for educators, including guides, lesson plans, kits, and children's books, many of which are available and promoted online. Many of these resources emerge in an effort to confront homophobia in school settings and/or a resistance to include LGBTQ narratives and representation in educational resources. While many of the curricular strategies I discuss do afford queer representation to some extent, such strategies are predicated on fitting within an existing curricular structure, which may not critique the limitations of inclusion into white supremacist, heteronormative and other exclusionary ideologies that shape mainstream institutions. I argue that, in an effort to be inclusive within existing school curricula, the rhetoric these resources employ inevitably contributes to constructing homonormative and homonational subjectivities fulfilling a neoliberal agenda. After aggregating and analyzing nearly 15 sources of LGBTQ educative data (see Appendix), this chapter seeks to examine the process of *curricularizing* the homonational, through a critical examination of the curricular resources offered by two prominent national organizations seeking to improve school climates and educate the public and especially educators about LGBTQ issues – the Gay,

Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and Welcoming Schools, a project of the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) Foundation.

My roadmap for this chapter is as follows. First, I conceptualize curricularizing and the ways in which this process instructs and constructs the homonational subject. Then, I demonstrate the ways that GLSEN and HRC resources are buttressed by "safe spaces" and "welcoming" discourses in response to incidences of bullying. Such discourses promote inclusion as friendly and palatable, but also reveal that inclusion is something granted by those in power deciding who is included and in what capacities. Then, as in Chapter 4, I examine what these resources do and do not tell us, or what is visible and invisible. I unpack the hidden mechanisms by which the LGBTQ subject is brought into being and normalized within these curricula by presenting my critique as components of a lesson plan with three procedures the LGBTQ subject follows as an essential aspect of conforming to homonormative and homonational subjectivities. These procedures include embracing (1) coming out and gender conformity, (2) marriage, reproduction, and the nuclear family, hitherto whiteness, affluence, and consumerism in Chapter 4 and (3) nationalism. I conclude by summarizing the messages of these collective resources and its overall implications. Moreover, I argue that these resources provide a series of parameters as to what defines a proper LGBTQ subject. I will illustrate that while these well-intended organizations and its resources aim to provide the promise of belonging its narrow vision imbued with messages of normalization reinforces the notion that queerness is only acceptable in society when it is substantiated or when it co-exists within the exclusionary properties as defined in my critical inclusion framework. Finally, in closing, I transition to Chapter 6, which entertains an alternative

path that is critical of inclusion – *undoing* the homonational – by locating examples of

curricular resistance or what I refer to as *counter inclusion*.

LESSON PLAN

Goal: Include the LGBTQ student

I am inspired by Valdés (2015), who conceptualizes *curricularizing* in the context of

language. As she defines it:

> [I]ts 'teaching' is approached as if it were an ordinary academic subject,
> the learning of which is parallel to learning science, history, or
> mathematics. It is assumed that 'language' can be 'taught' and 'learned' in
> classroom settings, it 'study' awarded units of credit, and its 'learning'
> generally assessed by paper and pencil examinations. (p. 257)

I extend on Valdés' discussion of curricularizing language in order to analyze how the

homonational subject is curricularized. This conceptualization furthers the normative

rhetoric of inclusion and is quite powerful in the ways in which well-intended resources

can play an enduring role in the production of the homonational subject. A collection of

resources, byproducts of the curriculum, that are predicated upon neoliberal values that

make claims about what is worth knowing (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1996);

inextricably linking power and knowledge (Foucault 1980a); and taking into account

what is explicit, what is implicit, and even what is null is explored below (Eisner, 1985).

What follows after this goal is the objective – to create a "safe" and "welcoming" space –

and then the procedure or step-by-step description of how to achieve the intended goal of

"including" the LGBTQ subject and the unintended goal of deploying the homonational

through normative curricular resources. Finally, a conclusion summarizes how these

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components of the lesson plan are linked together and the implications of this deployment as educators consider the best ways to approach and support LGBTQ issues and youth.

Objective: Provide a Safe & Welcoming Space

The curricularizing of the homonational subjects begins with where we left off in Chapter 4 – the inability for inclusion as delineated through the IGBP to offer social change with its individualistic framings centered primarily on the themes of bullying, bias, and homophobia. Concomitantly, GLSEN (see: Safe Space Kit: A Guide to Supporting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Students in Your School), and HRC's Welcoming Schools (see: Welcoming Schools Approach) prioritizes the same education with its focus on individual prejudice and/or misconceptions through conversations focusing on language and introducing their resources with the primary objective of creating a "safe" and/or "welcoming" space for LGBTQ students.

The "safe schools" movement can be traced back to the 80s and 90s when activists were fighting to improve LGBTQ school climate (Sadowski, 2016). Influenced by safety discourse, the Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth in Massachusetts was established in 1989 leading to what is known as the *Safe Schools Program*. This language and its accompanying principles spread throughout the country (see: California Safe Schools Coalition, Washington (State) Safe Schools Coalition). Sadowski (2016) synthesizes this movement into three components: anti-bullying programs, Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), and LGBTQ "safe zones." For example, stickers, such as this one below, designate the space as a "safe zone" and make such spaces more visible:

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Figure 6: GLSEN Safe Space Resources

This effort is noble in communicating a message of intolerance towards harassment. Yet, this attempt at creating safe spaces also raises several questions. What does a "safe" or "welcoming" space communicate to its invitees? What does this mean for the rest of a building or school? If a certain person occupies a "safe zone," what does this mean about spaces not designated as "safe" or "welcoming?" What guarantees are and should be accorded to those in "safe" and "welcoming spaces?" Is inclusion merely a space carved out amidst planes of exclusion? And is a member of the LGBTQ community supposed to believe that they are in need of being made safe or welcomed? These questions raise concerns as to the limits of such framing discourses, which will animate the rest of this chapter.

Prominent traces of safety discourse pervade an analysis of the framings of many LGBTQ support-based resources. For example, there are examples across the spectrum of this discourse in action within the two case studies, GLSEN and HRC. GLSEN's Safe Space Kit has a "Know the Issues" section which implies that to create a safe space for LGBTQ youth there are three particular issues that will help: allyships, assessing one's personal beliefs in a "Check Yourself" activity, and learning LGBTQ terminology. A

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"Check Yourself" activity is the first step in realizing that "anti-LGBT bias is all around us," but not as to why and how. It ends by challenging its participants to "Talk the Talk," which involves familiarizing oneself with LGBTQ terms including referring to individuals by preferred personal pronouns. This emphasis on language plays a pivotal role in creating a safe, welcoming, and ultimately an inclusive space. And to some extent, language – self-labeling and respecting pronouns – does very important work. Such work assumes an element of respect for the person who is speaking, for example. The problem is that language does not necessarily effect social change. For example, using someone's correct pronoun is an important first step in improving the lives of gender non-conforming people. Yet, so long as institutions continue to be shaped by white supremacy, heteronormativity and other systems of oppression, the material conditions of many gender non-conforming individuals will continue to suffer.

The Welcoming Schools Starter Kit, "grounded in research that links improved academic achievement and social-emotional well-being with an inclusive school climate" begins with a "Bias, Bullying, and Bystanders: Tips for K – 8 School Educators." While the kit attempts to broaden an understanding of what bias might look like by citing that "[o]ver three-quarters of middle school students who are harassed say that the harassment is related . . . to their race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, actual or perceived sexual orientation, religion or disability," its very next lesson on how to address hurtful language includes a preponderance of space that perceived sexual orientation and the phrase, "that's so gay!" as of utmost concern. This emphasis is made clearer in the final section of the kit, "Responding to Some Concerns about being LGBTQ Inclusive," when a disclaimer is provided:

When you try to be inclusive of lesbian, gay, and transgender people and topics, questions and concerns may arise in conversations with parents, guardians, administrators or school boards.

While conversations about race, ethnicity, class and religion remain difficult for many people, our society generally shares the value of respect — or at least tolerance — for people who are of a different religious, racial, cultural or ethnic background than our own. We can largely agree that certain race-based or religious-based slurs are unacceptable, and we expect educators and all school related personnel to intervene when they see or hear harassment or name-calling based on characteristics associated with these categories.

However, anti-gay attitudes or behavior are often tolerated, and many students still "get away" with using gay or gender-based slurs that can be very hurtful to students. Because LGBTQ people and topics are often not included in teacher education programs, it may be that educators have less knowledge or comfort with intervening or having conversations with students about these topics. For the parents and guardians in your school community, the idea of talking with students about LGBTQ topics may raise many questions.

This passage overlooks the ways that race, ethnicity, class and religion are constituted amidst axes of gender and sexuality differentiation and stratification. Although the writers of that guide recognize that "None of us are just one thing—we all have sexual, gender, religious, ethnic, racial, class, and other identities that combine in complex ways," the suggestion that anti-LGBTQ bias can be constructed over and against other types of oppression is maintained. This is consistent with the ways that "safe space" discourses have typically been taken up in LGBTQ advocacy. Countless researchers have revealed that such "safe space" discourses operate within a normalizing gaze rendering LGBTQ subjectivities in simplistic and reductive ways (Fox, 2007; Mayo, 2014; Rasmussen, 2006; Sadowski, 2010, 2016; Talburt, 2004). Such discourse normalization elides the relationship between power and privilege and the ways identities come into being relationally too: "how a variety of forms of oppression intertwine

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systemically with each other; and especially how the person who is disabled through one set of oppressions may *by the same positioning* be enabled through others" (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 32).

This erasure of the ways that race, gender, social class and other forms of social differentiation intersect with sexuality leads to the assumption that "safe spaces" are safe for all LGBTQ youth. This contributes to a false sense of unity and suggests LGBTQ solidarity that does not consider the strategic significance of the meanings attached to other forms of social differentiation. Thus, although "safe zones" may be designated spaces for queer expressions and identifications of gender and sexuality, they ultimately provide an illusion of community indifferent to the issues afforded by more intentional intersectional approaches. For example, "safe space" scholarship focused on queer youth of color (Fox & Ore, 2010; McCready, 2004, 2010; Sadowski, 2016) and transgender students (Sadowski, 2016) alerts us to ways that these groups may be marginalized by LGBTQ student organizations comprised predominantly of cisgender white people (McCready, 2004, 2010). When confronted with this marginalization, such students often choose not to associate with LGBTQ groups like GSAs because, in fact, they are not "safe" within this space. Importantly, the same challenges are often confronted by queer people of color in race-based identity spaces that focus on racial inclusion in ways that do not account for the intersectional oppression confronting queer people of color produced by white supremacy and heteronormativity (McCready, 2004, 2010).

In many ways, the resources are not accounting for structural oppression at all. Instead, the theory of change seems to be that using appropriate terminology will lead to more inclusive spaces that will, in turn, lead to the end of the marginalization of LGBTQ

students. These resources and their terminological focus operate from a mindset that so long as people are using the right terminology the issue has been resolved even if people still feel uncomfortable in having difficult conversations. They also overlook the fact that schools are still not serving students of color well even if they are using the right terminology and by framing issues of inclusion as changes to individual behavior – "please, don't say THAT" – rather than structural change and thus those who are likely to benefit are those who are already privileged in other ways (i.e. white gay men). For example, there is a lot of space to recognize the injurious effects of labels and epithets, such as "that's so gay," or "you are a fag," or "dyke!" (see: Welcoming Schools, "Words that Hurt and Words that Heal" or GLSEN's "No Name Calling Week" and "ThinkB4YouSpeak" campaign).

Programs framed as either Safe Spaces (e.g. GLSEN Safe Space Kit: Be an Ally to LGBTQ Youth!) and/or anti-bullying, with its emphasis on marking spaces (e.g. stickers) and overemphasizing terminology run the risk of failing to be disruptive to the social hierarchy and the systems of power that put them there remaining intact. On the one hand, the investment in safe spaces and LGBTQ terminology presents a micro-political change, which is respectful and promising at face value. On the other hand, these spaces and language instructions gives the illusion of safety to the extent that outward homophobia and transphobia will not be tolerated while leaving unaddressed the need for structural change. This issue is all the more disconcerting if LGBTQ youth are socialized into the expectation that spaces produced through these systems of oppression are the types of spaces they ought to be seeking to be included in as they navigate the rest of their lives.

Procedure # 1: Come Out & Conform!

Now that spaces have been designated as "safe" and welcoming," the homonational is encouraged to share his story about his fears, wants, and desires and for the purpose of this section, is exemplified through children's books, that HRC's Welcoming Schools and/or GLSEN highlight on their webpages and/or educator's guides. There, these organizations spotlight tales that have moved past the heteronormative narrative to a homonormative one in which LGBTQ youth are encouraged to be out and proud from the first very page. These prominent texts are not only spotlighted on the GLSEN and HRC Welcoming Schools website, but also receive attention on lists such as "30 LGBTQIA-Positive Children's Books That'll Teach Kids How Beautifully Diverse The World Is" (Bustle, 2015) and "21 LGBT Picture Books Every Kid Should Read" (Advocate, 2016). These recommended children's books are welcomed and even laudable engaging in important work by promoting LGBTQ visibility and pushing back against the heteronormative narrative in the face of intense pushback to any queer representation in the curriculum (simply Google "LGBT children's books" and "censorship"). However, they aren't nearly as transgressive as they appear inscribing homonormative ideals and thus reinscribing certain queerness as acceptable and other queerness as not acceptable particularly with their focus on the themes of coming out, gender conformity, and perseverance.

The IGBP played an instrumental role in celebrating coming out and GLSEN and HRC by the very nature of their existence and function are predicated upon role modeling the process. For example, HRC provides a "Resource Guide to Coming Out." It begins:

Being brave doesn't mean that you're not scared. It means that if you are scared, you do the thing you're afraid of anyway. Coming out and living openly as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or supportive straight person is an act of bravery and authenticity. Whether it's for the first time ever, or for the first time today, coming out may be the most important thing you will do all day.

The benefits to coming out the resource lists are notable:

The Benefits of Coming Out:

■ Living an open and whole life.
■ Developing closer, more genuine relationships.
■ Building self-esteem from being known and loved for our whole selves.
■ Reducing the stress of hiding our identity.
■ Connecting with others who are LGBT.
■ Being part of a strong and vibrant community.
■ Helping to dispel myths and stereotypes about who LGBT people are and what our lives are like.
■ Becoming a role model for others.
■ Making it easier for younger LGBT people who will follow in our footsteps.

The homonational is seduced into a more "vibrant" world where stronger relationships and a greater sense of self are the prize. But the homonational also has a huge amount of responsibility as someone who is expected to represent the community in a proper manner reaching a hand to the next generation and ultimately playing a strategic role in demonstrating the ways queerness can be a viable and acceptable mode of belonging. These benefits, however, speak to Hunter (2009) and its conflation of coming out as "healthy" queerness with the potential to construe not coming out in negative terms (Hunter, 2009). This initial expectation also presents itself as a problem for many LGBTQ youth of color, who uniquely rely on their families and communities for financial support that may be even more threatened than their white counterparts if they come out of the closet and who are not necessarily welcome into the LGBTQ community

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plagued with the same racism of mainstream U.S. society (Kumashiro, 2001).

Coming out transitions to conformity as exemplified by texts that perpetuate gender normativity. This is prominently emphasized in stories that feature transgender and other gender non-conforming children as protagonists maintaining binary normative conceptions of gender. A surprisingly large number of LGBTQ children's books amidst the scant archive takes up the trope of the dress, an integral symbol of gender variance if not femininity. The desire to wear clothes that do not correspond with traditional notions of gender is a reoccurring theme with narratives serving to explore the possible repercussions for not fitting into or abiding by common notions about masculinity and femininity. They include *10,000 Dresses* (Ewert & Ray, 2008), *The Boy in the Dress* (Walliams & Blake, 2009), *My Princess Boy* (Kilodavis & DeSimone, 2011), *Jacob's New Dress* (Hoffman, Hoffman, & Case, 2014), and the most recent and Stonewall Book Award winner, *Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress* (Baldacchino & Malenfant, 2016).

10,000 Dresses (Ewert & Ray, 2008) is a prominent example of this genre of children's book, by telling Bailey's story. Bailey lives as a boy to her family, but "does not feel like a boy," so she lives as a girl in her dreams where she whips up one-of-a-kind, awe-inspiring dress designs. While Bailey's parents ascribe masculine expectations – "Boys don't wear dresses!" – the narrator refers to Bailey the way she intends, as a girl. On the one hand, this text challenges assumption about gender identity in children, but on the other, it presupposes that Bailey's sense of girlness transposes onto her desire to wear and design dresses. That is, because she is a girl she must want to wear dresses. There are certainly transgender girls who this experience will offer resonance. In fact, for many

trans youth, the ability to "pass" and conform is a matter of survival – the only means to access bathroom and locker-rooms without fear of harassment (Angello & Bowman, 2016). In addition, the story is admirable in its respect of Bailey to self-define through her willingness to express herself in defiance of her family and broader societal expectations. Therefore, texts such as *10,000 Dresses* do two things: (1) they help articulate potentially life-saving strategies for educators, parents, and children in that they present trans identity as acceptable, but (2) in an attempt to normalize these identities, they also reinforce gender binaries. On the one hand, Bailey sharing her dreams of dress-making and then wearing a dress of mirrors, which "show us OURSELVES," pushes against normative gender assumptions and yet the trope it relies upon in longing to be a girl reinscribes the binary.
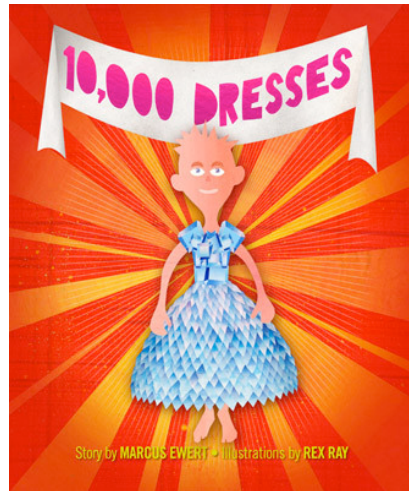
Figure 7: 10,000 Dresses Book Cover

The issue of challenging gender norms all the while in a quest for acceptance is also at the heart of *Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress* (Baldacchino & Malenfant, 2016), which tells the tale of Morris who "loves to paint . . . do puzzles . . .

apple juice at snack time . . . most of all" he loves wearing a tangerine dress in the dress-up center of his classroom. His classmates perceive his fascination with the tangerine dress as a problem. "Dresses," they say, "are for girls. They even exclude him from helping them build a spaceship: "Astronauts," they say, "don't wear dresses."

Figure 8: "Astronauts Don't Wear Dresses!"

These words and these actions lead a despondent and physically ill Morris to stay at home where he works through his pain by imagining an awesome astronomical world. The boys are impressed by his vivid imagination. "It didn't matter if astronauts wore dresses or not," the boys decide, because "the best astronauts were the ones who knew where all the good adventures were hiding." Morris receives their acceptance with exuberance. This theme of perseverance is reminiscent of the Best Little Boy in the World. Protagonists must overcome: acceptance is offered when it comes with the caveat that additional spectacular traits or talents are presented. Lester (2014) argues in her intersectional analysis of LGBTQ children's literature that these patterns might seem positive as the characters end up accepted, but are in fact problematic:

> [T]hese characters bear the burden of proving that they are acceptable, rather than an expectation that the communities must change their way of thinking. The implication of this expectation is that there is something wrong with gender nonconforming behavior—so wrong that even children must make up for it by being exceptional. These cases of privileging individual exceptionalism as the only way of gaining acceptance still maintain that gender nonconformity is unacceptable and should be avoided. (p. 250)

It's in these exceptional narratives that the homonational is inculcated with greatness and that the need to further pursue this greatness is maintained.

While it should be lauded when schools or organizations promote positive images of LGBTQ youth in an attempt to promote perseverance and acceptance, books featuring LGBTQ characters deemed progressive and inclusive by antiquated school standards, these stories can do more damage than good by reinforcing stereotypes rather than presenting dynamic, multifaceted portrayals of queerness. Relying upon the whimsical, white, and middle, upper-class protagonist to forge a path only further perpetuates and entrenches this stereotype. Finally, when acceptance approximates closely to the normative social order, the message is clear – come out and conform while also having LGBTQ youth perceive that it is reasonable to deflect stigma in an arduous quest to belong.

Procedure # 2: Get Married, Have a Baby, & Make a Family

The next order of business after coming out and embracing conformity through acts of perseverance is to find your soul mate – or what Bryan (2012) describes as "the inevitability of pairing" – get married, have a child, and start a family. HRC's Welcoming Schools and GLSEN endorse marriage and the family likely because of what

these institutions represent as a source of financial, legal, and emotional benefits.

However, such an endorsement reinforces the depths of hetero and cisnormativity –

transmitted from one generation to the next – rather than challenging the status quo. On

the HRC Welcoming Schools website, there's a "Who Can Marry Whom? Inclusive

Conversations About Marriage," tab that helps educators answer student questions

"quickly and succinctly" reinforcing what Warner (1993) describes as "generational

transmission:"

> **"Why would two women or two men want to get married?"**
> "Because they love each other and want to be together as a family – the
> same reason all people get married. They want to make a commitment to
> each other and care for each other for the rest of their lives."
>
> **"How can two women have children? Don't you need a dad?"**
> "Children come into families in many different ways. Some families may
> have both a mom and a dad, some have a mom or a dad and some have
> two moms or two dads. What's important is to have a family that loves
> and cares for you." (Note: If you have a child with two dads or two moms
> in your classroom, it can be helpful to know how their parents talk about
> their family. This will help you respond to other students' questions.

The Welcoming Schools homepage opens in big and bold white capital letters, "Creating

Safe and Welcoming Schools for *All Children & Families* [emphasis added]." There is

an entire section of books devoted to family diversity: "books with two moms and two

dads," and "diverse books that celebrate adoption." In "4 Simple Ways to Start the Year

with a Welcoming Classroom" the Welcoming Schools kit alerts teachers to "create a

display of books featuring all kinds of families and recommends a "Is Your Family Like

Mine?" panel discussion to see the diversity that exists within and across families.

GLSEN prominently spotlights the book, *Heather Has Two Mommies* (Newman

& Cornell, 2016), on their LGBT-inclusive curriculum tab. Beyond its twenty-fifth

anniversary, the first lesbian-themed children's book ever published is spotlighted as "Heather still has two mommies: and we still love her." Interestingly, this commitment to the family and adoption appears in texts like *And Tango Makes Three* (Richardson & Parnell, 2015), *King & King* (De Haan & Nijland, 2003), *King & King & Family* (De Haan & Nijland, 2004), recurrently the most "challenged" books in the U.S., an honor bestowed upon texts that receive the most complaints filed by a library or school, according to the American Library Association (2017). These narratives simultaneously contest prevalent images about the heteronormative nuclear family and while also affirming the homonormative nuclear family as the ultimate source of belonging and contentment.

  And Tango Makes Three, for example, cements the Welcoming Schools family compulsion – "What's important is to have a family that loves and cares for you." – by anthropomorphizing two adorable gay penguins, Roy and Silo. Because of the kindness of a keen and compassionate Central Park Zoo zookeeper, who is aware of their affections, Roy and Silo get a chance to have a baby of their own. Two "little bit different" penguins destined to be "daddies" welcome a penguin, obscure the absence of the baby's mother, and reach the conclusion that "it takes two to make a Tango." In a mere few pages, coupling, monogamy, childrearing, and kinship are treated as the only viable resolution to Roy and Silo's longing and cemented with Tango as their most precious gift.

Roy and Silo taught Tango how to sing for them when she was hungry.
They fed her food from their beaks. They snuggled her in their nest at night.

Tango was the very first penguin in the zoo to have two daddies.

Figure 9: Roy & Silo Teach Tango to Sing

Another instance of a queer couple wishing to have a baby and equally if not more problematic in its erasure of race, class, and imperialistic overtones in this pursuit is the tale of two gay princes who fall in love in *King & King*, a book that recently made headlines when a good-natured teacher resigned after parents filed a complaint against him for wanting to promote a gay-friendly atmosphere in his classroom after a student had been shamed as "gay" in gym class (Schaub, 2015). In the follow-up, *King & King & Family*, the two married princes-turned-kings take a trip to an unnamed country – the "jungle" – to bring home "the child they've always wanted." They engage in an upper-class life of leisure as they further the homonational ideal. The image below captures all of this complexity in a single page:

> "It's been a wonderful trip," King Lee said. "I can't wait to tell everyone about everything we've seen."

> "All those animals with their babies," King Bertie sighed.
> "I wish we had a little one of our own."

Figure 10: King & King Want a Baby

And eventually the two Kings do have a child of their own: Princess Daisy. And

compared to their pallid skin and royal dress, Princess Daisy, with darker skin, dark

brown hair, and casual dress stands out. As the only character of color this furthers to

"Other" by drawing attention to her difference. The royal family in the book can only

explain her difference by exoticizing her and relegating her to the jungle as a primitive,

uncivilized being. For example, the Queen exclaims: "Oh, my, it's a little girl from the

jungle!" And because these Kings are rich and all-powerful Daisy can be whisked into

their lives unquestioned. Puar (2007) points out how the cost of gay acceptance,

particularly as it transcends Western understanding and penetrates the global sphere in a

war-like manner includes "tactics, strategies, and logistics" as exemplified in *King &*

King and extended into *King & King & Family*:

> [N]ormativizing gay and lesbian human rights frames, which produce (in
> tandem with gay tourism) gay-friendly and not-gay-friendly nations; the
> queer "market virility" that can simulate heteronormative paternity
> through the purchase of reproductive technology; the return to kinship and
> family norms implicit in the new lesbian "global family," complete with

transnational adoptee babies; and market accommodation that has fostered
multibillion-dollar industries in gay tourism, weddings, investment
opportunities, and retirement. (p. xiv)

In each of these stories, for example, the LGBTQ subjects are participating in a

decidedly homonational life embracing white, middle-class values, gender-conforming

roles, and treating marriage and the family as a guarantee of a happy ending while

overcoming adversity. These examples are not isolated. Recent scholarship into LGBTQ

children's literature confirms the erasure of race, class, and nationality and its

intersections, especially representations of lower class and LGBTQ characters of color

(Lester, 2014; Shannahan, 2010; Taylor, 2012). The idealized family is placed front and

center and the message in regards to inclusion is that the only way to live a fulfilled life is

to spend time and money on whatever it takes to make that happen and to then maintain

such a life too. Being a part of a family not only gives meaning and purpose but also

presents LGBTQ families in a homonormative palatable way as they converge with their

heterosexual counterparts and embody the homonational ideal.

Procedure # 3: Be Proud, Be a Patriot

From a framework of educative resources that push a homonormative narrative,

homonationalism embraces a neoliberal vision of society that views an exemplary

LGBTQ member of society as someone who supports the country in a public fashion.

For example, nearly all of the organizations provide a means to enable LGBTQ youth to

advance inclusion in their schools and communities by translating the gay and lesbian

rights movement national model of inclusion to a rights-based approach in schools and

communities (Quinn & Meiners, 2013; Spade, 2015). This includes "know your rights"

sections on websites to advance progress in the areas of anti-discrimination and anti-

bullying policies communicating to LGBTQ youth that the best way to respond to the

violence they endure is through increased surveillance and punishment (Quinn &

Meiners, 2013; Spade, 2015).

The GLSEN website, for example, provides model anti-bullying and harassment

policies:

> Let's face it – bullying and harassment based on sexual orientation and
> gender identity/expression are way too common in our schools. And this
> isn't just in this school or that state – this is a nationwide problem. And we
> want to be part of the solution.

The problem with a rights-based approach is that while admirable in an attempt to protect

students from harm, it simultaneously perpetuates the hegemonic system by narrowly

focusing on ways to punish the perpetrator and thus providing a false sense of social

justice (Quinn & Meiners, 2013; Spade, 2015). The faulty logic is that by simply

removing these "bad apples" from schools, according to Quinn and Meiners (2013),

educative spaces will become safer places for everyone. Quinn and Meiners (2013)

reflect upon this faulty logic, stating:

> Not only is there no evidence that anti-gay bullying laws, like other forms
> of hate crimes legislation, will act as a deterrent toward bias-related harm,
> this criminalizing response circulates in a landscape where LGBT youth
> are already disproportionately punished by state entities tasked with
> ensuring our collective safety and security. (p. 158).

These approaches impose upon schools a culture of punishment that has been found to be

racist missing out on an opportunity to alternatively foster a culture of care and

understanding and remediation that speaks to the ways in which violent acts are enacted

upon certain individuals in the first place. As the momentum of inclusion escalates, there

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should be a concern for the ways in which these discourses position certain LGBTQ students obscuring transformative possibilities at the school and societal level.

These resources further forge a relationship between LGBTQ subjectivity and the country through the theme of service. They encourage youth, for example, to participate in its civic apparatuses such as the military and volunteerism. These homonational underpinnings are highlighted in GLSEN's *Unheard Voices: Stories of LGBTQ History. Unheard Voices*, as its title suggests, is a compendium of missing stories from contemporary middle and high school history textbooks GLSEN created in partnership with the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and StoryCorps covering nine stories that range from "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" to Boy Scouts of America (BSA) membership policy. For example, the first unheard voice spotlights Kendall Bailey, a U.S. marine discharged from the military under the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy after his sergeant discovered phone texts between Kendall and his boyfriend. Kendall reflects:

Kendall Bailey *joined the U-S Marine Corps in 2001.*

Five years later he was a sergeant assigned to a recruiting office in Virginia and was considering becoming career military.

At StoryCorps, Kendall told his friend, Don Davis, how because of Don't Ask, Don't Tell those plans changed.

Figure 11: Unheard Voices: Kendall Bailey's Story

On my discharge paperwork, it says RE4 and that means I am never ever allowed to be in the military again, which sucks. I mean if I could go back, I would . . . my life changed dramatically when I got out. I'm able to hang out with my boyfriend and hold hands walking down the street. Obviously I'm very disappointed that I can't serve, but my feelings toward the military really didn't change. Its just being equal is something that I think everyone deserves and obviously we have a long way to go.

James Dale, is an American rights activist, known for his role in *Boy Scouts of America v. Dale*, a Supreme Court case that challenged the BSA policy of disallowing gay men from serving as Scout leaders. James shares his reaction to the BSA when they discovered his gay activism as a sophomore at Rutgers University:

In 2000 the United States Supreme Court ruled that the Boy Scouts of America could refuse membership to people who identify as gay.

It was a ten-year court battle.

*The plaintiff in the case was **James Dale,** who began scouting when he was eight years old. By the time he entered Rutgers University, he had achieved the rank Assistant Scout Master as an adult.*

Here, Dale remembers how he ended up as a lightning rod for gay rights in the United States.

Figure 12: Unheard Voices: James Dale's Story

> I didn't really think much of it. But then as a result of that, I received a letter in the mail from the Boy Scouts. They said "avowed homosexuals" are not permitted in the Boy Scouts of America, which kind of blindsided me because I think as a gay kid, I didn't fit in a lot of places, but the Boy Scouts was some place where I felt important and valuable and connected.

These examples of two white, gay men fighting to be a part of systems that have histories of discrimination is telling in that their criticism highlights how they are ostracized from the very organizations that accepted them but for their gay identities. On the surface it brings the Best Little Boy in the World to light, gay men willing to deflect their sexuality by embracing some of the most prominent leadership roles symbolic of American patriotism, but it also reveals the potency of such membership – the allure of normalcy. Both Kendall and James reveal a desire that these institutions accommodate the interests of gay men by recognizing that they really aren't that different from members of their respective groups, but were not afforded the opportunity to embrace the spaces simultaneously, and that their gay identities cost them their affiliations. James concludes, "Ultimately that's kinda what I was thinking that the Boy Scouts would do

with me, not that they were thrilled that I would be gay and visibly gay, but I did think they would rise to the occasion." These stories maintain a commitment to presenting oneself as All-American and even the ways in which those who are excluded will persist to be "welcomed" and "accepted."

A common thread present in creating the homonational ideal is that the heroes of the stories must overcompensate the politicization of these events by insisting that they have no intent to undermine the social order, that they are not a danger – not a danger to their schools and classmates, not a danger to the institution of marriage, not a danger to be a dad, not a danger to serve in the military, and not a danger to images of Americana like the BSA. After all, these were many of the milestones they had to endure to "fit in." Puar and Rai (2002) and Puar (2007) insist that these appeals to the nation and its maintenance of security allows the "docile patriot" to be included – assimilated – and to shield the system from criticism in its (un)intended effort to make (in this case) the military and BSA more gay-friendly, a signal of progress in American society.

Unfortunately, *Unheard Voices* misses out on the opportunity to deploy a more nuanced definition of inclusion and exclusion. For example, it does not take into account the most recent events surrounding trans rights or how the repeal of the *Affordable Care Act* and passage of the *First Amendment Defense Act* could provide a nationwide license to discriminate against LGBTQ people in the name of religion. Asking for the "inclusion" of gay people, which is really at the heart of a Welcoming Schools approach is further exacerbated by the larger mission of the HRC critiqued by scholars as homonormative (Goldberg-Hiller, 2007; Wilchins, 2014), a damning internal report describing the organization as a "white men's club" (Geidner, 2015; Griffin, 2015).

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Qualitative accounts of white privilege and the exclusion of LGBTQ of color in the

organization persist online and demonstrates the ways in which HRC misses out on the

opportunity:

> [T]o provoke conversations about the complex mechanics of power in
> U.S. culture and politics; about the relationship between the discourses of
> masculinity, militarism and international politics; or about the complex
> ways that gender and sexual norms function in both national and
> international contexts. (Wallowitz, 2008, p. 91)

Closing Activity: Eat a Scoop of Vanilla Ice Cream

When Nixon (2012) described the criticism of LGBTQ inclusion strategies in

primary school settings, he ultimately referred to the curricular tendency to produce the

heteronormative ideal as "vanilla strategies." It's a fitting close to a lesson to eat a scoop

of vanilla ice cream when reflecting upon what inclusion is and what it actually

accomplishes. The inability for the examples above to subvert the current system makes

such a metaphor of a basic or bland consumption apropos. These shortcomings

demonstrate the need for complicated discussion "about the meanings, presumptions,

methods, and intentions" of such inclusive approaches (Wallowitz, 2008, p. 91). What do

educators think they will accomplish by insisting that LGBTQ youth, mainly white gays

and lesbians, be included and that such inclusions might lead to assuming an LGBTQ

character is white and middle class? What do they hope to accomplish by prioritizing

visibility and conformity?

The critique offered is not about attacking a particular children's book or

organization. They contribute, after all, to challenging heteronormativity, which is

important and inspiring work. My intent has been, instead, to point to the ways that a

challenge to heteronormativity can easily succumb to homonormative narratives that, in turn, serve a broader homonationalist agenda that permits the inclusion of certain acceptable queer subjects at the expense of the most vulnerable members of the LGBTQ community. These resources seek to ward off queerness even as it invokes gay and lesbian identities with these bland all-American images operating through the production of images and resources coding LGBTQ youth for a mass audience. The inclusion of LGBTQ defining itself as resembling heterosexuality, whiteness, and masculinity will be "at best an addendum waiting to be nullified" (Phelan, 2001, p. 13) and is rooted in an "[u]nstable politics of hope and fear – hope that they [LGBTQ individuals] might be included, and fear that the tide will turn" (p. 114).

Educators interested in countering injustice through inclusion might want to engage with scholarship critical of tolerance, a discourse that also politically asserts its hostility towards difference by succumbing to normalization (Brown, 2008; Cover, 2012; Wallowitz, 2008). Furthermore, inclusion like tolerance through its various procedures provides students with a means to establish the boundaries of normal by identifying "safe" and "welcoming" spaces rather than invite an investigation of the relations of power these strategies and boundaries to begin with misses out on an opportunity to examine relations of power that are responsible for the strategies and the boundaries in the first place (Wallowitz, 2008). Further, these strategies and approaches can reinforce the homonational project by effectively erasing the voices of those deemed most vulnerable and the issues those voices contend with on a daily basis by placing the burden on the youth themselves and absolving school culture and/or the culture at large (Meyer, 2007).

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Critically, this reading also doesn't account for the many ways in which LGBTQ youth resist such spaces and press upon the counters of normalcy in dynamic ways. As we shall see in Chapter 6, these inclusionary efforts do not exist in a vacuum. LGBTQ youth present alternative responses and stories counter to inclusion or *counter inclusion* disrupting the narrative of worthiness in a battle against the mainstream. In this regard, LGBTQ youth who lead the ways in which queerness can be conceptualized without conjuring themselves as in need of assimilation are particularly enlightening in response to the proliferation of such curricular representations.

CHAPTER 6: UNDOING THE HOMONATIONAL

If I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive.

— Audre Lorde

Where there is power, there is resistance.

— Michel Foucault

As I have demonstrated in my analyses of various inclusion campaigns and curricula, much of this work has been predicated on arrogating the identities of queer subjects to national projects – the affluent homonormative subject, the loyal homonational. One of the key tactics by which inclusion manages queerness is through curricularization. Reading inclusion through Judith Butler's concept of undoing (see: *Undoing Gender*) is illuminating as to how such an approach is bound in acknowledging how the relationship between power and resistance to normativity speaks to the precarity of life. Butler (2004) describes how, through processes of recognition and incorporation, people are constituted as social beings. Undoing, according to Butler, is articulated as performative resistance: "[t]o intervene in the name of transformation means precisely to disrupt what has become settled knowledge and knowable reality and to use, as it were, one's unreality to make an otherwise impossible or illegible claim" (p. 27). And it is in this undoing that this chapter seeks to find its voice.

After demonstrating the ways in which the homonormative and homonational are created and further curricularized in Chapter 4 and 5, respectively, this chapter seeks to demonstrate that homonormative and homonational subjectivities are also simultaneously being undone through LGBTQ resistance that opposes intelligibility. It would be a

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travesty to ignore otherwise. Although normativity confers livability, according to Butler (2004), LGBTQ people continue to exude worthiness inside and outside the barriers of inclusion. Such examples exist within and beyond the IGBP, within and beyond mainstream national LGBTQ curricular resources, articulating an existence that exceeds the narrow, categorical and often binary auspices of coming out, conformity, whiteness, affluence, marriage, reproduction, and/or nationalism.

My roadmap is as follows. First, I conceptualize what I mean by undoing the homonational and how this undoing is animated through critical inclusion. Then, I highlight four examples that constitute *counter inclusion*, or curricular examples that disrupt the homonormative and homonational concepts by highlighting resistance. My first example demonstrates that even amidst the IGBP campaign there are videos – *It Gets Better, Rural Dykes!* and *It Doesn't Get Better. You Get Stronger* – disrupting LGBTQ universalizing amidst its messages of normalization. My second example, *Reteaching Gender & Sexuality*, is a youth-produced video that takes on the IGBP and its curricular manifestations by speaking out forcefully against promulgated homonormative and homonational discourses and demonstrates the possibilities of a critical inclusion discourse as a means to support the LGBTQ community. My third example furthers this examination – the Audre Lorde Project – an organization whose resources are equally available to educators online and yet contributes to a much more comprehensive, intersectional response to LGBTQ issues. Finally, I summarize my arguments and transition into Chapter 7, which provides a few evaluative practices bridging this chapter to an area of proposed future research.

The Undoing of the Homonational & Counter Inclusion

Butler (2004) writes that "sometimes a normative conception . . . can undo one's personhood, undermining the capacity to persevere in a livable life" (p. 1). Though she was writing this in the context of gender, one might apply this to the many normative facets of LGBTQ inclusion from the propagation of heteronormativity to the ascendancy of whiteness, consumerism, and nationalism that can undo one's personhood and make life seem unlivable (Butler, 2004). Applying a normative method of inclusion does not actually improve the lives of marginalized communities, but in fact presents yet another litmus test to belong. For Butler, "undoing" or disentangling and deconstructing exclusionary norms is a necessary step in reimagining a greater livability believing that it is also necessary to refute recognition and incorporation in sociality to reclaim possession of the self. Thus Butler's critique might be reimagined not solely as a project of deconstruction, but a productive project that strives towards improving the material conditions of LGBTQ people. This endeavor of deconstruction circulates throughout this dissertation by exposing and critiquing normative and performative constructions of identity. Now, the dissertation shifts to supporting resistance with a call to conceptualize new approaches to social change: "[i]f methodologies have been used to silence and marginalize people . . . then methodologies can also give voice and turn the margins into places of transformative resistance" (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002, p. 37). Mills (1997) adds:

> Thus, individual subjects should not be seen simply to adopt roles which
> are mapped out for them by discourses; rather, they experience discomfort
> with certain elements implicit in discourses, they find pleasure in some
> elements, they are openly critical about others. Individual subjects are
> constantly weighing up their own perception of their own position in

relation to these discursive norms against what they assume other individuals or groups perceive their position to be. In this way, the process of finding a position for oneself within discourse is never fully achieved, but is rather one of constantly evaluating and considering one's position and, inevitably, constantly shifting one's perception of one's position and the wider discourse as a whole. (p. 87)

For Butler (2004), a livable life requires work: it takes real time and effort to understand and "undo" the forces that assert dominant discourses of inclusion. Butler is keen to point out the limited stories that dominate the mainstream. Reactionary texts written by Moraga and Anzaldúa (2015) and Lorde (1984), for example, chart a politics and poetics of transgression in response to "majoritarian storytelling," which acknowledges the complex subjectivities of queer women of color and their resistance to intersecting systems of oppression (Brockenbrough, 2015). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) treat such writings as examples of counter-storytelling: "a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told" (p. 32). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) discuss one aspect of these counter stories, *theoretical sensitivity*, a concept that refers to the importance of researcher insight and capacity to interpret and give meaning to the data, which emboldens me (p. 34).

Moreover, such efforts have the potential to foster positive social change by (1) including an interrogation of the current oppressive reality and (2) shining light to diverse forms of resistance engaging in the disruptive possibilities of transgressive LGBTQ formations (Eng, 2010; Eng, Halberstam, & Muñoz, 2005; Halberstam, 2005, 2011; Muñoz, 2009; Sedgwick, 1990; Sadowski, 2013). I conceptualize these two points together as necessary components of *counter inclusion*. Here, counter inclusion draws from examples of resistance that challenge the construction of homonormative and

homonational subjectivities; it goes beyond the reification of the status quo by striving

for a transformative effect for the marginalized as it strives to undo normative LGBTQ

configurations of domination.

Driver (2008), for example, conceptualizes "queer youth as cultural and political

catalysts" and their acts of resistance as potential sites for enabling change (p. 1).

Halberstam's essay, in particular, magnifies this potential to upend the homonormative

and homonational trajectory: "Queer subcultures . . . produce alternative temporalities by

allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to

logics that lie outside of the conventional forward thinking narratives of birth, marriage,

reproduction, and death" (p. 27). As organizations seek to offer curricular resources that

seek to promote inclusion and inclusive representations, one must concede "that LGBT

youth will put these resources to creative uses as they pursue their own constructions of

identities, practices, and communities" (Talburt, 2004, p. 121). In this way, LGBTQ

subjects open up new meanings, which threaten normative narrations perpetuated by the

pursuit of inclusion (Talburt, 2004). What follows are three examples of resistance that

manifest as counter inclusion undoing the homonational.

It Doesn't Get Better. You Get Stronger.

I begin by returning to where I started my analysis: the It Gets Better Project

(IGBP). I would be remiss not to return to the IGBP to acknowledge the tremendous

effort put into the campaign as well as the many different directions that participants took

the IGBP. Several researchers point out how unfair it would be to characterize the IGBP

as nothing more than a monolithic project of normalization (Hain, 2016; West,

Frischherz, Panther, & Brophy, 2013). In fact, West et al. (2013) argue that IGBP is an

example of "queer worldmaking," which they refer to as the "practices and relationships

that contest the logics of compulsory heteronormativities," a concept inspired by Berlant

and Warner (1998).

One prominent example of how the IGBP was appropriated for worldmaking

possibilities emerged from the glaring absence of lesbian women in its first iteration. At

26,080 hits (as of February 2017), the 3 minute and 25 second video, *It Gets Better, Rural

Dykes!* may not have been viewed nearly as much as the pioneering Savage and Miller

video 2.12 million (as of February 2017), but it's nevertheless striking because it serves

as a counter-narrative to inclusion. Two chickens in a coup amidst a bucolic setting

introduce the creator, Krissy Mahan, hailing from rural upstate New York. In a blue

flannel shirt and baseball cap seated on a bale of hale, Krissy, a white woman, disrupts

the geographic escapism and metronormative narrative by embracing her rural roots and

stating: "Everything that's frustrating about right now, being in the country, you know,

rocking the flannel shirt every now and then, those are totally hot to somebody, so things

that are frustrating now, it's gonna get real better."

Figure 13: It Gets Better, Rural Dykes!

This video works to undo the homonormative narrative implicitly favoring urbanism and

cosmopolitanism in ways that marginalize the experience of rural LGBTQ people.

Addressing "young lesbians who are not in cities," Mahan states: "Being a rural dyke has

some challenges, but it is really cool, and totally worth sticking around for. Please don't

give up. Yay for country butches and femmes!" And unlike most IGBP videos, Mahan

takes on class popping the myth of gay affluence balloon perpetuated by the depiction of

LGBTQ elites in the media, stating:

> [I]t looks like gay people have a lot of money and, as a person who
> doesn't come for a place of a lot of money, who doesn't have a lot of
> money, um, but I've been really happy being gay; I've been really happy
> being a big dyke, so, I also want to put that out there too, that, like, if you
> don't have a ton of money, you'll be fine.

Mahan's video continues the work of the homonational undoing in the comment section. For example, Mandypants222 responds: "This is the best [video] I've seen so far, thank you for giving this to all those kids who are not in the city, near gay clubs, around other gay people, etc. I'm sure some young butch dykes out there will get some hope from this. :)." In this way, the video and its supportive comments complement the existing analyses of how rural LGBTQ youth and their allies draw from new media, which offers a platform for them to become producers of their own subjectivities broadening "rural" conceptions disseminated by traditional media sources and structures of power (Gray, 2009; Gray, Johnson, & Gilley, 2016). Gray's (2009) research further disrupts the myth that rural settings exclude LGBTQ populations – these environments are also fraught with intersectional subjective experiences defying preconceived notions.

The project has also been re-appropriated by lesbian women of color. For example, one lesbian Latina with a rainbow peace flag in the background pithily says: "It doesn't get better. You get stronger." LuzLoca821 with 33,538 views (as of February 2017) undercuts the IGBP metanarrative, according to numerous commentators by being "real:"
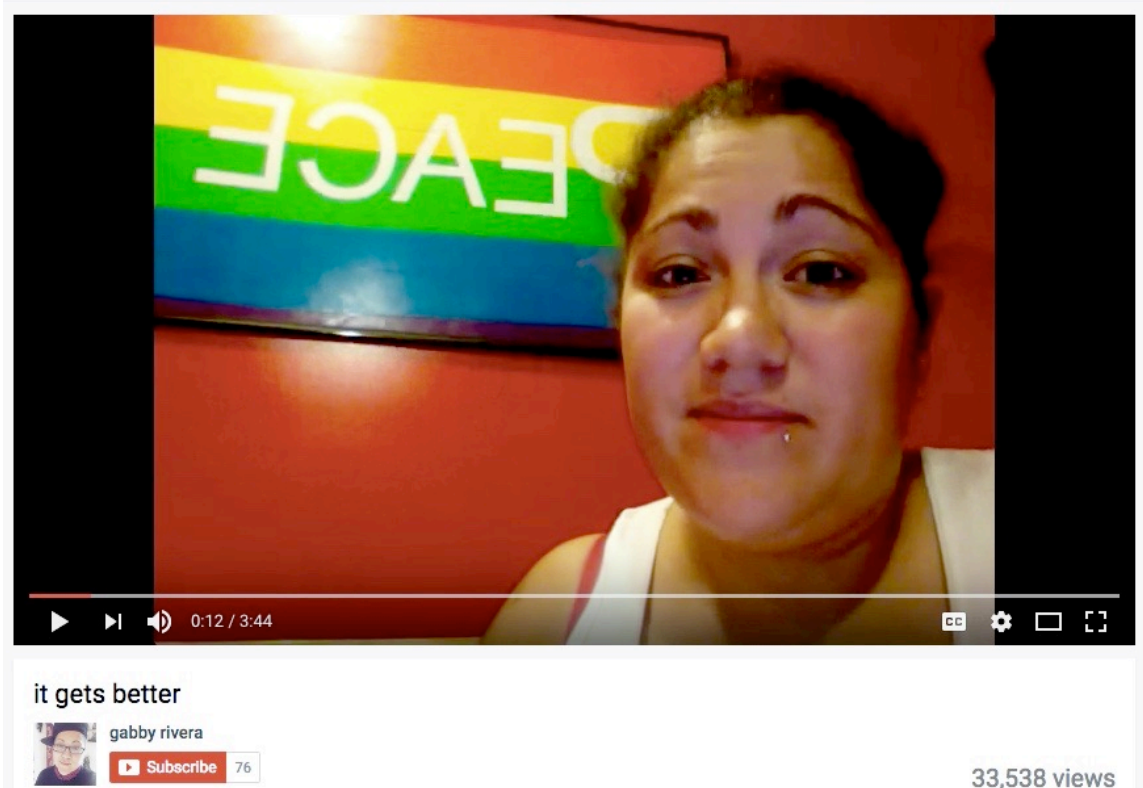
Figure 14: It Doesn't Get Better. You Get Stronger.

> As a gay woman of color I just want to let the youth know that it kind of
> doesn't get better. Like all these straight rich celebrities . . . they can tell
> you it gets better because they got money and that people don't care . . .
> but like I'm going to be real because I live this life and I'm not rich, and
> I'm brown, and I look like probably most of you.

She is impassioned in her resistance. She subverts IGBP by not having herself limited to

its mainstream representations – "Don't give into this myth that it's going to be fancy and

amazing when you're older." – and provides an additional account that queer women are

not necessarily white and not necessarily wealthy and that people like her have a place in

society. This video also does not posit that to be in a happy, intimate partnership is

essential. In fact, talk of relationships are only present when she discusses her

relationship with her faith. Finally, she doesn't project a better life onto the future, but

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rather, over time youth will learn more about the ways of the world and this vital

realization: "[I]t doesn't get better. But what does happen is that you get stronger."

Although both of these videos also rely on the individualistic narrative that lies at

the core of the IGBP, they offer counter inclusion in the sense that they defy normative

representations challenging homonormative, patriarchal, and white privilege framing.

Staking out these sites of resistance reappropriates the IGBP project by opening up the

doors as to how intersecting systems mobilize and constrict LGBTQ lives. Moreover,

IGBP counter videos hold tremendous value for the cultivation of LGBTQ media literacy

and negotiation of alternative LGBTQ subjectivities for those with access to technology.

It just takes more work and more time to scroll through the dominant narratives that rise

to the top of the page. These dominant narratives are even more undone by a single video

– a direct response to the campaign mimicking its format but existing outside of its scope,

transforming the contemporary pervasive declaration of *It Gets Better* to one with

immediacy, *Make It Better, NOW!*

Make It Better, NOW!

One of the critiques of the IGBP project is the way its message absolves schools

and society for taking responsibility for the broad and deep oppression facing the

LGBTQ community now, leaving the community to seek solace by projecting its hope

onto a future rather than working together to do the meaningful dirty work of the here and

now. To challenge a heteronormative and homonormative culture, societal hierarchies

and power structures must be radically altered. IGBP and its curricular extensions lack

the radical potential needed to subvert the power structures and norms that foster such a

culture. A standout response to this individualistic narrative, *Reteaching Gender and Sexuality* (2010), includes a representation of diverse voices across genders and races, each assertion expressed by one voice after the next after the next, disrupting dominant dialogues about the trials and tribulations of LGBTQ lives.

Figure 15: Reteaching Gender & Sexuality

> This is about way more than bullies in our schools. This is about our school boards, our homes, and our country. This is about every small town, every suburb, and every city. This is about how people talk about us and treat us. This is how we talk about ourselves and treat ourselves. This is not just about how 'it gets better' when you get older. You want me to wait until later? Hell no!

These collections of voices consider systemic issues that are often ignored when considering the prominence of LGBTQ bullying in schools and thus encourages a deeper reflection as to way constructions of gender and sexuality and its intersections with race, class, and nationality have negative implications upon LGBTQ youth too:

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> Together, we are taking a deeper look at what's happening in our
> communities. This is how queer youth like me wind up homeless. And
> dropping out of school. And getting harassed by the police. This is how
> queer youth like me end up in jail.

These sentiments are reminiscent of observations made by trans activist, Riki Wilchins
(1997), critiquing the lesbian and gay movement for its blind spot on issues that do not
appear directly relevant to normative aspects of sexual orientation:

> Left untouched is any problem that is about "sexual orientation AND." So
> we're not going to deal with queers of color, because that's sexual
> orientation AND race. We're not going to deal with issues of working-
> class queers or queers on welfare, because that's about gay AND class.
> And we're not going to deal with the concerns of lesbians, because that's
> about gay AND gender. Pretty soon, the only people we represent are
> those fortunate enough to possess the luxury of simple and uncomplicated
> oppression. That is, their race, class, and gender are "normal" and so go
> unmarked and unoppresscd. (p. 84)

The video takes on the regulatory mechanism of the closet and its overemphasis
on coming out and how paradoxically this emphasis neglects the perpetual and ultimately
frustrating need to assert oneself over and over and over again. One voice states: "The
very concept of coming out is an old, sad idea. That normal is being straight. And
everything else is just LGBT. TQIAA. This is about how my identity can not be summed
up in letters." Voice after voice demonstrating the ways these discourses are reproduced
through gender conformity:

> This is about being queer! This is about how people assume that I am a
> girl. People ask me if I have a girlfriend. People assume that I am a boy. I
> am so over that. I am so over that. I am pretty much over that.

The dialogue rejects norms and rigid, binary identity categories.

The video also employs critically inclusive rhetoric, demonstrating that such a
framework has the potential to be translated into publicly salient discourse. By calling

out coming out, gender conformity, and falling in love as unpacked in both chapters 4

and 5, the participants in the video leave the listener in contemplation of what other

alternative trajectories ought to exist for a life. The video further undoes the

homonational narrative by taking the institution of marriage and the military to task as

well:

> This is not just about same sex marriage or military service. This is about
> a culture of *Don't Ask, Don't Tell* in my school. This is about not having
> supportive adults in my life up until now. And this about more than just a
> safe space. How about a liberating space? . . . This is about young people
> being educators and advocates for themselves . . . NOW.

This thoughtful example points to the important spaces that media and its partnership

with students and educators can have in reshaping conventional notions of identity by not

solely focusing on the limited storylines that LGBTQ youth have become so normalized

to contend with on a daily basis. Critiquing the media, particularly by framing the

question 'inclusion, but for whom?' fosters rich conversations around the themes of

racial, gender, sexuality, class and nationality normativity as well as of its silences,

erasures, and biases. These curricular themes need to be addressed as they occupy a

central role in informal educative spaces. Such an awareness of inclusion limitations and

possibilities among LGBTQ youth heralds what Foucault (1982) suggests when he says:

> Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse
> what we are. We have to imagine and to build up what we could be to get
> rid of this kind of political "double bind," which is the simultaneous
> individualization and totalization of modern power structures.

The video visually concludes that it's imperative to institutionalize the "reteaching of

gender and sexuality" rhetoric and its disruption of the homonormative and the

homonational: "PUT THIS" – "in the curriculum," and "in the policy" and "in your

boardroom" and "in your hometown," and "on the schedule," and "in your network," and

"in your backpack." And by "PUT THIS" the voices do not explicitly offer a

prescription, but rather seek to disrupt the ways that we traditionally discuss gender and

sexuality in schools and society in hopes of creating new openings for much needed

dialogue. Such a final call to action upends inclusion as it has been presented and

embodies a comprehensive, resistant approach that is deemed as an essential new

beginning in truly supporting LGBTQ youth in this country.

The Audre Lorde Project

Local LGBTQ organizations are taking this call to disrupt the normative

representations of gender and sexuality that underpin inclusion by spreading an

alternative message of equity and social justice. This is exemplified by the Audre Lorde

Project, a NYC-based organization. The namesake of the organization is based on the

life of activist Audre Lorde, a Caribbean-American black lesbian writer who prolifically

published books of poetry and prose giving voice to issues of race, gender, sexuality,

class and nationality. Here, countering homonormative and homonational subjectivities

from the outset is within its mission: "Through mobilization, education and capacity-

building, we work for community wellness and progressive social and economic justice.

Committed to struggling across differences, we seek to responsibly reflect, represent and

serve our various communities." Its first guiding principle:

> Recogniz[es] the full diversity of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two-Spirit,
> Trans and Gender Non Conforming (LGBTSTGNC) people of color, and
> our collective histories of struggle against discrimination and other forms
> of oppression, the Audre Lorde Project has been established to serve as a
> home base that LGBTST peoples of African / Black / Caribbean, Arab,

Asian & Pacific Islander, Latina/o, and Native/Indigenous descent can use
to organize, support, and advocate for our diverse communities.

A series of thoughtfully conceived political statements appear on the website from

advocating for *Black Lives Matter* solidarity to affirming *Transgender Day of*

Remembrance. One statement, "Do Not Militarize Our Mourning: Orlando and the

Ongoing Tragedy Against LGBTSTGNC POC" critiques media depictions of the

Orlando Pulse nightclub shooting reminding readers of the diversity of victims and

survivors – black, latinx, trans, undocumented and working class. Erasing these victims

and survivors while obsessing over the race of the perpetrator speaks to the ways in

which the system holds up "the terrorist" to make possible the construction of a national

identity (Beauchamp, 2009; Puar, 2007) to give the appearance of the care and concern

for the LGBTQ community and masking the 200 pieces of legislation antithetical to

LGBTQ flourishing all to promote the interests of the nation:

> Besides erasing the lived reality of Muslim LGBTSTGNC people, Black
> Muslims, and LGBTSTGNC people of color more generally, this
> promotes the xenophobic stereotype that Muslim people and immigrants
> are more "homophobic," and become "radicalized" elsewhere. The culprit
> becomes the figure of the "Islamic terrorist," and the heroes become the
> politicians, the police, and the military. We reject this deliberately racist
> framing. Individual perpetrators are part of a much larger system of
> militarization and colonization.

Such a statement undercuts the pinkwashing of Donald Trump's RNC speech.

The statement also brings attention to American imperialism. The Audre Lorde Project

recognizes that you can't talk about gay rights in the military without also talking about

what are the implications for a country exerting its power all over the world. Effectively,

a message that makes clear that these actions also endanger innocent lives, including

queer lives abroad. Sanctioned drone strikes, for example, have led to excessive

collateral damage including the deaths of innocent people in Yemen, Pakistan, Somalia,

and Afghanistan. Rationalizing U.S.-led incursions and the loss of innocent life in the

Middle East and North Africa (MENA) particularly as sold as a project of LGBTQ

emancipation requires scrutiny not the least of which includes examining the history of

colonization in this and other parts of the world.

One of the resources the Audre Lorde Project makes available to the public is a

Say What? media guide, a collaboration among FIERCE, Streetwise and Safe (SAS), and

TransJustice to support the media with transformative language and frameworks to more

equitably report on behalf of those in the LGBTQ community enduring discriminatory

policing and violence. Not only does it unpack why certain terms might be especially

hurtful to those subject to such frequent discriminations, but also takes space to draw the

distinction between individuals and systems:

> Another issue that often comes up is individualizing systemic issues. For
> instance, when reporting on violence against trans people, it is critical that
> folks understand that it isn't just individual trans people who are
> experiencing violence, but that there is a systemic issue of violence
> targeting trans people specifically because they are perceived as a threat to
> social norms of gender. When we individualize, and isolate the incident it
> can make it easier to victim blame and avoid addressing the systemic
> issues that lead to culture of violence in the first place.

The Audre Lorde Project shows how you can focus on changing language while also

focusing on broader structural issues. Such a distinction reflects upon and then acts upon

the complexities of LGBTQ violence and abjection. It speaks to the limitations of

projects and resources that were presented in Chapter 5 that frame solutions to LGBTQ

inclusion by individualizing the problems such as the ample attention given to bullying

discourse and anti-bullying and anti-discrimination policy advocacy. Instead, these

efforts demonstrate a great need for intersectional work as they face oppressive

ideological apparatuses head-on:

Community

ALP's primary strategy is community organizing inclusive of leadership development. We define community organizing as a strategic process for building people's (our communities') collective power to achieve self-determination and justice including:

○ Ensuring that community members (those indigenous to LGBTSTGNC POC communities) are the ones who identify key problems and issues (where inequality is felts most) ALP chooses to work on.
○ Bringing community together to identify solutions based on collective action and response – to build people power.
○ Building a base of community members that understands and strategically uses community organizing to further justice work. We understand that building this base requires ongoing training, skills-building and other opportunities to develop analysis, organizing and leadership indigenous to our communities. This includes ongoing leadership development as well as support of institution-building within LGBTSTGNC POC communities.
○ Identifying and directly confronting institutions and individuals that are oppressive to our communities, so that we can work together to change power relations that perpetuate or cause inequality. Our strategies and tactics include direct action, coalition-building and strategies that rely upon – and build – collective power.

ALP's community organizing work is driven by working groups made up of volunteers directly affected by issues that our campaigns prioritize. Staff members are also members of working groups and partner to coordinate and lead work. To support organizing campaigns and build health and wellness, ALP also has a central resource center that supports our organizing work.

Figure 16: Audre Lorde Project's Community Organizing Approach

The Audre Lorde Project advocates for a "trickle-up" social justice approach as a

means to avoid interference by dominant actors (Spade, 2015). There is an understanding

of collective humanity within and beyond borders and it is more sensitive to the

hypocrisies of the country touting progress, such as LGBTQ "progress," while also

enacting violence towards communities of color, immigrants, and/or communities abroad.

This example above sparks coalitional brainstorming by focusing on the plurality of lived

experiences within the queer community whose subjectivities make them even more

vulnerable to violence rather than sweeping these differences under a rug. In addition,

the project is attuned to ways surveillance and immigration enforcement relies upon the

"Other" whether it be the Black Other or the Muslim Other to maintain national cohesion

and the status quo hierarchy and it calls it out. In this way, the Audre Lorde Project

enables its supporters to be keener on examples of pinkwashing and global injustice even when perpetuated in a patriotic context.

Composed predominately of LGBTQ feminists of color, the Audre Lorde Project prioritizes an agenda around community organizing, poverty, trans identity, racism, immigration, health care, geriatrics and street violence invoking the memory of the organization's namesake, Audre Lorde (1984), who famously once said: "There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle, because we do not live single-issue lives" (p. 138). These identity campaigns have been appropriated to effect real political change. There is no doubt that the work of the Audre Lorde Project is inspirational with a tremendous potential for transformation in the ways in which it advocates for systemic change. It speaks to Petzen (2012) when she advocates:

> A more promising vision of a queer politics committed to social justice
> would have anti-racist attached to its political practice, not just its name.
> It is not enough to claim a critical positionality. Allies must have a
> commitment to an accountable positionality, which goes beyond declaring
> one's racial, class and gender positioning and moves to a public
> commitment to be held accountable, a commitment to support queers,
> trans people and feminists of color in their political struggle and not just
> use their bodies and theories to advance their careers. (p. 299)

Such effort represents the capacities for organizations perhaps because of their small size to not only focus on local issues, but to avoid aiming for a relatively comfortable mainstream opinion that fits a broad national audience like IGBP. This example also captures the imperative to counter future attempts addressing LGBTQ issues in schools and society solely through a mainstream gender and sexuality inclusion lens.

Conclusion

In summary, previous chapters located and identified resources that seemingly offer a tapestry of experiences that testify to the importance of coming out, conforming to gender and sexuality expectations, partnership, marriage, reproduction, service to the country that may still seem currently unimaginable to isolated LGBTQ youths and thus provides a sense of social progress. Yet much of this progress is hampered by the narrow vision of inclusion, a lack of regard for intersectional discussions of power and privilege, and multiple forms of oppression that compromise the integrity of these efforts.

The examples in this chapter, however, remind us that this isn't the only path presented to LGBTQ youth. There are processes in which some aspect of mainstream is challenged as illustrated in Chapter 5, which get narrowed and encapsulated in ways that do not endanger the system as a whole, until someone stands up and pushes against this limiting tendency. And it's these counter paths that might be more promising in its homonormative and homonational undoing. Such undoing, however, does not rely upon a single voice or even a single campaign. The rich and dynamic LGBTQ community will always rise within and beyond the contours of inclusion. My first examples demonstrate how this resistance can take place within a campaign. My second example demonstrates how this resistance can take place against the campaign itself. And my third example demonstrates the difficult work we have in and out of classrooms to bridge theory critical of inclusion into practical applications working alongside youth in educative spaces.

Based on my application of a critical inclusion approach and its applications to notable cases, I am concerned that mainstream efforts at inclusion are invariably tethered to hetero and homonormative and homonational practices and that neoliberal obsessions

with individualism will forever succumb to nothing more than a normative project. It leads me to continue to wonder how we can avoid the obsession to identify and regulate queerness rather than holding systems accountable. What does a critical engagement with these issues that are emboldened by intersectional thinking and approaches look like at other levels of society? Do organizations like the Audre Lorde Project hold the answer? What aspects of virtual projects whether by design, control, and/or regulation hinder/aid in these illuminations? What are the ways in which we can prepare educators and students to be critical about what they consume – the ways in which they are subjugated and the ways in which they can resist? Perhaps even moving us beyond dialogue and inspiring action?

CHAPTER 7: TOWARD A CRITICALLY INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY

Queerness is a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present. Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing.

‒ José Esteban Muñoz

During freshman honors English my teacher asked, "who in this room is the all-American boy?" I didn't raise my hand, but I remember thinking, 'it's me!' Compared to my classmates, I embodied the all-American dream: a first-generation student whose father and mother's tenacity as a waiter and hairdresser, respectively, meant sacrificing the comforts of living near their families to move here – a town deemed as one of the best school systems in the state of New Jersey. It's me! I carried myself with pride contributing to all types of causes like volunteering at the local food bank and running for student government. Even my perceived queerness, I thought, made me stand out as a byproduct of all the possibilities this country represents. Instead, after a long pause, my teacher ticked off names, none of them a Michael, and the class rallied around the white-skinned, presumably straight, Catholic, well-to-do quarterback of our football team. How desperately did I want to be included and how interesting that I thought all-American stature had such currency.

But this is how inclusion operates. It's granted to you. And it's enticing. And yet it sieves difference into assimilation. In many ways, the IGBP campaign and LGBTQ inclusive curricular resources perpetuate the Best Little Boy in the World archetype as an American ideal, seemingly guaranteeing all of its tangible and intangible benefits. When you feel like you are on the outside looking in you can imagine how seductive it is to be

invited into that world rather than on its fringes and how challenging it might be to imagine what it would take to create a different world. As crystallized during my work on this dissertation, I am more aware of why this inclusion approach is no longer satisfactory, acknowledging the paradox of wanting to fit in so badly and yet knowing that feeling might never be fully resolved. As a social justice advocate who challenges conventional notions of race, gender, sexuality, class, and nationality, and through my extensive training on these issues, I can better acknowledge my own privilege as a middle-class, white, Ivy League educated man. My work in Philadelphia school systems, however, has exposed me to the gravity and detriment these omissions of intersectional LGBTQ narratives have on building a more inclusive society.

An audience often quickly captures these sentiments when I lead a workshop on inclusion and share this image:

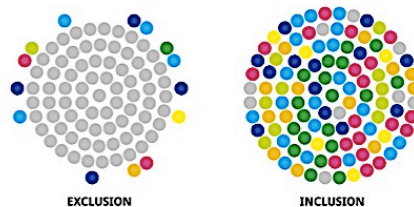*Figure 17: Exclusion vs. Inclusion Diagram*

"Is this what inclusion looks like?" I ask. Such an image conjures the removal of barriers and full participation as if everyone is equally valued and unique. One teacher raises her hand and notes that the image of colored dots spread across the circle in solidarity is beautiful yet inconspicuous in society. Classroom walls are not the only barriers

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hindering some of us and some of our students more than others when facing structural disadvantages that thwart equity and justice.

To transform the status quo and strip away the gloss painted on by approaches focusing on the individual as reflected in bullying, safe space, and rights-based discourse, it is increasingly important to show that inclusion can fall short of breaking down structural inequality. Let's take the prominent national strategy of LGBTQ inclusion, marriage. A principled rejection of marriage, according to Spade (2015), demonstrates a shift from an inclusive to critically inclusive strategy or what he differentiates between as an "official lesbian and gay solution" vs. a "critical queer and trans political approach" (p. 32-33). Rather than reinforce marriage as an ideal, denounce its ascendency and advocate for policies that value *all* families like universal healthcare that is trans and reproductive health care inclusive and altering hospital visitation policies that recognize a variety of kinship formations beyond hetero and homonormative dyads (p. 32-33).

Let's apply the spirit of Spade's pivot (2015) to an example of inclusion in an educative context such as LGBTQ bullying. While an inclusion solution might be to pass stricter anti-discrimination and/or zero tolerance measures, a critical inclusion approach advocates for a school-based response along the lines of restorative justice with the intention of rebuilding the community and repairing any harm that was a result of the wrongdoing. Shifting away from policing and disciplinary practices that disparately impact students of color coupled with a focus on critical engagement with these issues ought to have profound implications for the ways student relate and connect with one another.

Macro-level policies to punish harassment and provide equal protections and

benefits under the law make significant progress in protecting the freedoms of some LGBTQ individuals, but an agenda of queer transformation requires work on the ground, including in the classroom, as an essential counter to these advancements so as to reflect upon a collective struggle, collective gains. To truly safeguard the political and civil rights of LGBTQ populations is to fight for a future where queer nonconforming people are able to live free from discrimination and harassment AND resist conformity and assimilation.

Until the ideological and institutional aspects of oppression inherent to neoliberalism are addressed, unforeseeable, new systems of social control of race, gender, sexuality, class, and nationality will emerge. Moreover, there ought to be an urgency to ensure that such systems are dismantled at the core so new possibilities for social justice can begin to take shape. To encourage educators to focus on the urgent need to make the systematic changes that are imperative. The public school system in this country is one of the most underhanded culprits in this suppression as it purports to be the apparatus to prepare all students for respectable treatment in society and yet its exclusionary policies and practices often do quite the opposite.

Yet I resist seeing schools as agents of stifling socialization. I stand with the optimists. The transgressors. The transformers. I stand with Maxine Greene (1995) who conceptualizes the school as an agent of social change. I stand with bell hooks (1994) as she argues that classrooms are the "most radical space of possibility" (p. 12). I stand alongside José Esteban Muñoz (2009), who conceptualizes queerness as a "rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world," as he calls upon a revivification of imagination (p. 1). These voices offer us visions of

community always in the making and one in which we might feel like we all belong.

Expel the expectation that students ought to "fit in" and assimilate to dominant

expectations presented to them. Such discourses might leverage some youth more

visible, constituted identities permitted to break through while others are not. Schools

must already be safe and welcoming so that the real work can begin – imagining what

might be done to resist oppressive forces and enable students to fully develop creative

ways of being. It is in that philosophical spirit that I also would also like to recommend

three evaluative practices of disruption that embody *doing* critical inclusion. They

include (1) promoting youth activism, (2) reconceptualizing the curriculum, and (3)

holding educative content accountable by exposing the limits of inclusion and applying

what I refer to as the critical inclusion test.

Promote Youth Activism

Being young and uncertain of your sense of identity is one of the most compelling

reasons to consume books, magazines, television, and the Internet – a quest to discover

yourself reflected in its pixels or pages. The proliferation of content production and its

mobility from platform to platform provides a unique opportunity – an evolving space for

expression. The IGBP and YouTube as a platform is an example of the role media can

play in affirming queer identities. These projects and platforms give youth an

opportunity to learn more about each other as well as offer opportunities to resist by

countering the project as a whole as it portends an ideal. The video *Reteaching Gender*

and Sexuality demonstrates the ways in which LGBTQ youth are responsive to political

discourse and the ways in which these discourses shape their lives, revealing a great deal

about their willingness to imagine new ways of being and living through resistance too.

These participants question and investigate various modes of expression in which

LGBTQ subjectivities are shaped and produced. Such projects reveal the creative

possibilities of teasing apart categories of race, gender, sexuality, class, and nationality.

During the summer of 2016, I had the honor to serve as a facilitator for the

Leadership for a Diverse America, a scholars program for students from

socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds. There, I integrated multimodal elements

of storytelling into the classroom as a means to support students' sense of paralysis in the

wake of the Pulse nightclub shooting and then followed by a week of heightened police

violence towards black and brown lives. I witnessed students communicate often painful

accounts of their lived experience in creative ways. One group put together a Snapchat

campaign with the accompanying hashtag, #WokeforBroke as a means to educate their

peers about what it's like to grow up as a low-income person of color in a society

obsessed with consumption (e.g. lavish Spring Break plans) while many of them choose

to focus on their studies instead. Such projects not only foster self and public awareness

of these intersectional subjectivities, but also demonstrate how these subjectivities and

their resistances are shaped by dominant discourses too.

Reconceptualize the Curriculum

Such activities have me reflect upon the role of curriculum in promoting social

justice. Britzman (1995), for example, rails against inclusion as an additive strategy

merely "adding" or "including" marginalized voices to an "overpopulated curriculum" (p.

86). Such a limitation captures the potential of metaphor in curriculum conceptualization

(Kliebard, 1982) beyond fixed, preconceived articulations. Pinar (1998), for example, conceptualizes the curriculum as a "complicated conversation." Greene (1995) conceptualizes curriculum as a "consciousness of possibilities." To account for what curriculum can and can't do, for what it can or can't say, it's imperative that educators conceptualize the curriculum as a site of exclusion. Texts by their nature are exclusive; they are meant to be opened up and examined. And by treating curriculum broadly and expansively, anything – a video, an object, a sound bite, an image, an email, a conversation – can be transformed into a text. These texts are worthy of critique investigating the complexity of identity, galvanizing and expanding subjectivities, recognizing a multiplicity of selves, and offering countless examples that help students translate their imaginings into being and enactment.

One way to illustrate this type of engagement is to rely upon children's books as producers of subjectivity. At face value *Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress* might be construed as a story whose images reinforce the Best Little Boy in World archetype as someone who simply wishes to don a tangerine dress. Discussing how the protagonist is marginalized by expressing himself in this manner but then is quickly accepted for dreaming up the best adventure merely reinforces the narrative: it's ok to be different as long as you offer your critics something worthy they likely didn't see coming. A curriculum that does not engage in the problems of acceptance in spite of difference misses an opportunity to reveal the shortcomings of inclusion and how inclusion often reinforces gender and sexuality stereotypes and that these stereotypes are often racialized and classed too.

The Critical Inclusion Test

One way of challenging these types of stereotypes in the classroom is through the critical inclusion test. Encouraging students to explore the relationship between inclusion and exclusion elucidates the fundamental relationship between power and knowledge. I offer a simple test in the spirit of critical literacy to encourage an ongoing critique of texts for their cultural assumptions contesting dominant discourses where some groups of people are included and some groups are excluded (Lankshear & McClaren, 1993). I offer my initial research questions alongside my framework as the critical inclusion test:

- What types of normative subjectivities do these texts (re)produce? How so?

- What subjectivities are marginalized or excluded from these texts? How so?

- How might these resources resist normativity, including national and transnational subjectivities?

These questions aim to enable students to dissect inclusion ideology as an amalgam of oppressive ideologies. These questions reiterate to students that every text is a site of exclusion. These questions aim to reiterate that every text makes certain modes of being possible and impossible inspiring students to decode: look beyond the meniscus of inclusion to recognize the potentially oppressive ideologies that lie beneath. These questions aim to initiate a conversation, inviting educators and students to come together to imagine a range of possible outcomes pushing the boundaries of gender and sexuality, and inclusion, in general, in multifaceted ways.

The introduction of an LGBTQ character, for example, might be progressive rendering certain modes of being as possible, for example, but what does that white gay

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character spending all the pages of a book looking for love and getting married communicate too? Once that perspective is inscribed into a text then that trajectory becomes solidified; it becomes an option and, occasionally, the only viable option for a way of life. Sometimes that can be celebrated. Watching queer people acting out in queer ways on TV or film can be inspiring, cathartic even. But what if those people are a queer couple living in a mega mansion like in *Modern Family* conflating inclusion with the pursuit and attainment of everything the heart desires. Without interrogation, this "progress" is limited. Thus, these "more inclusive" narratives that persist as means to push the boundaries of normalization even as they bring queer youth of color, undocumented youth, immigrant youth, trans youth and/or lower class youth to the fore, should be accompanied by a dialogue for social change, a process of continuous interrogation.

The critical inclusion test is a technique, an exercise to help us navigate the politics of inclusion to encourage youth to take control of and to create their ways of being: a move beyond "what is" to "what might be." This practice and what it engenders is made to be malleable and emphasizes a continuous pursuit of examining discourses of inclusion and exclusion. The critical inclusion test as well as the other evaluative practices I recommend is not intended to be prescriptive but rather a general framework that educators interested in utilizing a critical inclusion pedagogy can use as one of many tools in their toolkit. This refusal of prescriptivism is the point, for example, that Page (2016) makes drawing upon her experience in the field:

> [I]nclusive and critical pedagogy is not simply a collection of the "right"
> teaching strategies or practices, nor is there any singular exemplar or set of
> steps in how to implement a critical pedagogy. Rather, many elements

combined to form such practice: committing to equity, modeling dialogic and democratic practice, integrating notions of power and privilege in instruction, having an activist mentality and questioning the status quo, attending to student achievement for the purpose of offsetting asymmetrical power relationships, helping students develop critical thinking skills, and having a deep care for students and community. (p. 135-136)

The practicalities of this work are difficult, after all. In his article, *Teaching Transgressive Representations of LGBTQ People in Educator Preparation: Is Conformity Required for Inclusion?,* Jennings (2015) describes an anecdote as a lecturer for an LGBTQ undergraduate course addressing "transgressive content about LGBTQ lives" when one student asks, "Are you and your partner monogamous?" His reflection about that one seemingly straightforward question is riveting and provocative:

> As I considered my response, the tension between assimilationist and nonassimilationist strategies caused me to pause. If I said that it was none of the student's business, I could have reinforced the silencing notion, tied to heteronormativity, that discussions of nonheterosexualities are taboo in educational settings; it would have been, in short, a form of assimilation to norms that forbid such discussions. If my answer was a simple "yes," I could have reinforced a norm that potentially denied the relational diversity among LGBTQ people, even if it legitimized my relationship in light of hetero norms and perhaps in the eyes of my students. If my answer was "no," and I went on to describe ways a couple or triad might negotiate a modified monogamy or nonmonogamy in the interest of sexual expression and expansive kinships, I could have expanded their understanding of relationship diversity. However, this might have delegitimized my relationship and reinforced some students' beliefs that many gay relationships, because of a refusal to adhere to the dominant norms defining legitimate relationships, do not deserve recognition. (p. 454-455)

In other words, his "answer could either reinforce conformity as the pathway to acceptance, or perhaps undermine acceptance for the sake of acknowledging greater diversity" (p. 455). What I like about this example is how a question itself can lead to a reflection of the many principles of critical inclusion revealing the ways in which

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inclusionary and exclusionary forces are always at play in the tensions between

assimilation and liberation, between sameness and difference, between what is deemed

normal and what is deemed queer. It's an anecdote that reminds me that this work is

messy and that I can neither prescribe a curriculum nor define a series of best practices as

Page (2016) asserts other than have the reader reflect upon my evaluative

recommendations and decide their own thoughtful way as to how to develop and

implement a deeper appreciation and understanding of the limits and ultimate costs of an

inclusion approach. Jennings (2015) furthers this point with his uncertainties:

> For example, do we include LGBTQ representations that challenge the
> privileging of White, middle-class, dyadic lifestyles? Are we willing to
> show poverty among LGBTQ people, despite prejudicial beliefs in U.S.
> culture that equate poverty with laziness and moral inferiority, or to show
> LGBTQ people as single or in nondyadic relationships, even if doing so
> undermines the doctrine that LGBTQ relationships warrant recognition in
> as much as they mirror non-LGBTQ relationships? Do we include
> LGBTQ people in discussions about domestic violence, even if such
> discussions might undermine the narrative that LGBTQ relationships are
> idealized to be more egalitarian? Do we reveal racism and sexism within
> the LGBTQ community? Or rather, do we curate normalized, idealized, or
> limited curricular representations of LGBTQ lives to secure acceptance?
> (p. 455)

I recognize that these questions offered by teachers in action fittingly bridge this project

to another potential area for generative research.

Towards a Critically Inclusive Pedagogy

I see more than ever before the imperative that curriculum and pedagogy be

explored in tandem, pedagogy the connective tissue between the theoretical and practical

experiences of LGBTQ youth and their educators – indicative of the dynamic interchange

influenced by institutions, culture, and structures. For example, I can imagine

lengthening my dissertation title: *Curricular AND Pedagogical Possibilities Amidst a Homonational Project*. These two areas are inextricably connected and I am looking forward to building upon my current framework while continuing to draw from the many critical pedagogues who examine various aspects of inclusion and exclusion in their scholarly endeavors and who have influenced this reflection. The power mediated by educator and student relations inside and outside of the classroom and perhaps even as a way to imagine how a curriculum and a pedagogy can become a powerful duo in elucidating the connections between inclusion and exclusion, not only what is on the page, not only how the page is taught and mediated between educator and text, student and text, but also the ways in which the educator and the student can analyze their shared experience with the text as one operating in exclusionary and inclusionary ways too as illustrative of the Jennings example.

<p style="text-align:center">* * * * *</p>

In anthropology, *liminality* is a term used to describe a transitional period during a ritual in which a person lacks social status or rank. Anzaldúa's work on liminal spaces describes their power, explaining, "Transformations occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries" (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 1). Critical inclusion lives in that space towards a "concrete possibility for another world" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 1). It's that ambiguity that seeks to inspire educators to trouble identity, trouble belonging and enter into dialogue about the discomfort that is involved when we work through the ambiguities of tensions and pains that constitute a community as variegated as the one denoted by the letter string, LGBTQ.

Taking a step back and examining the ways in which individual interest rooted in neoliberalism pins groups against each other makes it increasingly difficult to coalesce as a single body and overturn this proclivity towards white, patriarchal, heteronormative, capitalist, national domination. Butler (2004) illustrates that this contributes to the pressure to conform, to reap state benefits still aware of its limitations when she refers to livability: "I may feel that without some recognizability I cannot live. But I may also feel that the terms of which I am recognized make life unlivable" (p. 4). It is imperative in that regard not only to look to those who are likely most marginalized by these inclusion strategies, but also those who seem to have successfully been brought into being and the ways in which they articulate what has been lost in that process.

The schooling of homonationalism is likely not to be always as obvious as conveyoring queer bodies into the military and towards reproduction; it's about making the subject useful, contributing members of society in a number of capacities and thus new discourses will emerge that obscure the harsh realities that remain for LGBTQ youth. To break through the clutches of homonationalism, as educators we have to begin by being aware of how we cultivate these particular subjects. Educators need to expose these assumptions by being critical of current curricula and pedagogical practices, even the progressive ones. They must begin by making it clear that inequality and discrimination are usually neither blatant nor even intentional and that we are all somehow implicated in that unfortunate reality too.

Forming better and stronger partnerships with organizations like the Audre Lorde Project can offer schools opportunities to integrate more diverse perspectives into their curricular and pedagogical approaches and applications. Consequently, developing and

cultivating ongoing partnerships is essential for this type of work to be seen as integral

rather than as one-time events or one-shot workshops or consultations, which rarely are

deemed productive or sustainable especially when loosely tied to existing curricula.

Therefore, incorporating a critical inclusive lens will hopefully move us closer toward a

more conscientious pedagogy seeking to illuminate queerness and the role it can play in

reconciling competing discourses of difference and sameness in texts believing that there

are important, critical ways we must work alongside a new generation committed to

tackling social justice issues. Every moment with our students is a chance to change

course, change hearts: to tap into the (im)possible.

APPENDIX

1. It Gets Better Project

   - Videos
   - Get Involved
   - *It Gets Better Book: Coming Out, Overcoming Bullying, and Creating a Life Worth Living*

2. The Trevor Project

   - In School

3. Human Rights Council, Welcoming Schools (HRC)

   - Welcoming Schools Starter Kit
   - School Resources
   - Answering Challenging Questions
   - Books
   - Lesson Plans
   - LGBTQ Definitions

4. Gay-Straight Alliance Network (GSA)

   - Resources
   - LGBTQ-Inclusive Curriculum

5. Teaching Tolerance, Best Practices: Creating an LGBT-inclusive School Climate

6. Lambda Legal

   - Youth & Schools:
     - Out, Safe, & Respected for Educators & Parents
     - Out, Safe, & Respected for LGBTQ Youth

7. Safe Schools Coalition

   - Resources by Topic

8. The Audre Lorde Project

   - Media Guide
   - Community
   - Statements

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9. Gay, Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN)

- LGBT-Inclusive Curriculum
- Educator Guides
- Lesson Plans on Diversity, Bullying, & Bias

10. Advocates for Youth, Creating Safe Space for GLBTQ Youth: A Toolkit

11. Trans Student Educational Resources (TSER)

12. NYQueer, Beyond Tolerance Resource Guide

13. GLAAD, LGBTQ Resource List

14. Stopbullying.gov

- Bullying and LGBT Youth

15. California Safe Schools Coalition

- Get the Facts

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