UN CAMINO DE CONOCIMIENTO¹:
A MARIMACHA’S ii MEDITATION ON AN LGBTQ INCLUSIVE CHARTER SCHOOL

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DISSERTATION
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation critically examines Java High, an LGBTQ inclusive charter school, using ethnographic methods to inquire if this school creates an institutional architecture that cultivates more positive academic and non-academic outcomes for LGBTQ youth. Java High is located on the north west side of the Midwest urban city of Hatfield and was established in 2005 as a public instrumentality charter school that serves approximately 175 students who can enroll by choice or force. The vision and ultimate creation of an LGBTQ inclusive charter school is implicated in the context of educational reform efforts that have become saturated with the ideology of neoliberalism pointing to an ongoing legacy of tensions between identity and school politics. Therefore, this dissertation sits at the nexus of the relationship between schools and society and offers a perspective on the evolving role schools can play in recognizing and better serving a growing heterogeneous LGBTQ student population. At the same time this study broadens the scope of the four dominant strands of LGBTQ research in education: decreased the pathologizing of LGBTQ sexualities, increased visibility and recognition of LGBTQ people, understanding spheres of intersecting student identities, and increased attention to institutional climates and experiences of LGBTQ youth in K-12 schools by generating new knowledges (theories, practices, curriculum, and policies) about how the architecture of a school can impact academic and non-academic outcomes of LGBTQ youth in secondary schooling. I made a decision to use an interdisciplinary approach to investigate Java High using what I call a queer Chican@ feminist lens; effectively opening up possibilities for me to think about and think through conceptualizations of LGBTQ inclusivity, at-risk youth, and school connectedness which emerged as
significant themes during data collection and contribute to the three significant findings of the project overall. My findings reveal the intentional creation of an LGBTQ inclusive charter school opened up possibilities for positive academic and non-academic outcomes for students who identify as LGBTQ as well as those students who do not. My findings also indicate the conceptualization of at-risk youth was mapped on to LGBTQ and students of color differently at the same time curricular attempts to connect at-risk youth to Java High broke down intermittently as the cultural frameworks that students of color brought with them to school were not bridged to academic learning. Overall my findings underscore the LGBTQ inclusivity operating within Java High produced ambiguous and diffused effects; effectively pointing to the significant challenges and tensions that arise in organizing an educational institution through a particular framework of inclusivity in order to remedy a web of inequalities marginalized youth face. Lastly, this dissertation contributes methodologically to the field of qualitative studies by theorizing about what happens in the fleeting moments the ethnographer and the ethnographic “others’” bodies, genders, and racialized sexualities intersect; bringing to the forefront the methodological dilemmas of the politics of representation and the power relations embedded within the qualitative research process. In this dissertation I tell stories through my eyes as a marimacha researcher purposefully creating new knowledges that refuse deficit tropes of at-risk youth.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing a dissertation is a lot like training for a marathon. If you want to write/run and complete a successful dissertation/marathon you have to create a plan, stick to that plan, be open to altering the plan when things go wrong, you have to write/run different distances consistently, you have to make choices about what you eat and how much you eat, and you have to find the intrinsic motivation and discipline to overcome hardships that happen throughout the doctoral program/training period. Facing the challenge of training and completing a marathon became an important metaphor for writing and completing my dissertation. I had to commit to the process of writing just as I had to commit to the process of running. Once I started to trust the process of writing and running I began to change tremendously, I started to enjoy writing and running. Writing and running became intertwined practices during the last two years of my life. As I devoted more time to running I became a better runner, and the more time I dedicated to writing I became a better writer. Therefore, the reasons I started my doctoral program are not the same reasons I completed it. I am not the same person I was eight years ago and I am grateful for the hills and valleys pursuing a doctorate degree brought me.

Even though writing my dissertation is the most difficult thing I have ever done, I recognize the privilege of being able to make such a statement. This dissertation was written over a period of time in which significant sociocultural, political, and economic shifts have occurred throughout the world exacerbating inequality at the same time normalizing the structural exploitation and domination of so many people. The politics of research is real and there is no time to be afraid of this reality. There is much work to do, and we must do the difficult work in solidarity with one another to radically reimagine the relationship between schools and society, challenge the commodification of knowledge and marketization of education, recalibrate the acts of schooling towards democratic and social justice projects, and remain steadfast in the transformative potential of the teaching and learning process. Fortitude is my life compass, while humility remains my constant companion.

I never thought I would get the opportunity to go to graduate school to pursue a PhD. As a first generation college student I don’t think I knew how one could even pursue a PhD until I was in my first professional job at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. After I earned a Master’s degree in the spring of 2003 from Eastern Illinois University I truly thought I had gone as far as I could go academically. I was proud of myself for going academically where no one in my family or friend circle had ever had an opportunity to go. I enjoyed my new professional opportunities and was particularly good at bridging my book smarts with my street smarts. I developed some financial security and even more autonomy through my first professional position. But after a few years I realized I could no longer ignore my passion for teaching and learning, so I set my sights to get accepted into a PhD program. But that desire has roots in my love for reading and learning that was cultivated throughout my adolescence by my parents, teachers, and the staff of the local public library in the neighborhood where I grew up. My parents instilled in me many of the core values that guide my life today and can be seen and felt throughout the pages of this dissertation. I come from working people, so I know that without struggle there is no growth. La lucha sigue.
During the eight years it took me to complete my PhD I worked two sometimes three jobs. Many of the people I had classes with throughout my doctoral program were able to receive consistent funding for their education through departmental grants, scholarships, or distinguished fellowships. I did not have the same luxuries. If I had the opportunity to receive consistent financial assistance throughout my doctoral program I might have finished my dissertation sooner and more importantly I would have been able to write a dynamic dissertation without acquiring a significant amount of student loan debt. I am grateful to Dr. Jeanne Connell, Dr. Casey George-Jackson, Dr. Pat Gill, and Dr. Isabel Molina-Guzman who over the course of the last eight years hired me as a teaching assistant and graduate assistant. Without the financial assistance provided by these professors I would have dropped out of my doctoral program and never finished my dissertation because I would not have been able to survive.

I am in the debt to Dr. Ricky T. Rodriguez, Dr. Chantal Nadeau, Dr. Larry Parker, Dr. Wanda Pillow, Dr. Alejandro Lugo, Dr. Terri Barnes, Dr. Antonia Darder, Alicia Rodriguez, and Laura Castenada for always making time to get to know me as a person, for sharing their personal stories with me, and for their tremendous emotional support and encouragement. Being a teaching assistant for EPS 201, EPS 202, GWS 100, and LLS 250 over the course of my doctoral program were tremendously important for my growth as a teacher, writer, and scholar. I am so grateful to all the students I have had the privilege to teach and for their challenge and excitement. It was the students who made discussion sections truly transformational spaces of learning. Working for the Office of Admissions & Records (OAR) as a graduate assistant coordinator of the Illinois New Student Registration program during the 2014 & 2015 summer terms was an important learning experience. Supervising the Illinois student admissions representatives (I-stars) during New Student Registration affirmed how important it is to mentor and develop positive relationships with undergraduate students outside the classroom just as much as inside the classroom. Even the most talented and dynamic undergraduate student leaders need older people in their life to mentor and challenge them. At the same time older people need younger people in their life to challenge them to never become stagnant or complacent. The I-stars helped me learn new things that brought about much professional and personal development as a writer, teacher, and educator. A special shout out to all the undergraduate students in LLS 410 Writing Latino/a Chicago, our discussions of Latino/a literature, Chicago, and life was the highlight of my week the last semester of the doctoral program. Thank you to Dr. Ricky T. Rodriguez for giving me the space to fall in love with fiction again, and the encouragement to call myself a writer without apology.

I am tremendously grateful for the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign Library and the Interlibrary Loan program. I took full advantage of the plethora of resources that are afforded to graduate students at Illinois and am grateful for all the librarians and staff personnel who graciously helped me find the books and articles I needed. A special shout out to Café Kopi, Espresso Royale, and the Champaign Public Library for being accessible public spaces in the Champaign-Urbana community I spent the last six months feverishly writing my dissertation and preparing for my dissertation defense. A special thank you to Hafiz Barnire, you are a formatting genius.

This dissertation would not have come to fruition without the support of so many beautiful and dynamic people. I have to first thank the students, teachers, and staff of Java High for allowing me to conduct a qualitative ethnographic dissertation project in
their school. The five months I spent collecting data I learned a great deal about the relationship between schools and society, the evolution of LGBTQ educational research, and myself as a human being, teacher, scholar, and Chicana butch writer. I learned the most from the students at Java High. I am so grateful I got to interact with so many students regardless of whether or not those interactions could be considered positive or not. Playing basketball, line dancing, sharing a bag of chips, walking to the bus, and sitting on the steps outside of the building talking about life were just a few things that made me realize conducting ethnographic research is powerful and difficult. Listening to and respecting the way the students told their stories or refused to speak to me at all humbled me beyond belief. Conducting this research project has changed me forever and I hope that sentiment can be felt while reading the pages of this dissertation.

Thank you to all the strong mujeres in my life who have supported my goals even when they didn’t always understand the urgency with which I went after them. To my Hermanas of the Delta Chapter of Alpha Sigma Omega Latina Sorority, Inc. at the University of Wisconsin Parkside thank you giving me the foundation of support I needed to succeed academically and the encouragement to go off and follow my dreams after I achieved my bachelor’s degree in 2001. I will always be grateful for your sisterhood and love. To Eta Pi thank you for letting me be your teacher when being your teacher was all I had to hold on to. I will forever be grateful you let a viejita like me guide you into ASOLSI. Thank you to my Hermana and best friend Shani Lizardi for being a tremendous ray of sunshine in my life since 2000. Our fifteen years of friendship and sisterhood have created so many beautiful memories. We are women who continue to defy expectations, and we are women who refuse to apologize for living life on our terms. I truly cannot imagine my life without you, and I will always stand in solidarity with you. Toda una eternidad juntas con corazon y esfuerzo lucharemos y venceremos. Thank you to my friend Jenni Crum and fellow UWP alum who has been in my life since 1997 cheering me on from near and far. I feel so lucky to have you in my life, thank you for your friendship Crum. Thank you to my friend Justin York for really helping me get through the first year and the last six months of my doctoral program. I’ll never forget the summer of 2008 when we went hiking every Sunday and talked about how we just couldn’t get over those who left us with our hearts in little pieces. Side by side we put one foot in front of the other and just walked and talked, determined to get through the heartache and determined to progress as doctoral students. Without our Tuesday night writing sessions at Café Kopi I would not have been able to finish this dissertation. Thank you for reading my work, engaging with my ideas, listening to my struggles, sharing your work and fears with me, and becoming such a trusted friend. To the mujeres I met at the Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social (MALCS) 2014 Summer Institute in El Rito, New Mexico thank you for your friendship and support. Talking with fellow Chicanas during MALCS about my dissertation topic, research interests, and my struggles as a Chicana butch scholar at Illinois gave me the courage to continue writing through my fears of failure and the courage to continue on with my doctoral program despite daily micro-aggressions. A special thank to Dr. Cindy Cruz for giving me constructive feedback on my individual paper presentation at MALCS that ultimately helped me turn a corner in conceptualizing and writing my methodology chapter. A special thank you to Patricia Pedroza for pulling me aside after breakfast the day after I presented my paper to engage me in a conversation about the power and risk in naming one self a marimacha.
researcher. My conversation with Patricia was a pivotal moment in my experience at MALCS that merged personal and professional growth. Talking candidly with several generations of Chicana scholars at MALCS and spending time in El Rito, New Mexico focused on my writing was necessary and transformational in my development as a Chicana butch scholar. A special shout out to my MALCS mujeres: Jazmin, Tiffany, Valerie, Andrea, Cassandra, and Gabby. Our adventures in Santa Fe and our ridiculous conversations around the fire during MALCS were so much fun. I miss you all and can’t wait to see you again! We will become those mujeres at MALCS over the next decade!

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“Instead of writing by inspiration, it seems we write by obsession, of that which is most violently tugging at our psyche. Perhaps there will be a time to write by inspiration. In the meantime, in my writing, as well as in that of other Chicanas and other women, there is the necessary phase of dealing with those ghosts and voices most urgently haunting us, day by day.”

~Sandra Cisneros

“Of course safety is a fundamental human right of all students, and because there is a profound lack of safety for LGBTQ students in and out of schools, our nation must do more to make schools safer for all… However, it is important to recognize that this primary focus on safety does have significant drawbacks.”

-Kevin Kumashiro

“Neoliberalism was constructed in and through cultural and identity politics and cannot be undone by a movement without constituencies and analyses that respond directly to that fact. Nor will it be possible to build a new social movement that might be strong, creative, and diverse enough to engage the work of reinventing global politics for the new millennium as long as cultural and identity issues are separated, analytically and organizationally, from the political economy in which they are embedded.”

-Lisa Duggan

“How might subalterns feel each other? How might subalterns talk to each other?”

-José Esteban Muñoz
INTRODUCTION

The words *Industry, Agriculture*, and *Recreation* are carved into a giant piece of oak that borders the State welcome sign just past mile marker 340. The contrast of adult video shacks and small businesses that lined both sides of the freeway sold products that ranged from cheese curds, deer meat, pornographic DVDs, antiques, or really ugly sweaters. There was more snow on the ground than I anticipated and patches of ice suddenly emerged as I swiftly passed a semi truck straddling two lanes in a construction zone. It was early February of 2012 and I was running late to my ethnographic field site, Java High. As I drove north towards Java, I began to notice the prevalence of *Recall Walker* and *I Stand With Walker* stickers holding steadfast to the bumpers of cars, trucks, church vans, and industrial vehicles gesturing a looming uncertainty for a State currently embroiled in contentious educational issues ranging from collective bargaining, budget cuts, to merit pay, and to teacher tenure. Passing through the Hatfield city limits I was determined to reach my field site before 8:30 a.m. so that I did not miss out on any opportunities to just hang out and talk with students informally prior to classes beginning for the day. As I exited the freeway the sun started to poke out from behind the clouds illuminating blocks of overcrowded single story dilapidated duplexes, bumper to bumper local traffic, corner stores, and bus stops packed with people waiting to head somewhere; all creating the contours of the neighborhood surrounding Java High.

I grew up approximately thirty minutes south of where Java High is now geographically located in a predominantly aging working class Anglo (predominantly 2nd generation Polish and German) neighborhood. During my childhood into adolescence my mother and stepfather moved my younger brother and I from a dilapidated apartment complex, to an aging duplex, to a small one family house, and then to a carefully gated
apartment complex straddling the border of Hatfield city and back in the 1990s a budding new suburb called Hillside. All this moving from place to place forced me to learn to navigate an array of neighborhood public schools and their corresponding cultures from kindergarten (1986) until my sophomore year of high school (1995). Being born a month early to a 19 year old Anglo (Polish) mother and 19 year old Mexican father demonstrated even in utero I developed a kind of restlessness and resiliency by learning to live and survive in the borderlands. From a young age I became familiar with an array of geographic, spatial, emotional, and spiritual borders that marked certain bodies and not others that seemed to chisel away at the contours of racially segregated residential communities and over time impacted my sense of being and be-longing. Unnatural borders sanctioned access to resources and knowledges, impressing upon my queer brown female body early on the ways in which intersectional workings of oppression policed certain bodies and shaped our lived experiences in economic, social, political, and cultural ways. Therefore I was not surprised to see on my weekly drive to Java High the pockets of primarily youth of color that stood on almost every street corner waiting to ride the city bus to attend school. From the time I was 6 years old I vividly remember sitting quietly next to my mother on the city bus traveling somewhere. I intently peered through the bus window as pockets of dilapidated apartment complexes, corner stores that sold milk and beer, and streets with unending potholes shifted seamlessly to small family houses with patches of trimmed green grass, parks filled with woodchips and shiny swing-sets, and grocery stores that had rows of parking spots. I began to learn by observing and listening while taking the city bus throughout my adolescence whether it was with my mother, by myself, or with friends who also attended the neighborhood
public schools I did. Far from feeling isolated or unsafe by these realities I felt a sense of be-longing, a queer sense of lucha.

By 8:15 a.m I had pulled into the Java High parking lot and found myself keeping step with a student wearing a dark gray baseball cap, matching gray shorts, and an oversized gray t-shirt on my way into the school building. I smiled at her once we both reached the top of the steps and asked her, “Aren’t you cold wearing shorts and a t-shirt in February?” The student who I would come to know the next day as Shani replied with a quick smile, “Nope. The building is really hot. You’ll see,” (February 6, 2012). Shani and I waited out in the cold side by side, silently looking up at the security camera hovering above the metal doors. Suddenly a buzzer sounded and Shani quickly pulled open the door and walked through ahead of me. Before I could tell her my name or reiterate my reasons for being at the Java High, Shani turned a corner into a part of the building and was gone. The intense wave of heat lingering behind the doors Shani had warned me about suddenly hit me and I walked forward up another short set of steps towards the jumbled voices coming from just around the corner. I made my way towards the common area outside the gymnasium to linger among students hanging out in the hallways prior to the start of classes.

As I regularly drove back and forth in the Midwest through the patches of rural and suburban spaces into the urban landscape surrounding the LGBTQ inclusive charter school I call Java High to conduct five months of field work I wrestled with the ways fragments of my life experiences unwarrantedly spilled over into, ruptured, and dislocated from the research process complicating what I thought I knew, how I knew it, and what the aims of this project should be and why. From this middle and unstable
ground I was able to create what Manalansan, Nadeau, Rodriguez, and Somerville (2014) describe as, “a queer vantage point—a troubled unstable perch...productive of alternative ways to approach space and time and to reimagine routes and paths, contours and shapes, directions and telososes of queer lives, practices, and institutions,” (p. 1). A mestiza consciousness (Anzaldúa, 1987) as a methodology began to evolve while I conducted research at Java that embraced the frictions between school and identity politics that integrated knowledge of how the boundaries of what is deemed personal and political shift, intersect, and drop off indicative of a Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogy. Growing up in a working class racially segregated neighborhood in the Midwest, attending racially segregated public schools, and living in a racially blended heteronormative family cultivated a queer agility to strategically move in between and among various constituencies risking the consequences of not completely belonging to any. Learning to navigate and cross the borders regulated in the private (read as family and home) and in the public (read as school and the city) was and continues to be arduous, but speaking and living in complex social realities throughout my entire life is what I know. I am a bocacalle¹. Therefore my approach to the research process is deeply informed by Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogies in what Aide Hurtado (1998) calls, “finding absences and exclusions and arguing from that standpoint,” (p. 135), and what This Bridge Called My Back editors Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga (1983) coined as theories of the flesh.

¹ Editors Arredondo, Hurtado, Klahn, Najera-Ramirez, and Zavella (2003) use Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of bocacalle as a provocative translation of street/mouth to, “evoke images of women shouting in the streets or the assertion of Chicana feminisms as public discourse demanding to be heard,” (p. 2).
Situated a Queer Chican@ Feminist Lens

The descriptive testimonio that opened this introduction grounds the interdisciplinary nature of my dissertation, and explicitly locates this qualitative research project as one that is attuned to interdisciplinary methods that purposefully *queers* a Chicana/Latina feminist approach to conducting a project situated in LGBTQ Educational research. Cindy Cruz (2012) articulates testimonio:

> A genre of the dispossessed, the migrant, and the queer, is a response to larger discourses of nation-building and has the potential to undermine the larger narratives that often erase and make invisible the expendable and often disposable labor and experiences of immigrants, the working class, African Americans, and others (p. 460).

I use testimonio as a political term in this dissertation to mark a counter narrative that tells stories through my eyes as a marimacha researcher purposefully creating new knowledges that refuse deficit tropes of at-risk youth and LGBTQ youth. According to Somerville (2007), “The term “queer” often causes confusion, perhaps because two of its current meanings seem to be at odds. In both popular and academic usage in the United States, “queer” is sometimes used interchangeably with the terms “gay” and “lesbian” or occasionally “transgender” and “bisexual,”(p. 187). Somerville’s interrogation of the word *queer* points to the versatility of this keyword as a noun, a verb, and as an adjective demonstrating the term has come to mean different things for different people over the last century. Often thought of as a synonym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning, the term queer points to the range of possibilities with LGBTQ as signifiers of sexualities, sexual orientations, and or sexual identifications deemed non-normative. In another way the term queer can be used to trouble LGBTQ as stable signifiers of non-normative sexualities, identifications, and or sexual orientations therefore making it
difficult to organize political and or theoretical positions from normative sexual orientations (gay or straight). Somerville’s (2007) keyword description points to the potentiality of the term by articulating, “To “queer” becomes a way to denaturalize categories such as “lesbian” and “gay” (not to mention “straight” and “heterosexual”), revealing them as socially and historically constructed identities that have often worked to establish and police the line between the “normal” and the “abnormal” (p. 191).

According to Villenas (2014) Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogies have been at the forefront of theorizing the intersections of the local, hemispheric, and globalized power relations, forging a trajectory of scholarship that is invested in multiple positions, intersectionality, cultural practices of the borderlands, and creating dialogue and practices of solidarity within and across diverse communities. Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogies are inseparably linked to the body and agency of mujeres rather than universalized notions of humanity; effectively linking our ways of knowing, teaching, and learning to non-sanctioned sites of theory production rooted in the everyday, the contradictions within and what constitutes family, communities, and resistance (Anzaldúa & Moraga, 1983; Trujillo, 1993, 1998; Villenas, 1998; Anzaldúa, 1987, 1994, 2006; Perez, 1999; Salvidar-Hull, 2000; Moraga, 2000; Elenes, 2002; Delgado-Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, Villenas, 2006; Cruz, 2006, 2011, 2012; Soto, 2010). Villenas (2014) asserts the four tenets of Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogies of intersectionality and global solidarity, the dismantling of dualisms, the embracing of ambiguity, and the project of tracking diverse modes of de-colonial agency are not meant to, “contain Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogies but rather articulate as one of a multitude of ways to express and re-imagine decolonizing feminist modes of being, knowing, and acting in the world,” (p. 207).
Therefore, in this dissertation I strategically put *queer* in front of Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogies as a political term that ruptures what is constituted as normal, to evoke a sense of uncertainty yet a sense of potentiality, and to mark the movement of bodies (my body and bodies of participants) signaling the ways race, sexuality, gender, and class throughout this project are never fixed as singular identity categories but as relational concepts embedded in power relations always negotiating who is researching whom. I strategically put *queer* in front of Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogies as a political term that unsettles dominant discourses, key questions, and normative ideas in Educational studies and Chicana/Latina studies about LGBTQ youth as an at-risk population. By making this strategic move to mark and use a queer Chican@ feminist lens I am able to use this framework throughout the dissertation chapters as a way of thinking about and thinking through conceptualizations of inclusivity, at-riskness, responsibility, respect, school connectedness/disconnectedness, and restorative justice as they have been constituted within an LGBTQ inclusive charter school like Java High located in the Midwest urban landscape of Hatfield City. Therefore, this dissertation contributes to the archive of Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogies as an intervention to focus our attention on cultivating new strategies of qualitative research aimed at generating educational theories, practices, and institutions attuned to the nuanced issues of LGBTQ youth as necessary de-colonizing projects. My hope is that my strategic move will not only push other scholars to engage with the limitations of ascribing particular kinds of at-riskness to LGBTQ youth, but also to point to the significant challenges and tensions that arise in organizing an educational institution through a particular framework of inclusivity in order to remedy a web of inequalities marginalized youth face indicative of larger
intersecting structural forces beyond the scope of one individual school.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

In this historical moment in which the larger project of neoliberalism has normalized Education as a market driven undertaking, this dissertation is not written as a romanticized success story of a queer researcher going back to a city where she grew up to conduct research about an LGBTQ inclusive charter school. This project is a collection of stories that matter. And these stories do not have simple or one-dimensional beginnings or endings. An uneven blend of personal curiosity and a professional belief in the pedagogical possibilities of conducting ethnographic research committed to cultivating anti-oppressive approaches to teaching and learning were the driving forces undergirding this project from its humble beginnings to its inevitable unfinished end. My ethnographic dissertation project investigated an educational institution organized under the premise of LGBTQ inclusivity, created as a charter, located in an urban city in the Midwest, and promised to restore positive connections between at-risk youth and a school environment in order to generate more positive academic and non-academic outcomes. After five months of ethnographic fieldwork the central argument of this dissertation is the LGBTQ inclusivity operating at Java High produced ambiguous and diffused effects. The individual dissertation chapters demonstrate a small amount of students were deeply impacted by the LGBTQ inclusivity embedded in the school’s infrastructure and regularly conformed to Java High’s discursive expectations of individual responsibility and respect; another group of students were moderately impacted by the LGBTQ inclusivity embedded in the school’s infrastructure and intermittently conformed, resisted, or transformed expectations, and yet another group
was not impacted by the LGBTQ inclusivity at all and spent a great deal of time in the in-between spaces of the school not consistently active in academic classes. Specifically, the findings examined in chapter four indicate the LGBTQ inclusivity operating flattened out the qualitatively different experiences and needs of the heterogeneous diverse student body and the school infrastructure positioned itself as efficient and inclusive while positioning the Hatfield public schools as not accountable, unsafe, and failing indicative of a neoliberal framework of educational reform. While the findings examined in chapter five indicate that because school culture was constituted within neoliberal educational reform strategies on the one hand a small number of students became deeply connected to the school environment by taking for credit a restorative justice class and developed a range of positive interpersonal skills and higher levels of positive efficacy, improved academic achievement, and decreased absences; on the other hand the restorative justice class was not able to effectively bridge academic learning to the cultural frameworks that a significant amount of students of color brought with them to school lessening the possibilities for those students to become connected/reconnected to the school environment. Like other educational projects vested in qualitative inquiry that use a school as a primary ethnographic site, this project offers a range of snapshots into what it was like to “be there” at Java High emphasizing the benefit of my versatile role as a multiple marginalized researcher researching multiple marginalized youth at an LGBTQ inclusive charter school located in an urban city in the Midwest. The next section will outline the overview of the six chapters.
Dissertation Chapters

In Chapter 1, I anchor this project within the field of social foundations of education by leaning on the scholarship of two important educational scholars. First, Mike Rose’s (2009, 2014) work points to the way this project rests at the nexus of an evolving relationship between schools and society that continues to wrestle with the questions of a) how can educational institutions advocate for and support better a growing heterogeneous LGBTQ population, and b) what if any obligations do schools have in mitigating educational inequalities that LGBTQ youth face? Second, the work of James T. Sears (1992, 1997, 1999, 2005) points to the ways this project affirms the visibility of LGBTQ youth in schools as a result of young people claiming an LGBTQ identity within early stages of adolescence, and the prevalence of violence LGBTQ youth face in schools and society warrants continued investigation and intervention. I substantially expand upon the design of the project, research questions and the methods, strengths, and limitations of this study setting the theoretical and practical landscape of this project. I end by articulating at length the strategy of using a queer Chican@ feminist lens as a theoretical framework in this project to underscore the central argument of this chapter which is: this dissertation project matters because it creates new knowledge within an emerging strand of LGBTQ research in Education that straddles the dialectical relationships between schools and society and identity and school politics.

In Chapter 2, I locate this project within an evolving strand of LGBTQ Educational research that is attentive to the ways institutional climates impact LGBTQ youth experiences in K-12 schools and expand upon the intersecting personal and professional factors that inform the background of this study. I trace the evolution of
increased visibility and recognition of LGBTQ youth in educational institutions, the types of violence LGBTQ youth face, and how discourses of risk & safety has become primary guideposts for theorizing U.S. based educational policies, practices, curriculum, and pedagogy concerned with LGBTQ youth in this historical moment. I use the phrase discourses of risk & safety throughout my dissertation to denote a mode of organizing knowledge about educational research, policies, curriculum, and practices in the U.S. rooted in spoken and written language that locates LGBTQ youth as perpetually “at risk” for harm as a result of their stigmatized sexualities on the one hand and on the other hand warrants specific protection from harm and potential danger within schools. I outline the importance of queer theory to the field of LGBTQ Educational research pointing to the myriad ways an array of educational scholars have used queer theories to investigate, rethink, and trouble the way institutional and intersectional practices organize sexualities, sexual practices, and discourses of sexualities that inform policies, practices, and theorizations of youth. Along with the rise in using queer theoretical approaches to research I point to the shift of focus from research in postsecondary education to secondary education indicative of larger shifts in research patterns that have cultivated archives of scholarship into the strand of research committed to increased visibility and recognition of LGBTQ people by pointing to the myriad of ways LGBTQ youth as adolescents encounter elevated levels of bias related violence and experience that stigma of at-riskness more prevalently than students self identified as heterosexual. Another rising strand of research vested in examining the role educational institutions have in shaping the experiences of LGBTQ youth have in secondary schools arguing institutions must be more intentional to cultivating school environments that recognize and attempt to
address the nuanced needs of LGBTQ youth in order to lessen the disproportionate negative outcomes associated with their school experiences. The last section of the chapter implicates this dissertation in the strand of LGBTQ educational research attentive to institutional climate by outlining key questions that ultimately gesture my decision to investigate Java High using a qualitative approach to inquiry about this emerging approach to mitigating inequalities LGBTQ youth face through a recalibration of an educational institution as the primary vehicle for intervention. Ultimately the significance of the academic terrain covered in this chapter contextualizes significant intersecting factors that opened up possibilities for Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter high school to develop in the Midwest urban city of Hatfield and the factors that continue to sustain Java’s existence as a potential neoliberal model for school reformers vested in small schools, charter schools, and schools that center their institutional mission for the needs of an LGBTQ student population.

In Chapter 3, I demonstrate the importance of scale when using qualitative inquiry pointing out the Midwest as a region is a contested terrain “saturated by larger cultural forces and processes” indicative of the way the local everyday informs, shapes, resists, and intersects with the global and national discourses about the evolving relationship between schools and society. Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school in an urban city in the Midwest is implicated in a regional terrain steeped in contentious discourses of crisis being played out through neoliberal school reform efforts. I expand upon the significance of educational ethnographic projects within the field implicating the varying scales of sociopolitical, cultural, and feminist investigations of how multiple forms of inequality such as discrimination, poverty, and violence can be thwarted,
shaped, intersect, and are reproduced within educational institutions. I then sketch out the multiple levels of analysis through ethnographic research methods that include participant observation, discursive analysis of Java High’s guiding documents, and individual one-on-one interviews at the same time I expanded upon the significance of the researcher as a primary instrument within a qualitative research project pointing to the tensions. I articulate the significance of using a mestiza consciousness (Anzaldúa, 1987) to explore the impact of Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school in an urban city by being able to use and name a methodological approach accustomed to intersections, contradictions, dualisms, and ambiguity. Finally, this chapter ends with an in depth discussion of Java High as the primary site of this dissertation that points to underlying conceptualizations of at-risk youth, LGBTQ inclusivity, and school connectedness embedded the architecture of Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school.

In Chapter 4, I shift to a focused analysis of selected Java High institutional documents and selected interview excerpts to demonstrate the nuances of Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school which advocates for positive academic and non-academic outcomes for LGBTQ youth that produced diffused effects. My multileveled analysis outs the intimate links between LGBTQ inclusivity and the forces of neoliberal school reforms that continue to fortify the privatization of public education in the U.S. as inevitable (Ravitch, 2010, 2013; Lipman, 2012) indexing the ways Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school locally reinforces the failure ascribed to the city of Hatfield’s public schools to effectively mitigate the inequality faced by LGBTQ youth. As an LGBTQ inclusive charter school Java High is significant because it has cultivated positive academic and non-academic outcomes for LGBTQ youth at the same time it is at
the nexus of substantial mergers between neoliberal strategies of school reform that perpetuates discourses of public schools as failing and in perpetual crisis that position charters schools as inherently more efficient and accountable re-conceptualizing institutional values of respect, responsibility, and safety. Ultimately, this chapter lays out the ambiguous impacts of Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive school by wrestling with possibilities and limitations of the school from contradicting perspectives.

In Chapters 5, I shift the focus of analysis to Java High’s Restorative Justice class and examine the ways the circle processes can intensify at-risk students disconnection to school, mediate at-risk youth by connecting them to school, or have no effect upon at-risk students’ level of connection to school at all. I trace the development of restorative justice theory, practices, and debates first through the criminal justice system and then its use within schools. I demonstrate the ways restorative justice approaches have been strategically positioned within K-12 schools as a more student centered alternative to traditional systems of school discipline. I offer the ways Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive school attempted to create a school culture that expected certain levels of respect and responsibility that turned away from a test and punish philosophy indicative of zero tolerance policies. This chapter wrestles with the promises of Java High’s use of a restorative justice approach as a primary mechanism to reconnect a significant amount of the diverse student body whose previous school experiences left them with entrenched sentiments of alienation, isolation, and indifference to schooling. The findings in this chapter point to the ways a colorblind discourse of race that shaped a range of student-teacher relationships and informed conceptualizations of LGBTQ inclusivity operated within the school culture. Ultimately this chapter points to the ways implementing a
restorative justice approach into the curriculum opened up possibilities for a core group of Java youth to develop positive self-efficacy, reflective listening skills, and reconnected them to the school environment at the same time it foreclosed possibilities for a significant amount of students that identified as students of color to connect with the school environment because it did not bridge academic learning with the cultural frameworks students brought with them to school.

I conclude the dissertation by recapping the central themes of at-risk youth, LGBTQ inclusivity, and school connectedness that emerged as most salient in my investigation of Java High. Returning to these themes points to many unresolved tensions that emerged from doing an interdisciplinary research project attuned to unsettling normative discourses in Education as well as highlight the ways neoliberalism continues to position schools as the primary solution to mitigating structural forces like poverty which continue to impact the educational experiences of at-risk youth in K-12 schools. After recapping the important themes that emerged during the dissertation project I close with the theoretical implications of taking on an interdisciplinary research project with an affective register (Cvetkovich, 2013; Muñoz, 2006, 2009). My decision to end the dissertation with an affective turn is a politically personal move. I see further analyses of LGBTQ inclusive schools (regardless of their status as a charter, private, magnet, or public institution) as a necessary part of a much larger project within the LGBTQ educational research to document, participate, and transform our schools and institutional structures through ethical and focused qualitative research projects that goes beyond bullying. Therefore, I demonstrate how turning towards affective writing as a mode of inquiry animates possibilities to reimagine education in the present by de-pathologizing
negative feelings of shame, disappointment, and anger too often mapped on marginalized bodies (the researcher and the researched) marked as failing with neoliberal educational frameworks that have reconstituted education as a market and students as consumers (Shiller, 2011; Lipman, 2012).
CHAPTER 1
SITUATING AN LGBTQ INCLUSIVE CHARTER SCHOOL IN SOCIAL FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION

Being a Stranger in a Familiar Place

One Friday evening in May of 2011 I finished reading several journal articles that encompassed the four dominant strands LGBTQ research in Education: decreased the pathologizing of LGBTQ sexualities, increased visibility and recognition of LGBTQ people, understanding spheres of intersecting student identities, and increased attention to institutional climates and experiences of LGBTQ youth in K-12 schools. As an emerging writer with training as an educational ethnographer, I always make time to peruse the bibliography, endnotes, footnotes, pictures, or dedications in any piece of writing for the unsexy yet interesting clues that further inform an author’s argument. I continue to read widely and critically because I see it as an ethical imperative as a qualitative researcher and it fulfills a growing personal passion. On the last page of the bibliography of the article I finished reading I noticed an Internet link for a school called Java High located in the city of Hatfield. This citation instantly caught my attention, and I did a quick Google search for Java High. I quickly learned Java High identified itself as an LGBTQ inclusive school geographically located on the north side of the city of Hatfield, approximately twenty-five minutes northwest of where I spent the first 15 years of my life. On a bit of a whim I sent a brief email to the lead teacher listed as the primary contact person on the Java High school website. I passionately introduced myself as a

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2 Java High is a pseudonym I created to protect the anonymity of the research site.
3 Hatfield City is a pseudonym I created to protect the anonymity of the geographic location of the research site.
Chican@ butch scholar native of Hatfield interested in meeting in person to discuss the possibility and the formal process of conducting a qualitative research project at Java High. In lieu of a response I constructed a barebones outline of a qualitative research proposal with Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive school at the center, and emailed my advisor to share with her I found a dissertation project I was committed to. On February 8, 2012 approximately nine months after I emailed the lead teacher of Java High with my inquiry, I began my five-month long ethnographic dissertation project with all the necessary local and University level permissions. In 1997 roughly fifteen years before I walked through the double metal doors of Java High as a University affiliated researcher, I graduated from Cooper High School completely unconcerned with the theoretical and practice implications of the relationship between schools and society; specifically the changing role schools as public institutions would come to play in serving LGBTQ youth. I had not yet developed the language to describe the precarious nature of schools which, “strive to give students equal opportunity but function to maintain various social hierarchies,” (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 1). Three months after I walked out of the Cooper High School gymnasium I packed up what little I had and took off to the smallest and least expensive public university in the State without looking back. At this time in my life I was both unaware and unconcerned of any relationship between schools and society because as a first generation college bound student nothing seemed as important as my longings to pursue my ‘voices’ away from ‘home’. At 18 I was self-absorbed and brazen enough to relentlessly pursue a college education despite my Cooper High School counselor discouraging girls like me from pursuing a bachelor’s degree in higher education and my parents telling me a family likes ours did not have the money for things
higher education. If I wanted to go to college I had to figure out how to get there and how to pay for it on my own. A little help from Sallie Mae\textsuperscript{4} coupled with working three university jobs allowed me to taste living life on my own terms, effectively using a college education as my vehicle to develop the autonomy I so desperately wanted. I like to think two of the many intersecting factors that lead me back to Hatfield more than a decade after I vowed to never return ‘home’ are responsibility and curiosity. Like other Chicanas before me, “I am the first woman in my family to pick up a pen and record what I see around me, a woman who has the power to speak and is privileged enough to be heard. That is responsibility,” (Cisneros, 1986, p. 76). The possibility to investigate a school like Java High and then craft a professional educational perspective affirmed my decision not to take the advice of that one high school counselor who told me all I was capable of doing was being a secretary like my mom. I knew gaining access to institutions of higher education would never be easy for someone like me, but easy is something I have never wanted nor asked for. Yet the process of learning to maneuver through individual and institutional racism and sexism of schooling has left visible and invisible scars that inform my decisions and my approach to situations many people might consider impossible. Survival is not an academic skill. Therefore, when the chance to conduct research at Java High became a viable professional endeavor I knew I had to pursue this project in Hatfield for both professional and personal reasons. Not only was I

\textsuperscript{4}In 2010 the U.S. Government started lending directly with students in higher education ending a long standing business relationship with the company Sallie Mae who served as an intermediate lending students attending institutions of higher education with loan monies to supplement costs of attending institutions of higher education. In May of 2014, Sallie Mae announced it would be splitting into two companies: Navient and Sallie Mae. Navient will take over the old Sallie Mae accounts that serviced U.S. government issued loans to students. The new Sallie Mae essentially is becoming a financial services company targeting college students and college bound families. This transition of Sallie Mae to Navient is significant because it signals another layer of privatization within the changing infrastructure of higher education by pointing to the power relations at work between the U.S. Government and the private sector (financial companies) to regulate and control monies necessary to access higher education opportunities.
personally curious about what Java High was all about, I knew the opportunity to investigate an LGBTQ inclusive school was necessary because it pointed to an emerging strand within educational research. In short, I was faced with a daunting professional opportunity that also significantly resonated with me. But let’s not romanticize research projects that are embedded in affective notions of be-longing or returning home. My decision to conduct research at Java High did not warrant any kind of homecoming or pomp and circumstance. On the contrary, traveling back and forth to Hatfield to conduct five months of ethnographic research at Java High was not a return as it was learning to navigate as a stranger in a familiar place.

**LGBTQ Educational Research**

If schools are essential to the very fabric of the United States of America, how has the relationship between schools and society evolved to recognize and meet the needs of an increasing heterogeneous LGBTQ student population? Mike Rose (2009) posed the critical question of, “why schools?,” (p. ix) to challenge educators, policy makers, teachers, and administrators to pause long enough to theoretically assess the current state of U.S. educational reform and argued for a reimagining of the role schools should play in cultivating a more perfect union. More than twenty-five years ago James T. Sears identified three significant trends that indicated an evolving and necessary role schools would need to play in advancing the academic and non-academic success of LGBTQ youth, “(1) educators acknowledging that all identifiable groups of students need support that is unique to their situation; (2) the increasing numbers of youth declaring their homosexuality while in secondary school; and (3) the victimization of lesbians and gays both in schools and in society at large,” (Szalacha, 2002, p. 78). The trajectory of scholarship outlining the commitment to cultivating inclusive curriculum, pedagogy,
practices, and policies for LGBTQ youth in all educational institutions is intentional, dynamic, necessary and well documented. Yet general problems and questions of access, equity, learning, and representation persist for LGBTQ youth across all areas of K-12 education despite the persistence of scholarship, activism, and policy advancements. It is at the nexus of these two tenuously interconnected inquiries (a) the evolving purposes of educational institutions and (b) how can schools better serve (support and advocate) the growing heterogeneous LGBTQ population, the impetus for this dissertation project emerges to investigate Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school.

There is a well documented body of educational scholarship that examines the lives and experiences of LGBTQ youth in schools alongside the important roles educators play in supporting, teaching, and providing resources for LGBTQ youth (Sapon-Shevin & Goodman, 1992; Sears, 1992; Friend, 1995; Nayak & Kehily, 1997; Whatley, 1992b; Szalacha, 2003; Kosciw et al., 2010; Seelman, Walls, Hazel, & Wisneski, 2011). Investigating the evolving structural architecture of educational institutions addressing LGBTQ issues, curriculum, pedagogy, and practices is deeply informed by necessary theoretical interventions and critiques. Therefore, the fortitude of an array of educational scholars who use theory as a means to intervene and critique heighten the visibility of issues, complicate and intensify theories and critiques, and challenge both homophobia and heterosexism within educational institutions is also well documented (Sears, 1983, 1987a, 1987b, 1992; Britzman, 1995, 1997, 2000; Ellsworth, 1989; Talburt 2000, 2004; Mayo, 2006, 2013; and Kumashiro, 2002). As the primary site for my dissertation project, my ethnographic investigation of Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school is embedded in larger theoretical conversations within social foundations of
education that ask: What constitutes an LGBTQ inclusive charter school? Why have LGBTQ inclusive schools emerged in this historical moment as a rising educational intervention aimed at improving the overall educational system for LGBTQ youth? In what ways do LGBTQ inclusive schools provide alternative school structures that have the capacity to increase and sustain positive school climates, LGBTQ curriculums, policies, pedagogies, and practices? In the NCLB era of high stakes testing and accountability how could an LGBTQ inclusive charter school even come into fruition?

Un Camino de Conocimiento…Queer Vantage Points

My dissertation project explicitly investigates Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school located in the urban city of Hatfield, using ethnographic methods to inquire how was the notion of LGBTQ inclusivity created, then promoted, and enacted in the present at Java High; effectively asking does this school create possibilities to alter an institutional climate that can cultivate more positive academic and non-academic outcomes for LGBTQ youth. Therefore, the descriptive testimonio that opened this chapter locates the interdisciplinary nature of my project, my desire to merge queer theories and Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogies as theoretical frameworks, and is indicative of the ways I used a mestiza consciousness as a methodology to think about and think through this emerging strand of LGBTQ educational research in two significant ways. First, using a queer Chican@ feminist lens creates intersectional optics that document and theorizes the ways a local charter school in an urban city can construct, position, and reproduce LGBTQ inclusivity. Second, theorizing from within the conundrum of power relations between the researcher and the research participants builds upon the educational ethnographic scholarship of Michelle Fine (1991), Ann Arnett Ferguson (2000), C.J. Pascoe (2012), Kysa Nygreen (2013) indicative of conducting a
messy intersectional qualitative research project. Educational ethnographies provide nuanced optics into the degree and scale of how multiple and intersecting social, political, cultural, and economic forces impact educational institutions, students, teachers, staff, parents, and volunteers differently. Educational ethnographies provide us windows into the everyday and the way making meaning of the everyday shapes, transforms, and pushes back against larger institutional forces. Ultimately, this project advances an emerging thread of LGBTQ Educational research by focusing in on LGBTQ inclusivity at Java High.

**Research Questions**

During my five months of weekly Wednesday and Thursday travels to and from Java High, I developed into a qualitative researcher that by choice and by force learned to learn to maneuver in multiple terrains. Like Rossman & Rallis (2003) discuss in their chapter about entering the field of research, an ethical researcher must develop her own set of principles of good practice that guide her during data collection. Learning to tolerate ambiguity, trusting my capacity to make difficult decisions and articulate those decisions by writing consistently in my researcher journal, and wrestling with deep interpersonal and emotional sensitivities to the multiple forms of data I encountered at Java High were by far the most frequent and toughest principles of ethical practice I developed while in the field. Cultivating these ethical research practices were difficult and draining not because I could not recognize right from wrong, but because things happened within the first two weeks in the field that affirmed data gathering is not a linear, neutral, or comfortable process. I made the decision to modify my research plan early on in data collection because I realized I made the anxiety stricken graduate student
assumption prior to data collection the majority of Java High students would identify as LGBTQ youth because they attended an LGBTQ inclusive school. I was very wrong. As a result of these assumptions I created a dissertation research plan that located LGBTQ identities, issues, and inclusivity as the central focus. At the outset of my project, I had these four research questions: (1) What are the experiences of LGBTQ youth who attend Java High?, (2) What roles do teachers at Java High play as primary stakeholders in the lives of LGBTQ youth who attend Java High?, (3) What kinds of processes of self-representation do LGBTQ youth who attend Java High engage in?, (4) How does Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive school create practices and policies that respond more equitably to LGBTQ youth who attend Java High? These initial research questions indicate how benevolently I conflated the institutional architecture of Java High’s notion of LGBTQ inclusivity with individual Java High youth LGBTQ subjectivities and created a research project that assumed the majority of Java High students would identify as LGBTQ. I also privileged individual interviews over participant observations rather than working towards bridging the two important types of qualitative methods a dynamic ethnographic project requires. Therefore, I had to narrow the scope of my research project recalibrating the fourth question into smaller questions that asked: (1) are schools established as LGBTQ inclusive better suited to mitigate inequalities LGBTQ youth face, (2) does privatizing inclusion through charter schools make it even more exclusionary, (3) how inclusive can a school be if it leads with one constellation of identity as its central fulcrum, and (4) in what ways does the architecture of Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive school speak to questions of identity and identity politics that continue to play out in a neoliberal terrain that associates education as a market and students as
consumers? Narrowing the research questions allowed me to conduct discursive analyses of Java High charter and educational documents within the context of ethnographic data gathered primarily from extensive participant observations, and a small number of individual interviews with participants. This project extends an examination of Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school from multiple perspectives that warrants significant findings about intersections of structural and individual violence, restorative justice as an alternative disciplinary system, and the gravity of affect in conducting a qualitative research project as a marginalized researcher about marginalized participants that are discussed in depth in later chapters of this dissertation.

Significant Frictions: Identity & School Politics

This is not a traditional educational ethnography. This dissertation is a challenge to the neoliberal agenda that has embedded itself into the fabric of education policy and practice since 1983, effectively forging significant tensions between identity and school politics. The discourse of education in the U.S. after A Nation at Risk took a sudden and dramatic shift from demanding equality among all students to demanding excellence from all students. The manufactured crisis that emerged from A Nation at Risk was not accidental but appeared within a specific historical context as calculated resistance led by identifiable critics whose political goals could be furthered by scapegoating educators (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). Ignoring data that shows American industries increasingly moving offshore and less apt to invest in their own capital growth, it is this mastery of public ideologies that allowed conservative constituents to set in motion the language and discourse of the New Right—defining teaching and teaching reform away from a democratic practice and toward a framework of free-market capitalism (Stanley, 1992; Spring, 1997; Apple, 1996; 1995; McLaren, 2005; 2001; 1997; 1986; Fraser, 1997;
hooks, 1994). Discourses of education after *A Nation at Risk* quickly thwarted the focus of equity demanded from identity politics and movements that evolved during the Civil Rights era and laid the groundwork in education to use the politics of school to once again shift the U.S. imaginary of what constituted freedom and progress that retooled the impact and aims of identity politics. Discourses of education after *A Nation at Risk* shift is a significant juncture in retooling linkages between identity and school politics because prior to 1983 significant federal and state level legislation was passed and implemented working towards remedying historical inequality that had been sanctioned by the U.S. Constitution prior to the adjudication of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. “In the aftermath of the *Brown* decision, the expansion of the fundamental principle of equality before the law spread quickly to the new categories of people, strengthened the passage of the Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960, 1964, and 1968 and the Voting Rights Acts of 1965,” (Anderson, 2006, p. 22). In addition to being a watershed moment in American history by redefining equality through the law, the *Brown* decision served as a critical juncture in permanently bridging identity politics and school politics to one another altering the creation of future assessments of U.S. educational achievement or school policies without considering racial inequality as a central issue. The *Brown* decision effectively positioned education as a primary site to mitigate racial inequality, while the identity politics that emerged during the Civil Rights era positioned jurisprudence as a primary site to mitigate the hypocrisy of U.S. democratic ideals of progress and freedom predicated upon deliberate and egregious racial, sexual, and gendered exclusions sanctioned by the nation-state.
The fight for nation-state centered forms of recognition (rights and privileges constituted to someone through statutory means) afforded to people who identify or are read as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ) are strategically positioned within a linear U.S. historical imaginary of freedom and progress that began with the Stone Wall Riots of 1969. In this dissertation I use lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning (LGBTQ) as identifiers signaling a self-aware and self-respecting sexual identity that challenges the identifier of homosexual which was imposed on people deemed to be and engaged in non-heterosexual sexual activity in the 19th century by the medical community and diagnosed to have a mental illness who should be forcibly treatable through a disease model of medicine. Susan Stryker’s (2008) scholarship points out that LGBTQ identity politics did not definitively begin with Stonewall and raises questions about how the operation of normativity within LGB history making projects have dismissed, erased, and or downplayed the role transgender activists and transgender histories have within LGBTQ politics. Therefore, the birth of the Gay Liberation Movement then is strategically folded into a socio-temporal trajectory of identity politics that emerged during the Civil Rights era gaining traction by collectively refusing the glaring hypocrisy of how U.S. democratic ideals were predicated upon deliberate and egregious racial, sexual, and gendered exclusions sanctioned by the nation-state. This linear trajectory of liberal humanism’s ongoing larger project of codifying a nationalist logic of what constitutes freedom and progress is seductive because it carefully narrates the collective struggles of marginalized communities as necessary efforts towards a re-articulation of democratic ideals only through a gradual lessening of structural barriers of oppression and individual acts of discrimination yet
relies upon a naturalized dualistic and fragmented Cartesian conceptualizations of identity subject formations (Grosz, 1995). The scholarship of Anzaldúa (1987, 2006), Cohen (1997, 1999), Moraga (1983, 2000), and Misa (2001, 2006) all poignantly demonstrates there are dangers in silencing the mutual constitution of subjectivities and the struggle to create one singular identity in the name of collectivity has consistently foreclosed possibilities to sustain practices of coalitional politics. Alongside the evolution of the identity politics, the cultivation of collective consciousness, and the gradual dissipation of identity based social movements was the integration of neoliberal practices and policies that were predicated on the expansion of markets and the dismantling of barriers to free trade in a globally-integrated economy (Melamed, 2006, 2011). During the 1950s identity politics functioned as a vehicle rooted in resistance and redistribution, in the 1960s as a vehicle fighting for state centered forms of recognition and rights, and in the 1970s identity politics shifted again functioning as a vehicle for fighting for the access to private choices. Over the past four decades persons who participated in the movements of the Civil Rights era and have been invested in the potential of identity politics have been in the process of negotiating and reconciling the promises of those political movements. These ideological shifts continue to evolve in tandem with the disparate realities that identity based political movements of the Civil Rights era were not able to bring about radical structural change they sought to. Yet the dominant narrative of what constitutes freedom and progress remains an actively key piece to undergirding how the politics of identity, particularly race and sexuality, are understood, retooled, and strategically positioned within the politics of school in the historical present. It is in this space of tension and friction where bridging queer theories and Chicana/Latina feminist
pedagogies to rethink LGBTQ Educational research is not just productive, but eminent. This dissertation joins in the efforts of scholars who have used Chicana/Latina feminist epistemologies to think through border transformative pedagogies in education (Elenes, 1997, 2002), pedagogies of home (Delgado-Bernal, 2006), pedagogies of the brown body (Cruz, 2006, 2011, 2012), convivencia (Carrillo, 2006), sobrevivencia (Trinidad-Galvan, 2006), la facultad (Anzaldúa, 1987; Delgado-Gaitain, 1994), and to valerse por si misma (Villenas and Moreno, 2011) to engage in re-conceptualizing agency, intersectionality, and subjectivities in diverse education contexts.

Thinking Through Queer Theoretical Frameworks

Queer theory as an academic endeavor was born out of a period of queer activism that emerged in the 1990s as a social reform movement determined to break down traditional ideas of normal and deviant. Queer theories recognize the partiality and tendentiousness of knowledge and perspectives and in their diversity and dissonance demand a questioning of the conventional and subsequent norms that follow. While queer theories are more interested in identifications and destabilizing social, cultural, and political structures and institutions; LGBTQ studies are more interested in questioning sexuality as an identity and understanding identity formations that emerge within social, cultural, and political structures and institutions. LGBTQ studies provide interdisciplinary discussions and multidisciplinary approaches to investigate the historical emergence and contemporary experiences of people who self identify as LGBTQ who have traditionally been neglected and relegated as non-normative. The important ways conceptualizations of normalcy, difference, and identities have deeply informed (and continue to inform) theoretical shifts in LGBTQ research in education that range from
frameworks of deviancy, to frameworks of visibility and recognition, to frameworks of self affirming naming, and frameworks of re-representation (Tierney & Dilley, 1998; Carlson, 1998; Mayo, 2006) cannot be overstated. This evolution of scholarship in LGBTQ educational research animates the myriad ways collective identity politics remain intimately tied to political projects, activism, and the processes of self-determination of marginalized peoples. Yet the tenuous relationship between queer theories and LGBTQ studies is productive because they have the potential to inform and challenge each other. As Mayo (2007) reminds us though, the terms LGBTQ, queer, and queer theories are all contested terms within the field of education and the variety of scholarship within varies. As an adjective, a noun, a verb, or a set of theories unapologetically committed to disrupting “regimes of the normal” (Warner, 1993), the term “queer” can be, do, or evoke a multitude of responses, desires, and perspectives. In both popular and academic usage in the United States, “queer” is sometimes used interchangeably with the terms “gay” and “lesbian” or occasionally “transgender” and “bisexual.” In this sense, it is understood as an umbrella term that refers to a range of sexual identities that are “not straight.” But in some political and theoretical contexts, “queer” is used in a seemingly contradictory way: as a term that calls into question the stability of any categories of identity based on sexual orientation. In this second sense, “queer” is a critique of the tendency to organize political or theoretical questions around sexual orientation per se. “To “queer” becomes a way to denaturalize categories such as “lesbian” and “gay” (not to mention “straight” and “heterosexual”), revealing them as socially and historically constructed identities that have often worked to establish and police the line between the “normal” and the “abnormal,”(Somerville, 2007, p. 189). Yet
for others the term queer is used to mark a (dis) satisfaction with the collective or individual signifiers of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender because they have strong associations with an assimilationist politics. Queer theory is a form of cultural study that “migrated from language and literary studies to education” (Pinar, 1998, p. 6) and serves as an intervention aimed at, “critically analyzing the meaning of identity, focusing on intersections of identities and resisting oppressive social constructions of sexual orientation and gender,” (Abes & Kasch, 2007, p. 620). In the context of education, what the signifiers lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer point to is the multiple and contradictory ways addressing and marking sexuality is relational yet absolutely necessary to create knowledge of self and others. Sedgwick’s (1990) scholarship in particular demonstrates the ways sexuality is expressive of both identity and knowledge linked to the operation of the system of heterosexism and it’s lover homophobia, effectively fuse within the matrices of oppression that continue to generate havoc in educational debates of reform or revolution. Queer theorists in education are specifically concerned with disrupting normalizing discourses that have been used historically to police teachers, students, and administrators within education (Blount, 2005; Dilley, 2002b; Quinn & Meiners, 2009). Queer theory is useful because it not only complicates gender and sexuality as those formations intersect with race, class, ability and other forms of identity and community, queer theory challenges us to expand whom we are talking about when we talk about whom or what can be queer or evoke queerness. Therefore, queer as a constellation of theoretical interventions in the field of education challenges practitioners and researchers alike to, “question not which policy to make on sexuality but how that strange workings of sexuality can allow for the rethinking of education,”
(Britzman, 2000, p. 52). Queer theories inform my analysis of Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school in that findings do not point to Java as a good or bad school or a effective or ineffective educational institution. On the contrary, queer theories inform a project that is invested in troubling the multiple relationships between educational institutions (Java High) and identity politics (LGBTQ inclusivity) in this historical moment pointing to the possibilities and limitations of K-12 educational institutions positioned as both responsible for and leading the charge for social transformation. Recognizing the critiques of normalcy, difference, and intersections of identities offered by queer theories is useful in situating Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school within social foundations of education research because these critiques offer a lens to understanding the kind of inclusivity enacted, resisted, and reproduced at Java High.

**Chicana/Latina Feminist Pedagogies**

According to Elenes, Delgado-Bernal, Gonzalez, and Trinidad & Villenas (2000) Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogies are culturally specific ways of organizing teaching and learning in informal sites such as the home and community, ways that embrace Chicana and Latina ways of knowing and creating knowledge that go beyond formal schooling. Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogies are multidisciplinary in approach and are concerned with re-conceptualizing and rethinking education using methods of educacion (holistic and moral education), la facultad (knowing through experience and intuition), pensadoras (creative thinkers), consejos (narrative storytelling), testimonios (testimonials), borderlands (the literal geographic but also symbolic spaces between countries and differences), sobrevivir (survival and beyond), convivir (the praxis of living together in community), valerse por si misma (to be self reliant), and a mestiza consciousness that point to schooling spaces full of creativity, agency, movement, and
coalition building are possible (Delgado-Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, and Villenas, 2006). These pedagogies are particularly important within the field of education because they challenge traditional notions of schooling that have historically used deficit theories to understand the experiences of Chicanas and other marginalized groups within education. Delgado-Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, and Villenas (2006) outline three ways that using Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogies have informed and continue to challenge the field of education. First, a Chicana/Latina feminist perspective allows scholars to understand and articulate nuanced schooling experiences of Chicana/Latina girls and women within institutions of higher education and secondary education that exist within a racialized society; generating a heterogeneous archive of mujeres that are undocumented, multilingual, first generation students, gender non conforming, lesbian, trans, and bicultural. What are the ways in which racially sexualized Chicanas/Latinas survive, resist, and thrive within educational institutions that come from cultural ways of knowing the self and partaking in strategies of self-care? Second, Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogies are concerned with using everyday practices of learning, teaching, and being in community with others as knowledge. What can we learn from older women and mothers that are a part of such a range of Latino communities and families? A Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogy is interested in understanding better their worldviews and how do their experiences challenge dominant worldviews about education, labor, immigration, identity formations, migration, kinship networks, and community processes of empowerment. Finally, Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogies are insistent that everyday experiences of Chicanas/Latinas are worth studying because they serve as key sources of knowledge that are necessary to theorize new de-colonial visions of life, family, labor, community, and
education. Some undergirding questions such as: in transforming our educational institutions in curriculum, teaching practices, and programs how can we begin to view children from non deficit perspectives, how can we design support programs for youth that capitalize on their resilience, and how can we enact pedagogies centered on wholeness rather than fragmenting bodies specifically inform Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogies because they privilege subjectivities, identity formations, and meaning making of Chicana and Latina identified women. Yet these questions were applicable and useful to me as I investigated the ways Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school addressed the issues facing LGBTQ youth positioned as a distinct at-risk population in the city of Hatfield. A Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogy informed my analysis of Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school by looking at the ways within the school culture positioned different conceptualizations of at-risk youth discursively, practically, and symbolically that represent borderland educational spaces. Chicana/Latina feminist perspectives frame a project that is interested in theorizing the schooling experiences of marginalized youth at an educational institution that positioned itself as LGBTQ inclusive without using deficit thinking or tropes. Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogies were useful in investigating the kind of inclusivity enacted and reproduced at Java High because these pedagogies addressed the ways race and racism, gender and sexism, and sexuality and heterosexism fused together and operated within the school culture, peer-to-peer relationships, and student-teacher relationships; effectively attuned to define, expose, and address the intersectionality of integrated educational problems. Therefore, my theoretical intervention in this dissertation project involved putting a Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogy in conversation with a queer approach to enable a queer Chican@
feminist position to unravel; ultimately framing my ethnographic research project by maneuvering within two conceptual frameworks that offered nuanced and multilayered examinations of Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school located in the urban city of Hatfield.

**A queer Chican@ feminist framework**

In what ways does a queer Chican@ feminist framework inform this dissertation project? Naming and using a queer Chican@ feminist framework is a political move on my part in an attempt to intervene in Social Foundations of Education research bridging queer modes of disruption with Chicana/Latina feminist pedagogies insistence everyday experiences of survival, resistance, compliance, dis/identification count as knowledge. The terminology of a queer Chican@ feminist framework unapologetically combines the destabilizing ‘queer’ as a verb that, “can never be fully owned, but only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage,” (Butler, 1993, p. 228) that puts consistent pressure on the ethnic signifier Chican@ and womanist signifier feminist as modes of doing rather than being generating unresolved theoretical tensions that evoke movement away from bounded notions of identity yet evokes the necessity of their use. The use of the @ symbol at the end of Chicana purposefully builds upon the scholarship of Sandra K. Soto (2011) and informs both my theoretical position and personal identification as a Chican@ butch throughout the dissertation.

The ethnic signifiers “Chicana”, “Chicano”, and “Chicana/o” when they are used as nouns and not adjectives announce a politicized identity embraced by a man or a woman of Mexican descent who lives in the United States and who wants to forge a connection to a collective identity politics. I like the way the non-alphabetic symbol for “at” disrupts our desire for intelligibility, our desire for a quick and certain visual registered of a gendered body the split second we see or hear the term (p. 2-3).
The terminology of Chican@ feminist signifies a recognition of the tremendous historical sociopolitical contributions of Chicana feminist thought that began in the 1960s formally to investigate the forces shaping their own experiences as women of color in the United States during the Civil Rights Era. Chicana feminists sought a room of their own in particular as their assessment of the rewards and limitations of their participation in various social movements were unfulfilled. Chicana feminists challenged the heteropatriarchy of the Chicano Nationalist movement at the same time challenged the racism within the Anglo Feminist movement that simultaneously developed during the Civil Rights Era. Articulating oneself as a Chicana feminist then and now remains a choice rather than an identification predisposed at birth or given to a girl during her adolescence. The choice of self-identifying as a Chicana feminist and or a Chican@ feminist marks identifications of a collective stake to land, resources, autonomy, and self-determination that recognizes and demands any kind of political movement(s) or coalitions that are forged in the liberation of Chicanas must be culturally and sexually specific. A queer Chican@ feminist position embraces the historical and sociopolitical interventions of queer theories and Chicana feminist thought and uses them as conceptual standpoints that inform my lens for qualitative research within education. Specifically, a queer Chican@ feminist position accepts: (1) that knowledge is always partial, open-ended, and relational because everyday experiences are the sources of theories of the flesh, (2) problematizes modes of inquiry that claims single strategy pedagogies of empowerment, liberation, and social justice for marginalized peoples; knowing that all research interventions are complicit in disciplinary power relations, (3) positions educational spaces as contradictory and complex spaces, and (4) disrupts dualisms, twists
in the intersections, and appreciates ambiguity as necessary to de-colonial strategies of change. The strength of a queer Chicano feminist position lies, in part, in the fusing of Chicana/Latina feminist theories and politics with queer theories’ constant challenge to normative discourses which inform my theorizing and pedagogical practices to re-imagine education and educational research with LGBTQ youth as knowledge producers. Using a queer Chicano feminist theoretical framework creates questions that undergird this project from intersecting and challenging perspectives. (1) What can an investigation of Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school tell us about the ways conceptualizations of at-risk youth, LGBTQ inclusivity, and school connectedness, and intersections of privilege might be welded to neoliberal strategies of school reform within education?, (2) What gets lost in an institutional demand for safety, a demand for certainty?, (3) What are the limits of agency within inclusivity regulated by educational institutions? Put another way, what happens when LGBTQ inclusivity and an educational institution merge?, and (4) What are the limits of inclusivity if it is positioned with one constellation of identities as its central fulcrum?

**Strengths & Limitations**

It is important to articulate at this juncture what this dissertation is and what it is not by discussing the project strengths and limitations. This dissertation does not advocate a model for LGBTQ inclusive schools based on research findings of Java High, nor advocate Java High as the singular institutional model of LGBTQ inclusion. This dissertation demonstrates more research should be conducted to investigate further what could LGBTQ inclusivity be if it is not bound by institutional constraints or institutional permissions. This dissertation does not engage in divisive polemic discussions of charter
schools and public schools, but does address the impact of neoliberal reform efforts had in contributing to the financial monies necessary to create and sustain Java High as an LGBTQ charter school in the city of Hatfield because a discursive analysis of school guiding documents warranted these interconnections. I do not make claims of Java High as a bad or a good LGBTQ inclusive charter school because that would be uninteresting, untrue, and simply unethical. I was more interested in addressing the ambiguous and diffused effects of Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school to connect these arguments to larger questions, problems, and patterns emerging in the field of Social Foundations. Finally, this dissertation does not theorize new kinds of LGBTQ youth identifications or advocate a set of best practices K-12 educators should implement when working with LGBTQ youth in any kind of school because the scope of this project does not warrant such conclusions. In spite of what this dissertation does not do, it does offer a critical intersectional approach that opens up new theoretical possibilities to conducting LGBTQ educational research by raising new questions rather than trying to prove or disprove established ideas. My intersectional analysis attempts to pull at the intertwined threads embedded in Java High’s creation and continued existence to unravel the links between neoliberal strategies of reform and LGBTQ inclusivity enacted discursively and literally. I try to get at the complicated messiness of institutionalizing a kind of LGBTQ inclusivity within a charter school located in an urban city in the Midwest that I have personal ties to which added another layer to the theoretical implications of the study.

Using an intersectional approach as its greatest strength, this dissertation has two distinctly, yet interrelated aims. The scholarship of McCready (2001, 2004a, 2004b, 2007) and Blackburn & McCready (2009) affirms the experiences of LGBTQ youth
attending schools in urban communities are both similar and different than youth attending schools in other environments. LGBTQ youth attending schools within urban communities speak to intersecting issues of immigration, poverty, racism, segregation, incarceration, gentrification, citizenship, economic exploitation, lack of access to resources, and other dynamics of cities that significantly impact their experiences in schools. Therefore, this dissertation urgently points to the necessity of future scholarship about LGBTQ inclusive schools and LGBTQ educational research to address the intersections marginalizing social positions, multiple youth identifications, and structural forces of poverty, racial housing segregation, and privatization of public schools that are embedded in the kinds of schooling experiences LGBTQ youth have. Second, this project urges a turn away from bullying as the center focus of LGBTQ educational research. I don’t think a continued focus of documenting the array of bullying LGBTQ youth encounter and the negative impact bullying has upon LGBTQ youth will transform our educational institutions to become beacons of safety for anyone. A continued focus on bullying obfuscates the facts that not all kids bully and there are different kinds of safety that play a role in the lives of all LGBTQ identified youth. To push our field beyond bullying without dismissing the necessity of it completely, I think a turn towards affect from a qualitative approach can slow ourselves and each other down to be able to use interdisciplinary approaches to LGBTQ educational research that do not look for strategies of reform but are committed to transformation and de-colonial practices.
**Limitations**

The two biggest limitations of this dissertation are time and generalizability. I simply did not have the professional or personal resources to dedicate more time to investigating social phenomena at Java High. I specifically did not have the personal financial resources to geographically move to Hatfield as I initially hoped I would be able to before the University level and local Hatfield review board approvals went through. Had I been able to live in Hatfield and immerse myself in the communities surrounding Java High, I could have visited community centers and other local venues, interviewed community officials critical to the development of the architectural structure of Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school. Also, my personal financial constraints limited the days of the week I was able to conduct data. Therefore, not only would I have been able to conduct fieldwork for an extended period of time if I had been able to move to Hatfield I would have been able to conduct fieldwork 4 days a week. Under the terms of Java High’s charter agreement the school is noted as a year round facility, however students did not physically attend school in the school building on Tuesdays. In the Java High educational vision & philosophy having one day a week with no classes in session allowed teachers and staff the critical time to plan lessons collaborative and have uninterrupted staff meetings, and students were encouraged to create consistent service learning project times, take online courses, or work a part-time job. Although, this dissertation did not focus on seeking out individual stories of violence, resistance, or resilience enacted by LGBTQ youth or educators I interacted with at Java High these things came up in participant observations, casual conversations, and in individual interviews.
While this study explores an emerging strand of LGBTQ educational research by investigating the kind of LGBTQ inclusivity promoted and enacted at Java High, there are limits to the generalizability of the study. The study includes individual interviews with only three students and students cannot possibly capture the breadth of understandings of Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school in the Midwest. More pointed attempts to individually interview more students could have broadened the understanding of student perspectives about Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school. While my intersectional approach offered a multifaceted lens of inquiry to engage in more participating than observing, the consistent casual and impromptu conversations with a significant amount of students, staff, and volunteers during fieldwork does not reflect a definitive understanding of the heterogeneous perspectives about the utility of LGBTQ inclusiveness in their lives. On the contrary, the project offers contextual findings into emerging patterns of Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school located in the city of Hatfield that bring a breadth of new perspective into the field of LGBTQ educational research.
CHAPTER 2
ENGAGING WITH LGBTQ EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Introduction

How has the scholarship vested in LGBTQ educational research evolved over the years so that we can understand this historical moment that much better? In what ways has the scholarship within the four dominant strands of LGBTQ research in Education: decreased the pathologizing of LGBTQ sexualities, increased visibility and recognition of LGBTQ people, understanding spheres of intersecting student identities, and increased attention to institutional climates and experiences of LGBTQ youth in K-12 schools generated new knowledges (theories, practices, curriculum, and policies) about LGBTQ youth experiences in secondary schooling? Are there scholars out there pushing at the seams of the four dominant strands of LGBTQ research by looking for points of intersection, moments of collapse, and unexpected mergers that ultimately generate more questions than definite answers effectively pointing the field in new directions by unsettling dominant discourses, key questions, or normative beliefs about LGBTQ youth? More pointedly, what contributions does this dissertation project specifically offer the field of LGBTQ Educational Research? What can investigating an LGBTQ inclusive charter school located in an urban city in the Midwest tell us about our current historical moment? These critical questions are the driving force of this chapter arguing it is not just a literature review but a critical engagement with the field of Education, the scholars, the research, the theoretical and methodological contributions, the unresolved tensions, and the dynamics pushing the field in new directions to generate more de-colonial research projects attuned to the evolving needs of LGBTQ youth in K-12 education. By
engaging with the field of LGBTQ educational research my hope is to map out the historical shifts that have occurred, play with the tensions that have been generated, and demonstrate the way this project fits into the sociopolitical terrain Education has cultivated at the same time demonstrate the way this project turns towards new directions. Ultimately this chapter lays the groundwork that informs my decision to investigate Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school located in the urban city of Hatfield by scaffolding general problems and questions of access, equity, learning, curriculum, and teaching that persist within LGBTQ educational research.

**The Evolution of Increased Visibility & Recognition of LGBTQ Youth**

More students in the U.S. continue to identify themselves as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer or Questioning (LGBTQ) pushing the K-12 public school system to make more of a substantiated effort to recognize and address the multiplicity of their needs (Reis & Saewyc, 1999; Rienzo, Button Sheu, & Li, 2006). Scholars such as Sears (1992, 1997, & 1999), Rofes (1997), Savin-Williams & Ream (2003), and Szalacha (2005) continue to challenge educators to engage in more qualitative research that emphasizes the exploration of LGBT identity development, resiliency, strengths, and effective coping strategies developed by LGBTQ youth in elementary and secondary education in the United States. For more than 50 years LGBTQ people have been trying to make sense of themselves using education as a primary vehicle to enact political projects (Mayo, 2009). However, the combination of homophobia, “A socially produced form of discrimination against homosexuals,” (Murray, 2009, p. 3) and heteronormativity, “a powerful form of social regulation and control used to expose and highlight how institutionalized heterosexuality is consciously and unconsciously accepted and reproduced- simply presented as “the way people
naturally are” and unquestionable emblem of normality,” (Kumashiro, 2002; Letts & Sears, 1999) has taken center stage in researching the experiences of people who identify as LGBTQ. The shift towards visibility and recognition within the field of Education is intimately connected to the primary strategies used by the national gay and lesbian organizations throughout the last forty years that have focused on the seeking state recognition, inclusion, and incorporation into the national body by changing the laws and policies to sanction and sustain equality for LGBT people (Spade, 2011). As the visibility and recognition of LGBTQ issues has harbored arcs of momentum through political campaigns, legislative protections, and cultural shifts for equality, the field of Education has remained steadfast in conducting research about issues pertaining to LGBTQ youth and adults within the United States with the five overarching themes of youth, professionals, curriculum & pedagogy, families, and educational policies (Sears, 2005). The ability to cite a plethora of diverse educational scholarship that has documented and theorized the visibility of LGBTQ people, institutional climate for LGBTQ people, and cultivated better understandings of LGBTQ student identities and experiences cannot be overstated. In this historical moment, the relationship between schools and society continues to be precarious particularly as it relates to LGBTQ youth. Therefore, recognizing the historical evolution of scholarship focused on the range of LGBTQ issues within Education is not outdated; this archive reminds readers and those of us who have were not alive prior to 1974 there was a time any mention of LGBTQ sexualities were deeply entrenched within discourses of homosexuality as deviance, contagious, and dangerous (Tierney & Dilley, 1998). As a result of this fact, the scope of educational research about LGBTQ issues has broadened to include the absence of sexuality and its
impact upon the arenas of educational theory, curriculum, and pedagogy (Szalacha, 2003). Throughout the 1990s researchers Sears (1992) and Sapon-Shevin & Goodman (1992) posited that without looking at gender bias and inflexible traditional gender roles the operation of homophobia could not be understood and Friend (1995) and Nayak & Kehily (1997) argued without critically examining heterosexism and masculinity homophobia could not be truly grasped. Whatley’s (1992a, 1992b) work also contributed to challenging researchers in education to be critical of reproducing the same inequalities we attempt to critique in our work. During the past decade LGBTQ research has shifted the scope from obstacles that LGBTQ youth face (like being ignored or being silenced) towards their resiliency and agency (Blackburn, 2004; Bochenek & Brown, 2001; Bohan, Russell, & Montgomery, 2002; Gray, 1999; Kosciw & Cullen, 2001; Talburt, 2004). Yet as Mayo’s (2009) scholarship reminds all educational researchers whose work critiques the institutional, social, and political barriers LGBTQ youth encounter and overcome are in fact statements of agency because critique is agency. Another important shift within LGBTQ research and social foundations research that emerged over the past two decades is Queer Theory.

Queering LGBTQ Education

Michael Warner’s (1993) seminal piece Fear of a Queer Planet posits, “Queer Theory does not replace gay and lesbian theory within academia but gets it edge by defining itself against the normal rather than heterosexuality…‘queer’ as a verb then has the effect of pointing out a wide field of normalization, rather than simple intolerance as the site of violence,” (p. xxvi). Therefore, Queer Theory opened up new possibilities and problems within the limitations of discourse and practice by examining how processes of
normalization consolidate and recirculate power. For example, Dean Spade (2011) uses queer theory to lay out and call for the necessity for a critical trans politics that, “is about practice and process rather than arrival at a singular point of “liberation” (p. 20), while, “understanding the dispersion of power helps us realize that power is not simply about certain individuals being targeted for death or exclusion by a ruler, but instead about the creation of norms that distribute vulnerability and security,” (p. 23). Concomitantly, ‘queer’ as a verb has also been used by researchers to critique metaphors of the closet and coming out (Rasmussen, 2004) and how too often terms like gay and queer fall into white and male calling for the necessity to further interrogate white masculinity (Pinar, 2003). Rodriguez & Pinar (2007) further use queer theory to queer heterosexuality, gender identity, gender formation, sex assignment, and processes of racial identification and community formation and maintenance. Kissen (2002), Lipkin (2004), and Sears & Williams (1997) have generated scholarship that is concerned with bridging research to direct practice within schools by addressing the homophobia within education. Furthermore, Queer Theory has also created the possibilities to generate more sexual diversity programs in an attempt to make schools safer (Blount & Anahita, 2004; Britzman, 1995, 1997; Bryson & de Castell, 1993; de Castell & Bryson, 1997; Harwood, 2004; Martindale, 1997; Mayo, 2002, 2004b; Rasmussen, 2004, 2006; Rofes, 2004; Talburt, 2004). As a result of Queer Theory being able to problematize ‘the normal’ within the schools over the past two decades in particular strides have been made to include LGBTQ issues within Education. Applebaum’s (2003) and Kumashiro’s (2008) scholarship demonstrates in particular that LGBTQ issues have and continue to create significant controversies within education because of the collisions between the values of
the religious Right and principles of democracy. Furthermore, the plethora of research
cultivated over the past two decades about LGBTQ youth in Education has used the
tensions as possibilities to examine current policies, controversies, teen pregnancy,
HIV/AIDS (Mayo, 2004a; Patton, 1996; Silin, 1995), abstinence only education (Levine,
2002; Mayo, 2004a; Pillow, 2004), safe schools policies and legislation (MacGillivary,
2004), gay-straight alliance policies (Miceli, 2005; Perotti & Westheimer, 2001), and
civil rights law disputes (Filax, 2006). Also, national support network based climate
surveys by The Human Rights Watch (Bochenek & Brown, 2001) and the Gay, Lesbian,
and Straight Educator’s Network (GLSEN; 2005), ethnographies of queer youth (Gray,
1999, 2011); collections of queer youth narratives (Bello, Flynn, Palmer, Rodriguez, &
Vente, 2004; Sonnie, 2000) and research on gay parents’ experiences with schools
(Casper & Schultz, 1999). Other scholarship has specifically used ‘queer critique’ into
methodological and epistemological approaches to research and policy (Capper, 1999;
Dilley, 1999; Honeychurch, 1996; Kumashiro, 2002; Leck, 2000; Sears, 1993; Talburt,
1999; Unks, 1995).

**LGBTQ Research in K-12 Education**

Until very recently, research on LGBTQ youth has focused on college-aged
students who for the most part identify themselves as White within in both qualitative and
quantitative studies. The smaller number of research studies that have documented the
experiences of LGBTQ youth in elementary and secondary schools have been personal
narratives or retrospective accounts, and focus on the difficulties experienced by LGBTQ
youth that ranges from abusive language, heteronormative curriculum and educators, and
strict adherence to gender codes and roles. In the past fifteen years, there have been more
efforts from researchers to shift from college-aged LGBTQ youth to LGBTQ youth in secondary schools. According to Cianciotto & Cahill (2012):

During the 2007-2008 school year the U.S. Department of Education estimated there were 22.4 million students in grades 7-12. Given the studies indicating that 4 to 6 percent of the U.S. population is homosexual or bisexual, we estimate that between 896,000 and 1.34 million students in grades 7-12 identify as LGB (p. 14).

Yet, conducting research in elementary and secondary schools that focus on LGBTQ youth issues or identities continue to present significant challenges. These limitations present a serious concern for the field as a result of more youth self-identifying as LGBTQ to themselves and others at earlier ages than generations prior to them. Russell & Rankin (2005) posit that LGBTQ youth are put at a greater risk for greater difficulties experienced by adolescents because they face more harassment and discrimination. In addition, a significant number of school personnel often do not take sexuality-motivated harassment or victimization seriously, even for some students whom harassment and victimization experiences are pervasive. Some school personnel express the belief that victims “cause” their own harassment and thereby do not support victimized youth. Kosciw & Cullen (2003) assert in their study of LGBTQ adolescents more than 69% of LGB youth in grades seven through twelve reported feeling unsafe in their schools, and one-third reported that they missed at least one day of school in the past nine months because they felt unsafe. According to McCarn & Fassinger (1996) there is little research on effective prevention and intervention strategies related to issues of sexual orientation and gender identity; and that further research is critically needed to provide schools with the tools necessary to create supportive educational environments for LGBTQ youth.

Additionally, two more significant concerns within the field of LGBTQ educational research are how the majority of research has focused on White mostly gay youth, and
the lack of research about LGBTQ youth in rural communities. According to McCready (2001, 2005) urban communities offer a range of social/support services that target LGBTQ youth such as The Hetrick-Martin Institute, home of The Harvey Milk High School in New York City, The Albert Kennedy Trust in London, England, The Triangle Program in Toronto, Canada, and the development of a significant amount of Gay Straight Alliances throughout the United States. McCready (2005) points out, despite what appears to be a great deal of resources for LGBTQ youth in urban communities and in schools in urban communities, these programs remain limited in scope because they do not address the new social context of urban communities (p. 878).

Two issues remain consistent within urban communities and continue to significantly shape the lives and experiences of LGBTQ youth living in them, racially segregated housing and racially segregated schools. According to Wells et al. (2004) in addition to institutional racism, individual white middle class families have been reluctant to live in the integrated urban communities that civil rights activists imagined. Middle class whites often fear the quality of schools suffer when they serve large numbers of children who are poor, of color, and/or nonnative English speakers. When people of color become the majority of a city’s population, whites may respond not only with “white flight” but also with a racialized view of “the city” even when they live within the city’s limits. McCready (2005) notes, “research on LGBTQ youth tends to focus out of these urban contexts, and instead center on issues of coming out, suicide, substance abuse, harassment, and family acceptance,” (p.880). LGBTQ youth living in rural communities also face challenges like their urban counterparts. Walton (2005) defines rural as communities that roughly have fewer than 1,000 people and more socially conservative in character than urban communities. Hillier, Warr, and Haste (1996) posit that rural
communities and schools tend to be characterized by tight-knit social groups with common beliefs where “everybody knows everybody’s business.” Morton (2003) asserts that a fear of disclosing their sexual orientation renders rural LGBT youth as more isolated and less likely to have access to helping resources, such as community LGBTQ support groups, counseling services, community resources, and their families. Lack of meeting places to socialize with other LGBTQ youth as well as dependence on others for transportation to events that are usually held outside their community exacerbates rural isolation. Mary Gray’s (2009) ethnography *Out in the Country: Youth, Media, and Queer Visibility in Rural America* offers a fresh perspective within the subsection of research about LGBTQ youth in rural communities by using an interdisciplinary approach to researching how young people living in rural communities in the U.S. who lay claim to LGBTQ identities confront the politics of gay visibility, expectations, and constraints that define and shape the recognition of LGBT identifying people in popular culture and public life. Building upon her prior work in 1999, Gray’s *Out in the Country* affirmed the growing amount of LGBTQ youth living in rural communities who are gaining access to and using the Internet as a major source of information, affirmation, and education. There have only been a small number of studies that have looked at how the homophobia LGBTQ youth experience in secondary education impacts them, and equally fewer studies that attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of Gay/Straight Alliances (GSAs) and Anti-Bullying Programs. According to Sears (2005), “less than 1% of all research studies challenge deficit models of queer youth and focus on how the LGBTQ youth effectively navigate through institutions such as school and social agencies while (re/de) constructing sexual identities,” (p. xxi). This extensive archive of LGBTQ research has
made significant strides to change education for the better, and research within social foundations in particular has gone from focusing on LGBTQ inclusion and rights towards post structural theory and psychoanalytic theory to use unresolved tensions as productive approaches to educational research. In 2015, there are some who posit LGBTQ youth are the post gay generation because they do not want to be bound by the pressure of norms and labels. Instead of rendering this generation of youth as beyond or over using LGBTQ as identity labels maybe it is pertinent to evaluate closer what the hesitation or refusal to use LGBTQ as significant signifiers tells us about our historical moment. Youth refusing LGBTQ as identity specific signifiers could be gesturing for more flexibility to name the evolution of their identities at the same time their complicated negotiation of overlapping identities challenges and affirms normalizing discourses of LGBTQ identities in an array of subtle (Blackburn 2004, 2005), spectacular (Gray 2007, 2011), and nuanced ways (Yon-Leau & Munoz-Laboy, 2010) that may be unfamiliar or unrecognizable to older generations. Therefore, conducting research with LGBTQ youth presents formidable challenges particularly with the concept of ‘being out’ and the boundaries sustained by the discourses of risk & safety that have become common place in understanding LGBTQ youth as at-risk and or innocent victims (Hackford-Peer, 2010).

**Focus on Bias Related Violence, Stigma, and LGBTQ Youth as Victims**

A growing body of qualitative and quantitative educational research that has influenced U.S. educational policy talk and policy implementation (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) has focused on LGBTQ youth as victims of homophobic violence, stigmatized as at risk for identifying or being perceived as identifying as LGBTQ, and how LGBTQ youths’ social environments within schools should be restructured (Cianciotto & Cahill,
2003, 2004; Limber, 2006; Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, Koenig, 2008; Athanases & Comar, 2008; Hetrick, & Martin 1987; Hanlon, 2009; Adelman & Woods, 2006; Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, 2009; Russell, McGuire, Lee, Larriva, & Laub, 2008; Varjas, Mahan, Meyers, Birckbichler, Lopp, & Dew, 2006). The work of O’Shaughnessy, Russell, Heck, Calhoun, & Laub (2004) and Poteat & Espelage (2007) compliments this troubling yet necessary body of LGBTQ scholarship, “has found the impact of many LGBTQ youth experiencing bias related violence at school is associated with negative outcomes, including lower attendance rates, lower grade point averages, and a lower sense of connection to school,” (Mayo, 2014, p.6). The growing archive of educational research devoted to and advocacy for LGBTQ youth coupled with arcs of increased national media attention focused on white gay males who committed suicide as a result of enduring pervasive harassment within educational institutions points to the evolving tenuous relationship between the politics of identity and the politics of schools (McKinley, 2010). The intersection of increased media attention of White gay male youth suicides alongside intentional research on and advocacy for LGBTQ youth informs well established discourses of risk and safety that circulate within the field of Education impacting the kinds of research being conducted by scholars that are committed to cultivating better understanding and responses to the array of issues LGBTQ youth face. These facts ultimately position educational institutions as primary sites where the array of inequalities LGBTQ youth face in K-12 schools can and should be mitigated. In particular, the psychosocial stressors of depression, risky sexual behaviors, substance abuse, homelessness, suicide ideation, and suicide attempts associated with LGBTQ youth have charged educational researchers to study the growing array of the needs of

LGBTQ youth within educational institutions (Russell, 2005). Yet, Cianciotto and Cahill (2003, 2004) point out that LGBTQ youth are at a higher risk for psychosocial stressors because of the stigma associated with non-normative sexualities and gender non-conformity and contribute to elevated rates of homophobic violence (verbal and physical assaults) within educational institutions. Distinguishing the difference between the stigma associated with LGBTQ sexualities and expressions of gender non-conformity and youth cultivating self-determination by claiming LGBTQ sexualities and expressing gender outside of a heteronormative frame is critical to understanding the multiplicity of ways psychosocial vulnerabilities impact the lived experiences and development processes of LGBTQ youth is consistently absent from news media’s engagement of LGBTQ youth issues. The stigma associated with LGBTQ sexualities and expressions of gender nonconformity more often than not are conflated with youth articulating LGBTQ identities or expressing gender nonconformity. In short, the stigma is the problem not the youth articulating LGBTQ sexualities and or expressing gender non-conformity. Therefore, it is necessary to implicate how the continued negative stigma pervasively linked to LGBTQ identities and gender nonconformity position homophobia as isolated acts of violence perpetrated by ignorant and fearful heterosexual individuals rather than as interconnected acts of violence committed by individuals who are incorporated into maintaining a heteronormative social order not fearful of LGBTQ sexualities and gender non-conformity.
Discourses of Risk & Safety in LGBTQ Educational Research

Educators in a mired of fields continue to advocate for and work towards an end of homophobic violence and homophobia as a cultural practice. Yet in our diligence to eradicate homophobic violence and homophobia within Education an archive of scholarship has been created that relies upon homophobic violence to legitimate LGBTQ identities and substantiate a call that LGBTQ youth need to be protected in schools through educational policies and practices. The scholarship of O’Shaughnessy, Russell, Heck, Calhoun, & Laub (2004) and Poteat & Espelage (2007) point to the negative impact of LGBTQ youth experiencing homophobia and biases at school is associated with negative school outcomes such as lower attendance rates, a lower sense of connection to school, and lower grade point averages pointing to why discourses of risk & safety in educational research have been generated with good intentions, are necessary, and are daunting. Dorothy Espelage’s (2005, 2007, 2012, 2013) scholarship in particular within secondary education has demonstrated critical links between bullying, homophobic teasing, homophobic language, and sexual harassment that have cultivated necessary bullying prevention programs and techniques in many U.S. schools. At the same time the discourses of risk & safety fall short in exposing underlying structural patterns and sites of power within educational institutions that reproduce heteronormativity as natural and sanction homophobic violence as a response to non-normative sexual and gendered bodies. Dean Spade’s (2011) scholarship pinpoints the importance of addressing the intersections of structural patterns to reveal the harms marginalized people like LGBTQ youth endure by, “understanding power is decentralized and that certain practices, ways of knowing, norms, and technologies of
power are distributed in myriad ways rather than only from a single person or institution,” (p. 21). Scholar Eric Rofes’ (2004) wrote extensively on the dangers and drawbacks of, “constantly placing [LGBTQ youth] in the position of victims or, at best, survivors,” (p. 50) because this positions LGBTQ youth as, “problems to be solved,” (Talburt, 2006, p. 88). Queer educational theorists Rofes and Talburt’s scholarship demonstrates implicit tensions within these larger discourses of risk & safety as they are positioned as primary standpoints for theorizing educational policies, practices, curriculum, and pedagogy concerned with LGBTQ youth. During the fall of 2011 a series of high profile suicides by primarily White cisgender male gay youth brought the issue of homophobic violence to the forefront of mainstream news media. According to Mayo (2014), “Cisgender people, people whose gender identity and birth gender are the same, may take for granted the ease with which they negotiate gender norms though they too can recall being corrected for not acting in properly gendered ways,” (p. 20). The emotional affects of fear undergirding the impetus of homophobic violence repeatedly leave educators and educational researchers with urgent and daunting questions that do not have simple linear solutions. Kevin Kumashiro’s scholarship has been at the forefront of conducting educational research and engaging in educational issues of risk and safety that impact and affect LGBTQ youth and LGBTQ youth of color. Specifically, Kumashiro’s (2008) scholarship points to three pressing limitations to focusing on discourses of risk & safety within research projects that seek to ‘understand and address the complex needs of LGBTQ youth better. The first limitation is that discourses of risk & safety focus attention on homophobia and bias against gender non-conformity, on the processes of marginalizing LGBTQ youth, and not on heterosexism and the privileging of
heterosexuality as normal. Leaning on the critique of Queer Theorists William Pinar (1998), Deborah Britzman (1998), and Judith Butler (1993) Kumashiro argues that, “Left unexamined are the ways we think about and treat heterosexuality and gender norms, including the prevailing assumptions that heterosexuality and gender conformity are the natural, normal, better, or moral way to be,” (51). Therefore, one foundational assumption within discourses of risk & safety is the primary goal of educators and policy makers alike to create schools in which LGBTQ youth can be assured they will be free of overt forms of harassment and violence. The second drawback according to Kumashiro is that focusing on safety to lessen risk can be interpreted as advancing assimilation of LGBTQ youth and significantly reduce the scope of anti-LGBTQ youth discrimination. Discourses of risk & safety position the issue of LGBTQ youth discrimination within a narrow scope of overt individualized acts of violence, and this positioning does two critical things. First, it ignores the multiplicity of discrimination at the same time erasing the interplay between and the intermeshing of power and oppression as a structure of domination. Second, it sends the message to LGBTQ youth and builds on the scholarship of Yoshino (2006) that if LGBTQ youth could just do a better job not making straight students uncomfortable with their identities and non-conforming gender expressions the overt forms of violence and discrimination would cease. Kumashiro asserts these two pillars undergird the force of dominant discourses of risk & safety in education and have allowed “The Right” to appropriate discourses of risk & safety that range from extremists arguing LGBTQ youth deserve death and abuse towards moderates politely arguing LGBTQ youth would not get bullied or be weakened by overt harassment and discrimination if they were not so gay or identified openly as LGBTQ. Kumashio’s and
Yoshino’s scholarship points to the significant limitations in building from and expanding upon discourses of risk & safety as primary standpoints for theorizing educational policies, practices, curriculum, and pedagogy concerned about LGBTQ youth.

**Schools as Primary Institutions to Mitigate Inequality LGBTQ Youth Face**

It is well documented that educators have cultivated a plethora of scholarship advocating educational institutions to be more inclusive for LGBTQ people (students, faculty, parents, administrators, and parents alike). Therefore, a significant strand of the bulk of LGBTQ issues in K-12 and Higher Education consists of investigating institutional climate for people who identify as LGBTQ. Renn (2010) identifies the three sub sections to institutional climate for LGBTQ people as: “(a) perceptions and experiences of LGBT people, (b) perceptions about LGBT people and their experiences, and (c) status of policies and programs designed to improve the academic, living, and work experiences of LGBT people on campus,” (p. 134). The work of Kosciw (2004), Kosciw & Diaz (2006) and Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak (2008) affirms the importance of climate studies to collect data on the experiences of and attitudes about LGBTQ people that are readily used as evidence for creating, improving, or expanding LGBTQ programs and services. Coupled with the call for reorganizing the architecture of schools to better serve and support LGBTQ youth is the label of LGBTQ youth as at-risk. Talburt (2004) notes that, “particularly after the release of the 1989 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Report of the Secretary’s Task Force on Youth Suicide revealed that gay and lesbian youth commit some 30% of teen suicides, numerous writers took up the topic of LGBT youth as at-risk,” (p. 118). This explosion of researchers taking on LGBTQ
youth as at risk population in has multiple sides and consequences. On the one hand the increase in scholarship demonstrates the importance of knowledge production and evidence required to inform educational policy, curriculum, and practices that pertain to LGBTQ youth success and self-determination. On the other hand, the growing documentation of violence endured by LGBTQ youth because of the negative stigma of their actual or perceived sexuality, sexual orientation, or gender expressions reinforced a stable identifier of at-risk. Foucault’s (1980) concept of power/knowledge helps understand why within the field of Education and other sociocultural, political, and economic institutions LGBTQ youth have become constructed as an at-risk population.

The significance of discourses about “kinds” of people highlights the relationship between the control of knowledge production and governing practices of the state and reaffirms the use of specific words and labels within a discourse are not arbitrary. As Erin Castro’s (2014) scholarship affirms, “While seemingly neutral, language works to re-inscribe inequality because it functions as commonsense and works beyond an individual’s particular intentions… More than simply a collection of words, language is representative of beliefs and values,” (p. 409-410). Therefore, discourses and language shape the lived experiences of people and sociocultural structures in turn shape discourses creating a dialectic relationship. One of the first and most important institutional responses to the growing concerns about LGBTQ youth was the development of the Hetrick-Martin Institute (HMI) in New York City by Psychiatrist Emery Hetrick and NYU Professor A. Damien Martin in 1979. Miceli (2005) outlines the goals of HMI and development of HMI in founding The Harvey Milk School as:

The goal of the institute was to provide social services, support, and advocacy for LGBT youth who had previously been ignored or discriminated against by other
youth social service agencies. HMI offers a range of services to youth, including support services as personal counseling, medical, and legal assistance and referrals, after-school activities such as arts programming, and school and career skills training. MHI founded the Harvey Milk High School in 1985 in conjunction with the Career Center of the New York City Department of Education. The school, which is a fully accredited high school, was established to provide LGBT and heterosexual students who had experienced verbal harassment and physical violence in their previous schools with a safe learning environment. The school was established as an institutional reaction to the growing body of research on, and reported instances of serious harassment faced by gay students, and the students perceived to be LGBT, in schools in New York City and around the country (p. 20).

I cite Miceli at length because her scholarship points to the tension of educational institutions reactions to the violent realities of LGBTQ youth and the impact of institutionalizing a discourse of risk and safety in understanding LGBTQ youth as an at-risk population. What these conditions point to is the socio-historical connection between schools and society in cultivating a K-12 landscape in which the steady increase of visibility and recognition of LGBTQ youth are coupled with experiences of alienation and violence that educational institutions have been charged to respond to and primarily mitigate. Therefore, Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school is a contemporary example of an institutional response in the Midwest to reconstituting the architecture of schools as a vehicle to mitigate the at-riskness mapped upon LGBTQ youth bodies that is intimately linked to the historical trajectory of HMI and HMHS as institutional responses to increase access to mental and public health programs and social services historically denied to LGBTQ youth in New York City. In the next chapter I pivot away from literature towards methodology in order to situate earnestly the underpinnings of Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school located in the urban city of Hatfield with a return to these four theoretical questions. What can an investigation of Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school tell us about the ways conceptualizations of at-risk
youth, LGBTQ inclusivity, and school connectedness, and intersections of privilege might be welded to neoliberal strategies of school reform within education?, (2) What gets lost in an institutional demand for safety, a demand for certainty?, (3) What are the limits of agency within inclusivity regulated by educational institutions? Put another way, what happens when LGBTQ inclusivity and an educational institution merge?, and (4) What are the limits of inclusivity if it is positioned with one constellation of identities as its central fulcrum? The theoretical pause in the next chapter evokes thinking about and thinking through the ways a qualitative inquiry approach to LGBTQ youth research in the field of education broaches the following questions: (1) If a charter school established as LGBTQ inclusive is positioned as better suited to mitigate the inequalities LGBTQ youth face more so than local public schools, what does positioning the public schools as inherently failing and the charter school as successful contribute to?, (2) If an LGBTQ inclusive charter school positions LGBTQ youth as inherently at-risk for victimization and harassment to justify it’s existence does this positioning create a deficit based infrastructure?, and (3) Does privatizing LGBTQ inclusivity through charter schools make it more exclusionary? The next chapter further advances this emerging strand of LGBTQ educational research by using a queer Chican@ feminist lens to investigate the intersections of LGBTQ inclusivity, neoliberal educational reform strategies, and the roles educational institutions can play in partially mitigating inequalities LGBTQ youth face through a qualitative approach.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

This chapter lays the methodological groundwork that informs my decision to investigate Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school in an urban city in the Midwest by implicating the project in a region steeped in political, social, and economic controversies intimately linked to neoliberal educational reform efforts. This chapter points to what queer theorists Martin Manalansan, Chantal Nadeau, Ricky T. Rodriguez, and Siobhan Somerville (2014) assert:

The constant interplay and overlap of urban and rural beyond the binary of the metro pole and the hinterlands... an assessment of the Midwest region points out it is hardly an isolated space but one saturated by larger cultural forces and processes—must call attention to the fact that the rural is always present in the urban and vice verses (p. 5).

The narratives of crisis and swift action continue to have tremendous valence within the Midwest region particularly in the cities of Milwaukee and Chicago demonstrating the Midwest is far from an uncontested site but rather a significant terrain that informs and shapes educational policies and practices. Therefore, using qualitative inquiry played a critical role in increasing understanding and developing new knowledge about the evolving purposes of educational institutions and how can schools better serve (support and advocate for) the growing heterogeneous LGBTQ population. I scaffold my investigation of Java within an archive of qualitative research in education pointing to the way scholars have used qualitative inquiry to view problems in urban education; then turn to outline the way and the reasons why I approached using ethnography, a mestiza consciousness, and my multiple marginalized positionalities as a researcher as productive tensions through out the data collection and analysis processes. Finally, this chapter ends with an in depth discussion of Java High as the primary site of this dissertation and
carefully points to the nuanced architecture of this LGBTQ inclusive charter school pointing to underlying conceptualizations of at-risk youth, inclusivity, and school connectedness inform the educational vision and philosophy of the school.

**The Upper Midwest: Turbulent Terrain**

On March 3, 2011 Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker signed into law the proposal essentially eliminated most union rights for Wisconsin state employees negatively impacting a plethora of public school teachers, fire fighters, police officers, sanitation workers, and trade workers ability to access collective bargaining. Walker justified his actions by reiterating stripping collective bargaining rights were a necessary step to balance the Wisconsin state budget⁶. But Walker’s actions were not well received by thousands of Wisconsin residents who gathered together in the state capital to protest as teachers, workers, parents, students, and activists showcasing the tremendous impact coalition building around working class issues translated into workers rights as human rights. The bill signed by Walker facilitated significant budget cuts in the state of Wisconsin by cutting funding for public education by 800 million dollars on the secondary level and 250 million on the colligate level.⁷ The impact of the bills has been disastrous in the already struggling city of Milwaukee in particular because the bill reduced the amount schools can collect from property taxes and other revenue combined. While taking out the legs of public school funding sources Walker expanded funding sources for privatized schools by expanded the Milwaukee county voucher program to the suburbs and to Racine County. Therefore, the bill signed by Walker in 2011 has had tremendous influence within the Midwest region in terms of setting a precedence for

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taking on workers unions, teachers unions, slashing public funding services, slashing
public education funding, and overall shrinking what is constituted as the public in order
to balance the budget of the state.

The week of January 27, 2015 the Green Bay Press-Gazette\(^8\) printed two articles
outlining Scott Walker’s latest plan to invest in the state of Wisconsin by creating a $220
million sports arena for the Milwaukee Bucks of the National Basketball Association in
downtown Milwaukee at the same time cut state funding for the University of Wisconsin
Madison by 13%. Walker’s actions to dismantle public education in the state of
Wisconsin through the guise of fiscal conservatism, what Yvonna S. Lincoln (2011) has
termed, “a neoliberal, managerial, technocratic set of means for regulating and
normalizing behavior,” (p. 370) remain deliberate and steadfast. However, Walker’s
entrenched neoliberal fundamentalism, a staunch belief that all social and economic
problems can be always be solved through a free market economy by deregulating
businesses and trade and restricting if not abolishing state intervention (Denzin &
Giardina, 2015) is not new. In 2013 Michigan’s Republican Governor Rick Snyder
approved a $650 million funding plan to build a sports area for the Detroit Red Wings of
the National Hockey League while also filing for public bankruptcy. Zirin (2013) points
out the severe limitations to using the funding and construction of a new sports stadium
in the heart of an urban city dealing with accelerating interconnected factors of economic
disinvestment, racial segregation, and a shift from an industrial economy to a service
economy as a catch all fix because publicly funded stadiums, “are part of the problem
because stadiums don’t address the central issues of falling population, falling tax base,
declining wages, unemployment, and the underfunding of schools;” (p.7). Therefore,

\(^8\) [http://www.wpr.org/walker-announces-220m-investment-new-bucks-arena](http://www.wpr.org/walker-announces-220m-investment-new-bucks-arena)
Walker’s bold move to reorganize the University of Wisconsin system at the same time pushing for a new sports stadium reveal he is committed to dismantle faculty tenure and shared faculty governance by claiming the budget cuts will force University officials to “be more effective, more efficient” (McCalmont, 2015, p.6) effectively normalizing the discourse and tactics of a neoliberal free market ideology within higher education as normal and inevitable. Taking on the workers unions, teachers unions, and winning of two recall elections has not only boosted Walker’s popularity within conservative funders like David and Charles Koch but affirms the contentious social, political, and political terrain of the Midwest region has moved front and center.

Just across the border from Wisconsin in the land of Lincoln Chicago Mayor Rahm Emmanuel has positioned himself at the center of contentious educational political debates during his tenure as Mayor of the windy city. Following Walker’s lead, in 2013 Chicago Mayor Rahm Emmanuel made history witting down a list of 330 schools recommended for closure based on a Chicago Space Utilization Standard signed into law in 2011 by former Democratic Governor Patt Quinn and closed 54 local schools located predominantly in low income Latino and African American neighborhoods on the south side of the city of Chicago. To protest these actions some Chicago activists deemed a violation of students’ civil rights, more than 7,000 parents, students, and teachers took to the streets to protest for more than three days right before the beginning of the 2013 school year. Like Walker, Emmanuel was firm in his decision to close 54 public schools in low-income neighborhoods on Chicago’s south side despite significant protests from parents, teachers, students, and activists alike because he deemed those schools and the

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teachers in those schools were inherently failing students. Accountability, efficiency, safety, and responsibility have all become reconstituted values by Governor’s like Walker and Mayor’s like Emmanuel whose policy records are indicative of accelerating a neoliberal agenda that has infiltrated both the democratic and republican party; effectively setting the stage for what education scholar Mike Rose (2015) observes is, “the same mistakes being repeated over and over again: top-down remedies, grandiose claims about the latest technology, disdain for teachers” (p. 30). What role does qualitative inquiry play in investigating the impact of the accelerated neoliberal terrain evolving throughout the Midwest as State officials like Governor Walker and Mayor Rahm Emmanuel who dismantle workers rights, teachers rights and benefits, close schools in struggling urban communities, increase the privatization of local education through market based funding initiatives, and yet position public educational institutions as primarily responsible for mitigating societal problems? Denzin & Giardina (2015) point us towards the eminent role of qualitative inquiry by putting it this way “We have a job to do; let’s get to it” (p.20). Therefore, qualitative inquiry has a significant role to play in the investigation, documentation, and ultimate transformation of the relationship between schools and society so that a more radical and progressive democracy can be envisioned and enacted. It is at the nexus of the evolving purposes of educational institutions to better serve (support and advocate) the growing heterogeneous LGBTQ population in which the impetus for this dissertation project emerged to investigate Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school located in the urban Midwest city of Hatfield.
Merging Qualitative Inquiry & Urban Ethnography

There are a significant amount of qualitative researchers, particularly feminists and scholars of color, invested in Denzin’s & Giardina’s (2015) call to use qualitative inquiry to get to the work that must done is intimately connected to social justice purposes through a variety of modes that include: theorizing about the complicated power latent relationship between the researcher and the researched (Zavella, 1993; Villenas, 1996, 2000; Britzman, 2000), the complexities of writing and being written into culture (Rosaldo, 1983; Rosaldo, 1989; Zavella, 1993; Behar, 1995;), defining and generating ethical research practices (Ellington, 1998; Foster, 1991; Beoku-Betts, 1994; Minh-ha, 1989; Hagy Hesse-Biber, Leavy, & Yaiser, 2003; Stacey, 1988), conducting research with communities of affiliation (Fine, 1994; Lather, 1991; Roman & Apple, 1990; Smith, 1999; Villenas, 1996), and negotiating one’s identity as researcher with other marginalized social locations and subjectivities as a researcher (Villenas 1996; Brayboy, 2000; Pillow, 2003; Cruz, 2011).

The ethnographic scholarship of Michelle (Fine 1991), Ann Arnett Ferguson (2000), C.J. Pascue (2012), and Kysa Nygreen (2013) spans two decades showcasing the evolving composition of critical educational ethnographic research that provides examples of contemporary uses of qualitative inquiry Denzin & Giardina call us to use, indicative to the kind of approach I took investigating Java High. At the heart of these four educational ethnographic projects are varying scales of sociopolitical, cultural, and feminist investigations of how multiple forms of inequality such as discrimination, poverty, and violence can be thwarted, shaped, intersect, and are reproduced within educational institutions. In her ethnographic project entitled, *Framing Dropouts: Notes*
on the Politics of an Urban Public High School, Michelle Fine took on the concept of the high school dropout and developed a narrative storytelling style that asked, “If public education is indeed accessible to all, how is it that most low-income urban youths attending comprehensive high schools fail to graduate,” (p. 8)? Fine’s scholarship points to the institutional practices and rituals that exclude “low-income urban youth” from actually completing graduation requirements at the same time she hones in on the importance of the ways the theoretical notion of ‘silencing’ operates as a vehicle for shaping language and representations of who and what a drop out is. Fine uses a mix of discursive analyses, participant observations, and individual interviews to showcase a multiplicity of narratives from students, teachers, staff, and administrators that informs discourses of a drop out. An important thread of Fine’s project attempts to, “blend multiple voices echoing around, stifled within, and expelled from public schools,” (p. 9) to demonstrate the contradictory array of representations of sociopolitical understandings of schools where low-income urban youth drop out. Fine’s ethnography was useful to thinking through my own research project at Java High by informing my methodological approach to thinking through, with, and against the interconnections among the levels of scale within an educational institution that discursively and practically positions itself as LGBTQ inclusive. Fine’s attention to scale demonstrates the ways multiple narratives inform, shape, and reproduce discourses of the drop out just as my attention to scale demonstrates the ways neoliberal reform strategies in education have retooled values of accountability and efficiency to inform, shape, and reproduce distinct discourses of at-riskness that are positioned to be thwarted by an inclusivity that can mitigate inequalities faced by LGBTQ youth in schools. In the next chapter I explore further not only the
development of LGBTQ inclusivity and distinctions of at-riskness mapped on to LGBTQ youth bodies who attend Java High but the impact of the interconnections between inclusivity and risk within a historical moment saturated with neoliberal educational reform strategies.

During the course of Ann Arnett Fergusons’ ethnographic project entitled *Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity*, it became clear to her that, “hidden curriculum to marginalize and isolate black male youth in disciplinary spaces and brand them as criminally inclined,” (p. 2). Overall Ferguson’s work investigated the notion of punishment through an exploration of the meaning of school rules and the interpretation of trouble from youths’ perspectives. Using a mix of participant observations and individual interviews with students and teachers Ferguson demonstrates the importance of combining qualitative methods to get at the ways discourses of identity labels inform contradictory notions of what she calls teachers’ preconceived notions of the ‘natural differences’ and ‘criminal inclination’ of black boys. Ferguson’s ethnography is poignant and sharply opens calls for other educational ethnographers to investigate the power of the educational institution to create, shape, and regulate social identities and the discourses of identities that permeate about multiple marginalized youth. Ferguson’s ethnography informed my methodological approach to use multiple methods within different intra school spaces like the gymnasium, the bathroom, the hallway, the classroom, the lunchroom, and the main office that opened up possibilities to see and understand better contradictions operating at Java High. For example, in chapter five I explore the way the restorative justice as an alternative mode to discipline and as an individual class within the curriculum functioned as a mechanism that connected and
disconnected Java High youth to school that created significant unresolved tensions
between the students, teachers, and administrative staff. Taking the lead from Ferguson’s
ethnography, my methodological approach developed a nuanced understanding of the
significant role Java High as an educational institution played in shaping, informing, and
reproducing discourses of at-riskness and inclusivity that distinguished at-riskness
associated with race and at-riskness associated with non-normative gender expressions or
sexualities.

C.J. Pascoe’s ethnography entitled, *Dude You’re a Fag: Masculinity and
Sexuality in High School*, offers an analysis of masculinity as both a gendered and
sexualized process moving away from traditional notions of masculinity that are rooted in
analyses of the physical male body demonstrating how these sexualized discourses travel
in different ways and to different extents. The primary aim of her project was to, “explain
how teenagers, teachers, and the institutional logics of schooling construct adolescent
masculinity through idioms of sexuality,” (p. 4). Using a mix of participant observations
and individual interviews Pascoe’s investigation lead her to understand what she calls
‘the fag discourse’ as a disciplinary mechanism to regulate the behaviors of both
heterosexual and homosexual identified young men. Pascoe discovered through her
investigation of the social world of River High gendered processes informed disciplinary
mechanisms operated on institutional, interactional, and individual levels. By pulling
from queer and feminist theoretical frameworks Pascoe’s ethnography demonstrated the
ways at River High focusing closely on sexuality revealed the ways masculinity operated
as a process rather than a stable mode of identity associated with specifically male
bodies. Pascoe’s ethnography was crucial to my methodological approach to
investigating an LGBTQ charter school located in an urban city as I immersed myself into the social world of Java High I too discovered the ways distinct discourses of at-riskness and inclusivity operated on institutional, interactional, and individual levels. Taking the lead from Pascoe’s attentiveness to masculinity as both a gendered and sexualized process pivoting away from traditional notions of masculinity that are rooted in analyses of the physical male body demonstrating how these sexualized discourses travel in different ways and to different extents. My methodological approach moved away from finding individual youth who self-identified as LGBTQ (physical bodies) people and explored an institutional infrastructure and a social world within a school space that predicated itself on LGBTQ inclusivity (processes of identification). My methodological approach opened up possibilities to recognize at Java High how inclusivity operated in such a way that on the one hand relied on stable distinctions of at-riskness for LGBTQ youth and low-income youth of color, while at the same time a significant amount of Java students ‘flipped the script’ to those discourses by demonstrating identifications trump identities.

Kysa Nygreen’s (2013) ethnographic project entitled, These Kids: Identity, Agency, and Social Justice at a Last Chance High School, investigates the educational paradox of a post NCLB and Race to the Top reality that demands in order to get a head a student has to inevitably get ahead of someone else no matter the cost. Nygreen writes sharply about the possibilities and limitations of conducting participatory action research with high school students, while also interrogating her own complicity in what she calls discourses that label youth ‘at risk’, ‘troubled’, and ‘low achieving’. Nygreen uses a mix of participant observations and individual interviews but relies heavily fragments and
bursts of casual conversations generated from participating with youth participants as methods for her study. Nygreen’s ethnographic project gets at the central paradox of critical theory which she describes as, “the problem of how to value students’ local, subordinated knowledge and empower them to be their own authors and agents of social change, while at the same time directing their knowledge and agency in particular and predetermined directions,” (p. 81). Nygreen skillfully articulates the hypocrisy in perpetuating rhetoric of social justice within educational institutions that cannot enact such a vision when language of failure, at risk, and low achieving is mapped onto bodies of marginalized youth. Ultimately, Nygreen challenges critical theorists and educators to come up with a more practical theory of critical pedagogy that can speak to contexts of high poverty urban schools like Jackson High if education can be imagined and enacted as a vehicle of democratic possibilities and social justice aims. Nygreen’s ethnography was crucial to my methodological approach to investigating an LGBTQ charter school located in an urban city because I was able to recognize the language of inclusivity constructed through Java’s infrastructure is embedded within larger neoliberal reform strategies that posit public schools as failing and inefficient and charter schools as successful and accountable. Like Nygreen, I found through immersing myself during data collection in the social world of Java High it was discursively positioning itself as the primary arbitrator of mitigating inequalities at-risk youth face which is both unrealistic and dangerous for generating long term systemic change, at the same time it created a school architecture that positively impacted the academic and non academic outcomes of at-risk youth.
These four ethnographies provided a range of both theoretical and practical foundations for an ethnographer like me to investigate the tenuous yet critical link between educational institutions and their responsibility to serve equitably and justly all students who walk through their doors despite the difficulties that responsibility entails. My dissertation project then builds upon the ethnographic inroads developed by the scholarship of Fine (1991), Ferguson (2000), Pascue (2012), and Nygreen (2013), and creates new possibilities by conducting an ethnographic project that is cautious about the coupling of LGBTQ inclusivity and choice in an accelerating context of neoliberal reform of schools while remaining steadfast to the critical role of the educational ethnographer to be ethically reflexive while maneuvering within power relations. Using qualitative inquiry to investigate Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school in the urban city of Hatfield rises to the call of Denzin & Giardina (2015) and Stich, Cipollone, Nikischer, and Weis (2012) to engage in methodological conversations about ethnographic projects situated in an urban community, “suffering from the deleterious affects of disinvestment…that make conducting research increasingly difficult, as researchers must navigate relationships among stakeholders that are ever more tenuous and rife with conflict,” (p. 464). Looking at these four ethnographic projects as a collective of a critical trajectory of evolving qualitative inquiries rather than as four separate dynamic school-based qualitative research projects points to the continued significance of studying educational institutions in the U.S. because they have a collective responsibility to better serve (support and advocate) the growing heterogeneous student population. My methodological approach opens up possibilities to examine discourses of at-risk youth at an LGBTQ inclusive charter school that builds upon the discourse of the “drop out”, the
discourse of “criminality” mapped onto black boys, the discourse of “the fag” as a disciplinary mechanism for heterosexual and homosexual boys, and the discourse of “these kids” as troubled low academic achievers that all inform the continued evolution of educational institutions charged with serving a growing heterogeneous student population. Mike Rose (2015) puts it this way:

Public education, a vast, ambitious, loosely coupled system of schools, is one of our country’s defining institutions. It is also flawed, in some respects deeply so. Unequal funding, fractious school politics, bureaucratic inertia, uninspired pedagogy, and the social ills that seep into the classroom all limit the potential of our schools. The critics are right to be worried. The problem is that the criticism, fueled as it is by broader cultural anxieties, is often sweeping and indiscriminate (p. 21).

Therefore, the ethnographies aforementioned were informative to cultivating my own methodological approach to examining Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school in the urban city of Hatfield by situating it within a larger project of conducting an urban ethnography using qualitative inquiry. There are always going to be significant challenges to conducting an urban ethnographic project in a school setting because locating a problem is never singular in scope, creating room to pursue an inquiry always has time constraints, giving voice to narratives of resistance and resilience without romanticizing them requires diligent reflexivity, engaging in meaningful participant observations requires attentive vulnerability, and understanding how the context a school informs the social phenomena being studied is nothing short of an intense and arduous undertaking.
Qualitative Research Methods

I chose to use a mix of ethnographic methods to investigate Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school because those methods were best suited to answer the research questions at the heart of the project. I used a mix of discursive analyses of Java High educational documents, conducted individual interviews, and engaged in participant observations as my primary qualitative methods. As the researcher I was the primary instrument of making meaning and in order to not just interpret the social world I investigated at Java High I inserted myself in that world and learned by doing and investigating the doing of others. The meanings associated with the LGBTQ inclusivity would have been lost had I not chosen a qualitative inquiry approach to conducting fieldwork, data analysis, and the entire process of writing this dissertation because meanings cannot be expressed through charts, graphs, and equating people with numbers. Field notes and analytic memos (audio and written) were integral to my data collection, in that I was able to observe short, often fleeting and unwarranted narratives of Java High students, staff, teachers, and volunteers that informed my overall investigation of the school. I did not keep a separate researcher journal during data collection. I took field notes by hand in a small brown leather journal and indicated in the margins a personal code of OC or TK when I was writing personal comments or posing questions to myself. It was easier for me to stay organized in a fast paced and intense school setting by writing in one journal. I clipped my keys to my jeans, kept my money and ID in my back pocket in a wallet, and I carried a book bag that housed my books, my lunch, and a hoody in case I got cold and an extra t-shirt in case I got really sweaty. By the grace of the Java High administrative assistant, I was able to keep my jacket in the winter months in the main
office during the day so I didn’t have to carry it around with me. Students had the option (I was presented with the opportunity but turned it down) of using a locker to house their personal belongings but most carried their jackets, cell phones, purses, or book bags with them to each class. Many students told me they didn’t want to use a locker because they couldn’t remember the combination to open it and it was more of a hassle to use a locker than anything. Thinking through a relatively small decision of where to keep my coat and personal items I became more aware of what Java High students carried around school with them. I realized after two weeks a significant amount of Java High students were not given physical textbooks to use in their classes. Using ethnographic methods allowed me to both document and welcome the complexity of that heterogeneity by using the methods of participant observation and individual interviews demonstrate how an institutionalized LGBTQ inclusivity offered by Java High impacted everyone at the school in some kind of way. Using ethnographic methods was not done to increase sample size in anyway because the time and financial constraints of the project warranted a smaller and multi-varied sample size. I also hoped by using ethnographic research methods to investigate Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school I could make inroads to open up different possibilities of conducting an LGBTQ educational research project rather than making recommendations for large-scale educational policy, curriculum, or teacher practitioner changes.

**Ethnography**

Ethnography specifically is a form of qualititative research focusing on the sociology of meaning through close field observation of sociocultural phenomenon. Hamersley & Atkinson (1995) define ethnography as,
Referring primarily to a particular method or sets of methods. In its most characteristic form it involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in peoples’ lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions—in fact collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research (p. 1).

While Van Maanen (1988, 2011) defines ethnography this way:

A written representation of a culture (or selected aspects of culture). It carries quite serious intellectual and moral responsibilities, for the images of others inscribed in writing are most assuredly not neutral. Ethnographic writings can and do inform human conduct and judgment in innumerable ways by pointing to the choices and restrictions that reside at the very heart of social life (p. 1).

These two definitions provide a foundation for how and why I conducted ethnographic research for this dissertation project centered on investigating the impact of Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school. As Emerson, Fritz, and Shaw (1995) articulate, “Modes of participating in and finding out about the daily lives of others make up key parts of ethnographic methods,” (p. 11). Therefore, in order to have a better understanding of how attending an LGBTQ inclusive charter school impacted the academic and non-academic outcomes of students, it was imperative to witness and be present for five months in the physical school building and surrounding to give descriptive accounts of the particular social system various participants created within Java High. Concomitantly, using ethnography as a qualitative method makes four critical assumptions demonstrating why I used it rather than another qualitative method such as but not limited to surveys, case studies, oral histories, and discursive analyses, and contribute to the methodological implications of this project overall. The first assumption is that a researcher is not a neutral observer, detached observer, outside and independent of the observed phenomena (Pollner and Emerson, 1988). The second assumption is that an ethnographer’s presence in a setting inevitably has implications and consequences for
what is taking place, since the field worker must necessarily interact with an hence have some impact on those studied” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). The third and fourth assumptions are that the principal research interest is primarily affected by the cultural understandings of the group and the researcher is capable of understanding the cultural mores of the population under study, has mastered the language or technical jargon of the culture, and has based findings on comprehensive knowledge of the culture (Hamersley & Atkinson, 2007). My ontological, epistemological, and methodological stances are linked to these four assumptions first by cultivating space for regular reflexivity and reflection upon the dialectical relationship between myself and the participants and the dialectical relationship between the structural/historical forces and human agency. Secondly, conducting an ethnographic qualitative research project roots this project within the historical, political, and economic conditions of Hatfield as an urban community altering the research process by refusing to separate the material realities of the sociocultural political landscape of the city with the intersections and fusion of the way identity categories are positioned to make the LGBTQ inclusivity enacted at Java is made legible. Ethnography allowed a unique position for me as both participant and observer and was critical to this dissertation in three significant ways. First, ethnography allowed me to discover and analyze Java High educational documents in conjunction with participant observations and individual interviews. My decision to employ a discursive analysis of Java High educational documents opened up possibilities to recognize what Oberhuber & Krzyzanowski (2008) cite as, “routines and practices that contribute to the ongoing reproduction of the organization…embedded in within a multitude of spatial, material, and technological conditions,” (p. 183). In short, an
analysis of Java High educational documents provided a foundation for understanding better the ways the five teachers who chartered the school theoretically envisioned the kind of LGBTQ inclusivity that would guide day to day operations at Java High. Concomitantly, deploying participant observation and individual interviews as methods illuminated the multiple perspectives and behaviors demonstrated by students, teachers, staff, and volunteers about Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school locating the importance of recognizing an ongoing interplay between what people say and what people do. Lastly, using a mix of ethnographic research methods directly linked the creation of Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive school to macro neoliberal strategies of reform within public education that have accelerated a pattern of charter schools opening in urban communities across the U.S. Deploying a mix of ethnographic methods that looked at LGBTQ inclusivity at Java High from multiple and at times contradictory positions was allowed me to grapple with complex relations of power. Therefore, wrestling with the question, “what is the best means to acquire knowledge about Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school,” warranted a methodological approach that facilitated critical and reflexive ways to position myself as the primary instrument of conducting research yet steeped in de-colonizing notions of the relationship between schools and society.

**Researcher as Primary Instrument of Data Collection**

One of the most significant challenges in conducting qualitative research is facing the ethics and politics that come with the reality you as the researcher are the primary instrument of data collection. In short, this means all the data you collect is mediated through you rather than multi-varied questionnaires, personal inventories, or surveys. As
Denzin & Lincoln (2003) point out a qualitative researcher has tremendous responsibilities in conducting research because their ontological, epistemological, and methodological stances are, “guide by the researcher’s set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied,” and the, “interpretive practice of making sense of one’s findings is both artistic and political,” (p. 34-35). With few exceptions, educational ethnographers who identify as Chican@ butches have limited exposure regarding the ways their experiences as ethnographers are informed by, challenged by, and complicated by their multiple and often contradictory positionalities. How do Chican@ butch researchers whose positionalities are intertwined as marginalized and privileged at the same time complicate, compliment, and change the power relations within the qualitative research process? What kinds of methodological dilemmas do they face in the field as a result of who they are and how they express their positionalities, how do they see themselves and how are they read by research participants, and how does the research process change by navigating contradictory positionalities? I build upon the scholarship of Sandra K. Soto to explain my decision to use the @ symbol at the end of identifying myself as a Chican@ butch.

The ethnic signifiers “Chicana”, “Chicano”, and “Chicana/o” when they are used as nouns and not adjectives announce a politicized identity embraced by a man or a woman of Mexican descent who lives in the United States and who wants to forge a connection to a collective identity politics. I like the way the non-alphabetic symbol for “at” disrupts our desire for intelligibility, our desire for a quick and certain visual registered of a gendered body the split second we see or hear the term (Soto, 2011, p. 2-3).

These are methodological dilemmas that I encountered throughout my research project that informed my role as the primary research instrument of data collection. I recognized these dilemmas as positive tensions rather than as limitations to the validity of the
research findings or as obstructions to data collection. As the primary instrument to conduct research implicated me within the research directly but also because of my multiple marginalized identifications I was implicated in the research process as someone who had a range of insider and outsider positions.

**Negotiating a Mestiza Consciousness**

Gloria Anzaldúa first published her seminal text entitled *Borderlands: La Frontera: The New Mestiza* in 1987 bolding offering a counter hegemonic discourse of the sociopolitical, historical, and cultural dispossession and oppression of what Norma E. Cantu (2010) calls, “The groundwork for feminist theorizing of Border Studies…a desire that continues to gather the voices of scholars, activists, poets, artists, and all who are called to contribute their voice to the cacophony of voices exploring new ways of being in the world,” (p. 11). Yet Anzaldúa’s project in *Borderlands* is theoretically a feminist one in that she develops a mestiza consciousness by reimagining a theory of feminist practice that is enacted by a Chicana lesbian whose movement between and among different worlds generates a subject with agency rather than subordinate abject positionalities. As Chabram-Dernersesian (1991) and Alarcon (2010) demonstrate that a mestiza consciousness as a theoretical stance is not unity in the Cartesian sense but provides an awareness and negotiation of multiple and often times contradictory subject positions that are always in motion, never at rest. According to Delgado-Bernal (2006), Cruz (2006), and Elenes (2006) a tremendous amount of scholarship has been written about Gloria Anzaldúa’s mestiza consciousness as defined in her text *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* and it’s usefulness and challenge as a concept to methods and methodologies in the social sciences, cultural studies, and Chicana feminisms. Anzaldúa
charges in *Borderlands*, “Because I, a mestiza, continually walk out of one culture and into another, because I am in all cultures at the same time,” (p. 101) that a mestiza is on the one hand a woman who comes from multiple and contradictory backgrounds and on the other hand gestures that a new kind of consciousness is possible and necessary. Anzaldúa is willing to engage in the arduous project and ongoing process of deciding to cultivate a mestiza consciousness when she articulates in a mix of English and Spanish la mestiza,

Puts history through a sieve, winnows out the lies, looks at the forces we as a race, as women have been a part of. Luego bota lo que no vale, los desmentidos, los desencuentros …This step is a conscious rupture with all traditions of all cultures and all religions. She communicates that rupture, documents the struggle. She reinterprets history, and using new symbols, she shapes new myths. She adopts new perspectives towards the dark skinned, women, and the queers. She strengthens her tolerance (and intolerance) for ambiguity. She is willing to share, to make herself vulnerable to foreign ways of seeing and thinking. She surrenders all notions of safety, of the familiar. Deconstruct, construct. She becomes a nahual, able to transform herself into a tree, a coyote, into another person. She learns to transform the small “I” into the total Self. Se hace moldeadora de su alma. Según la concepción que tiene de sí misma, así será, (p. 105).

Thinking through a mestiza consciousness allowed me to cultivate a purposefully generated an interdisciplinary, relational, and divergent thinking approach to interrogating the possibilities and limitations of Java High an LGBTQ inclusive urban charter school in tandem with interrogating how my body and multiple and contradictory positionalities as Chican@ butch ethnographer complicated, challenged, and altered the approach to this ethnographic research project. Negotiating a mestiza consciousness enabled my use of a feminist toolbox from which I grabbed tools from to face the methodological dilemmas that emerged during data collection; allowing me to make ethically informed decisions attuned to the necessity of intersectional research linkages between emotions and analytics in the power relationships between the unstable positions.
of researcher and researched. By negotiating a mestiza consciousness I was purposeful in using language and different writing styles to call attention to the various levels of scale and contradictions that inform this project contributing to a spatial and linguistic challenge to a hegemonic mode of U.S. Western thought that privileges certain kinds of knowledge in education as natural and normalized through circuits of binaries and hierarchies.

Yet it was not till after I ended the data collection process that I was able to recognize the value and the risk of negotiating a mestiza consciousness accustomed to intersections, contradictions, dualisms, and ambiguity as my methodological approach to examine Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive urban charter school. Anzaldúa describes this evolving mestiza consciousness – a coming to recognize oneself as a subject in process—this way, “She has this fear that she has no names, that she has many names, that she doesn’t know her names. She has this fear that she’s an image that comes and goes clearing and darkening, the fear that she’s the dreamwork inside someone else’s skill, (p. 65). Therefore, a mestiza consciousness informing my methodological approach is indicative of a constant migration of knowing many selves as a researcher as the research project evolves post data collection into data analysis. Being able to tolerate the ambiguity of not knowing how to understand the range of issues going on within a school, of traversing different positionalities as a researcher interacting with a range of multiple marginalized participants, and tolerating the discomfort when those positionalities contradict one another is indicative of a methodological approach that is risky yet intentional. Negotiating a mestiza consciousness influenced my methodological approach to investigate an LGBTQ inclusive urban charter school because I refused to
make truth claims about Java High as either good or bad; focusing my analysis on how the school as an educational institution mobilized LGBTQ inclusivity to produce ambiguous effects more so than defining it’s institutional worth. I approached an examination of Java High from multiple perspectives looking at the intersections, the overlap between institutional discursive positionings, and the micro social world enacted in the hallways, gymnasium, and classrooms that often times clashed with each other creating ambiguous effects. My methodological approach refused to contain Java High and the Java High students into otherness by offering an alternative way to talk about LGBTQ inclusivity that does not position the school outside of larger sociopolitical and cultural forces shaped by neoliberalism and did not position the students outside of racialized sexualities that shape the way we talk about LGBTQ inclusivity in schools. Therefore, negotiating a mestiza consciousness opened up possibilities to take risks to investigate a historical moment in identity and school politics that affirmed educational institutions have the capacity to simultaneously transform and shut down equitable and just teaching and learning environments. Ultimately, negotiating a mestiza consciousness emphasized thinking, seeing, listening, and doing as a researcher as process rather than as an essence; ultimately providing a way of getting at a palpability of multiple meanings of LGBTQ inclusivity, at-risk youth, school connectedness, and positionalities in productive tensions.

Research Methods & Participant Selection

The participant selection process was altered after the first week of data collection ended because it became clear from interacting with Java High students and staff as well as skimming through Java High educational documents the majority of students attending
Java High did not self identify as LGBTQ. Therefore, I decided almost immediately to shift the scope of the research project once I realized my research questions and project were too broad and did not take into consideration the racial dynamics and composition of the students, staff, teachers, and volunteers of Java High. The stories, snippets, and sound bites of students, teachers, staff, and volunteers discussed throughout this project make up a range of adolescents and adults who identify as Black, African American, Mexican American, Latino/a, White, Mixed Race, sometimes female and sometimes male, LGBTQ, girls who like girls, heterosexual, and gender non conforming. There are as many gender presentations and racial identifications as there are people, and the Java High participants demonstrated this throughout data collection. Therefore, participants did not have to self-identify as LGBTQ to participate in the study but some of the adolescents and adults who volunteered to be tape-recorded did self identify as LGBTQ. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of all participants and the school itself. The focus of the project shifted to understand how Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive educational institution impacted those who attended, worked, or volunteered there.

The data collected was done through a range of participant observations that included a significant amount of casual conversations and encounters with Java High students, teachers, staff, and volunteers during school hours, three taped individual interviews with two Java High students, five taped interviews with Java High staff, one taped interview with a Java High volunteer, and discourse analysis of all Java High guiding charter and educational documents. There were several times different teachers asked me to help an individual student in their class who was struggling with a particular course concept or to work with a small group of students on a team oriented activity. As a
participant observer I sought to gain a base level of respect and trust with the students, teachers, and staff and I consciously never took on the role of teacher in any setting. It is an oversimplification to say my decisions to observe, participate, or both gradually changed over the course of the entire project because there were plenty of times within one class period I vacillated between being a participant, to observer, to participant observer. I did not engage in any kind of corrective behavior or positive behavior management with any of the students during part of the project. There were times I was quiet and reserved within classroom settings in particular because I did not think it was my place nor a part of my project to have the same kinds of responsibilities and authorities as a teacher. I never had an explicit conversation with the Java High teaching staff about how to balance my responsibilities as an adult who was a University affiliated researcher, and none of the teachers pulled me aside to establish boundaries with me either. The students were the ones who shaped my use of methods more than anything because each school space I entered they set the terms and the tone of how I could participate, observe, or participate-observe in each setting. For example, in the 9th grade science class I regularly visited the students would quiz me on the material they were going over for that period before the class began. During the unit about the bones of the human body one student brought over the human skeleton on wheels and pointed to a bone asking me to give the scientific term for it. Once class began the teacher went ahead with her lesson plan and I listened, took notes, and chatted with students when they did small group work. However, whenever I visited the afternoon restorative justice class the students never let me sit outside of the main circle of chairs set up in the room. Prior to the class beginning students asked me to sit with them in the circle and began outlining
what would be happening in the class. Once the door to the classroom was closed by the Restorative Justice teacher, a student in the class stepped up to begin the restorative justice circle, rang a set of chimes, said a few opening words, and handed the talking piece to the person to their left. I was expected to talk when I had the talking piece and to listen when I did not, just like the other students and adults participating in the restorative justice class. In most classes, regardless of what class it was, and throughout the duration of the project itself students asked me questions that varied on a scale of highly personal to very impersonal, such as: do you have a girlfriend, how old are you, do you live far away, can I see your driver’s license picture, can I be your Facebook friend, what is your favorite television show, why are you in this class, what is college like, and how long will you be at our school? I answered all the student questions to the best of my ability using my best judgment. I never disregarded any question from any student. If I didn’t know the answer for some reason or couldn’t answer it, I told the students this outright. I saw the students’ willingness to ask me questions throughout the duration of the project as their way to research me, and I welcomed their questions. I often sat on the couches strategically located in an open area on the second floor of the building or sat on top of a table outside of the main office having brief and informal conversations with student. This willingness to talk about something or nothing, personal or informal made a difference as I found it easier to engage in a range of conversations with students than any of the adults in the building. Therefore, not only did every day at Java High bring about different experiences and challenges, but each individual class, event, or area of the school I found myself in brought about a different set of experiences and challenges because the students collectively a school culture that was both fast paced and intimate.
The process of rapidly shifting between different ethnographic methods was highly intensive and demanding, requiring a significant amount of emotional, physical, and mental endurance to focus and make on the spot judgments and decisions as they came about.

**Dissertation Site: Java High**

Java High is a charter school geographically located on the north side of a racially and economically segregated urban city in the Midwest I call Hatfield that serves approximately 175 students in grades 9-12. When I conducted my fieldwork during February 2012 to June 2012 Java High served students in grades 6th-12th grade. Java High was not able to maintain the middle school portion of the curriculum and now in 2015 serves students traditionally in high school grades 9-12. Charter schools are public schools, authorized by states and funded by state dollars. Charter schools are not private schools nor religiously affiliated, and are started by a group of people who developed a concept for providing public educational opportunities to students (Tryjankowski, 2012). At the beginning of the 2011-2012 academic year, 70% of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch, racially identified as 45% Black, 23% Latino, 13% White, 8% Asian Pacific Islander, and 2% Other, and 25% of the students were homeless or living in group homes or foster care. The students who attend Java High are a mix of youth who do so by “choice” and by “force.” Some youth attend Java because they have been deemed by the local Hatfield school district as not excelling within the “traditional” high school environment due to a number of reasons ranging from truancy, poor test scores, disinterest in school, and repeated disciplinary referrals as a result of incurring or causing harassment, intimidation, and physical/and or emotional abuse. According to Java High’s
Educational Vision & Philosophy:

The paramount goal of Java High is to create an atmosphere that fosters cooperation, tolerance, and accountability. The school will focus on making sure that student needs for physical and psychological well-being are met, so that students will be able to focus on learning. The school is guided by a belief in Maslow’s “Hierarchy of Needs” recognizing that when students’ needs for food, shelter, love, and stability are not met, education becomes inconsequential. There will be a strong focus on re-enrolling students who have dropped out of school or stopped attending due to harassment, intimidation or physical violence by creating a safe environment for learning (Java High, charter documents, 2005, p. 2).

The philosophy at the core of Java High begins with the premise that all students must first have their basic needs for safety and security met before they can develop, succeed, and excel academically. Educational achievement and pursuing higher education opportunities are expected of all students through creating an environment that cultivates creative energy from students, teachers, and staff, and cultivates a range of community involvement. In order to fulfill its mission Java High actively connects with local community agencies such as the Hatfield City LGBT Community Center, the Hatfield City Counseling Center, and a Hatfield City Youth and Family Centers to sustain a network of support systems for students. Additionally, all Java High students are required to participate in community service placements that allow them a positive academic space to challenge the attitudes and practices, which have significantly limited or halted their opportunities to thrive in a traditional high school setting previously. Java High’s Educational Vision & Philosophy define the school curriculum as:

A combination of service learning and expeditionary learning practices which support students engaging in service learning projects and personal develop projects. Java uses a flexible four-block schedule that allows students to choose classes that are tailored to meet their graduation requirements while simultaneously supporting students’ interests and goals. The courses offered at Java High are academically challenging and provide students a foundation for pursuing higher educational endeavors (Java High, charter documents, 2005, p. 5).
Java High as an educational institution was the brainchild of five teachers who were all teaching in a local Hatfield public high school during the 2003-2004 academic school year. This collective of five high school teachers felt compelled to undergo the journey of creating and advocating for a school like small school like Java High because they collectively believed the kind of educational advocacy, support, and space necessary for the academic and non-academic success of LGBTQ youth was not happening institutionally across the Hatfield City public school system. Therefore, creating a small charter school that was an LGBTQ inclusive institution became a priority for this group of five local public school teachers. For more than a year the group of five teachers collaborated to use their individual skills, resources, and social capital to write two grant proposals; one grant that secured the funding necessary to create a new small educational institution and a second grant that ultimately secured a charter agreement between the school and the Hatfield City Public School System to sustain itself as an educational institution. Social capital is a concept that has been used by social scientists to describe benefits individuals derive from their association with and participation within social networks and organizations (Sampson, 1998; Woolcock, 1998; Putnam, 1995; Noguera, 2008). In January of 2003 representatives from the Technical Assistance & Leadership Center (TALC) New Visions, a local charter management organization working with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation visited the local Hatfield City high school were this group of five teachers worked suggesting the possibilities of receiving $50,000 of grant monies to create new small schools in Hatfield was viable. After seriously talking with TALC representatives, an English teacher named Joanne pushed the group of teachers to begin the formal process of writing the initial small school grant proposal for monies to
sustain their vision. Joanne is affectionately referred to by many of the Java High
students like Darius as, “Ms. Joanne…she is like our principle but cooler. She cares about
us, well-all the teachers do,” (Individual Interview, March 31st, 2012). Joanne is
documented in the charter petition as the lead teacher of Java High and while teaching
English in a local public school during the 2003-2004 academic year was “outed” as a
lesbian and in her words “…decided to turn the tables and act as an ally to the gay kids in
the school. I wanted to kids to know they had someone. So I put up rainbow curtains in
my classroom and everything ” (Individual Interview, April 17, 2012). Yet even though
Joanne ran a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) club after school, she heard stories of students
being assaulted in the hallways and called gay slurs. She noticed some kids were skipping
school more often and then would stop showing up at all. During an interview with
Webley (2011) Joanne commented that, "They (LGBTQ students) were trying to be
strong and carry the load, but they were dropping out right before my eyes," (Individual
Interview, June 6, 2012). As Mayo’s (2005) extensive work on GSAs reminds us:

"GSAs are currently the most prevalent queer-friendly, extra-curricular sexuality-
related activity. In a cultural climate where many still believe homosexuality and
bisexuality to be immoral and the promoting of GSAs as unethical, these alliances
of gay, straight, bisexual, transgender, questioning, and heterosexual students are
important reminders of the central role of ethics in forming and maintaining
communities (p. 24)."

The combination of watching LGBTQ youth either drop out or eventually get kicked out
of high school for truancy, poor academic performance, distrust of school personnel, or
lack of support from school personnel catapulted Joanne and the four other teachers to
push the collective grant writing process further towards securing financial resources
from TALC to create a small school that would institutionally to create an LGBTQ
inclusive charter school in Hatfield City. A significant part of the grant writing process
included all five members of the teacher planning committee reaching out to key representatives and organizations within the LGBTQ community in Hatfield to enlist personal and professional short and long term support for creating and sustaining a small charter school that could better meet the needs of “at risk” LGBTQ youth. Following the encounter with TALC and the strategic outreach to the LGBTQ community and organizations in Hatfield, Joanne took the lead and scheduled a conference call in early February 2003 with then Executive Director of the Harvey Milk High School (HMHS) in New York City (NYC) David Mensah to discuss “the needs and difficulties of creating a school assigned to meet the needs of students who have been harassed” (Java High, 2005, Charter School Vision Documents, p. 6). HMHS is named after Harvey Milk, the first openly gay official in the United States who served as California Board of Supervisors for the Castro, Haight-Ashbury, Duboce Triangle, and Noe Valley constituency in the late 1970s (Rosiek, 2005). The HMHS was founded as a two-room program originally run by the Hetrick-Martin Institute (HMI) that started in 1984 in NYC as an after school program aimed to support “at risk” LGBTQ youth. The HMI created by Dr. Hetrick and Dr. Martin serves primarily GLBT youth by providing career building, job readiness, and skill building programs, HIV prevention information, and general social support. In the fall of 2002 the once two-room program shifted into what is now known as HMHS receiving accreditation from the NYC Department of Education. The evolution of HMI and HMHS is one of the first and most important institutional responses to the growing concerns about LGBTQ youth. Miceli (2005) outlines the goals of HMI and development of HMI in founding The Harvey Milk High School:

The goal of the institute was to provide social services, support, and advocacy for LGBTQ youth who had previously been ignored or discriminated against by other
youth social service agencies. HMI offers a range of services to youth, including support services as personal counseling, medical, and legal assistance and referrals, after-school activities such as arts programming, and school and career skills training. MHI founded the Harvey Milk High School in 1985 in conjunction with the Career Center of the New York City Department of Education. The school, which is a fully accredited high school, was established to provide LGBT and heterosexual students who had experienced verbal harassment and physical violence in their previous schools with a safe learning environment. The school was established as an institutional reaction to the growing body of research on, and reported instances of serious harassment faced by gay students, and the students perceived to be LGBT, in schools in New York City and around the country (p. 20).

I cite this excerpt at length because it points to the tension of educational institutions reactions to the violent realities of LGBTQ youth and the impact of institutionalizing a discourse of risk and safety in understanding LGBTQ youth as an at risk population. What these conditions point to is the socio-historical connection between schools and society in cultivating a K-12 landscape in which the steady increase of visibility and recognition of LGBTQ youth are coupled with experiences of alienation and violence that educational institutions have been charged to respond to. Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school is an example of an institutional response in the Midwest to reconstituting the architecture of schools as a vehicle to mitigate the at-riskness mapped upon LGBTQ youth bodies at the same time it is intimately linked to the historical trajectory of HMI and HMHS as institutional responses to increase access to mental and public health programs and social services historically denied to LGBTQ youth in New York City.

The next chapter demonstrates how Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school is embedded in the evolving relationship between schools and society that purposefully charges educational institutions to better serve (support and advocate) the growing heterogeneous LGBTQ population. I demonstrate the development of Java High
is intimately connected to the historical evolution of HMI and HMHS but Java was not created in the exact image of HMHS because creating a school during the doctrine of No Child Left Behind offered significantly different options that creating a school during the acceleration of A Nation at Risk doctrine. In the next chapter I demonstrate those significant differences by showing the intimate connections between neoliberalism and the infrastructure of Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school outing the ambiguous effects from multiple perspectives. Throughout the chapter I wrestle with larger theoretical questions such as: How did the five founding teachers of Java High constitute an LGBTQ inclusive charter school? What are the intersecting factors that have led to the creation of an LGBTQ inclusive school as a charter in an urban city in the Midwest? In this historical moment should Java High serve as a rising model of a Midwest educational intervention aimed at improving academic and non-academic outcomes for LGBTQ youth? Does an LGBTQ inclusive school provide an architecture that has the capacity to increase and sustain positive school climates, LGBTQ curriculums, policies, pedagogies, and practices? Ultimately, I explore how Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school has been constituted through neoliberal strategies of school reform to mitigate the stigma of risk mapped onto LGBTQ bodies it has been charged with serving.
CHAPTER 4

STRANGE BEDFELLOWS OR UNLIKELY ALLIES? NEOLIBERAL REFORMS & LGBTQ INCLUSIVITY
An Introduction to Respect, Responsibility, and Safety

A group of five African American boys and one African American girl who identified herself as a stud are in the gymnasium/cafeteria playing a game of hustle. Classes did not begin for another twenty-five minutes and a significant number of Java High students were already sitting throughout the first floor of the building talking to one another, sitting next to an outlet plugged in to some kind of individual electronic device, or standing in small groups watching their peers play a game of hustle. The banter back and forth between the players’ shifted between friendly teasing about shot selection to which teams were going to make it all the way to the NBA playoffs in June. The Miami Heat and the Oklahoma City Thunder emerged as the top contenders. I sat along the wall sipping my coffee and raised my fist in the air cheering openly when the Thunder got mentioned. One player I came to know as Nathan during my fieldwork, yelled to me, “Teach-The Heat are gonna take the series in seven anyway. Come on now! You

11 Hustle is a type of half court basketball game played primarily by youth (approximately ages 8-20) in urban communities, although there are a variety of regional differences that impact how hustle is played across the U.S. Some people call hustle street basketball or simply ‘21’ because the aim of hustle is to score 21 points total to win the game. However, different kinds of shots have different point values, so you have to be strategic when deciding what shots to take and ultimately make. In the game of hustle there are no teams per say although alliances can be formed to help certain players get points. Every player is responsible to get the basketball and advance towards the basket to make a shot, whether that shot be a layup, jumper, or three-pointer, etc. Anything before the three-point arc is worth two points, shots beyond the arc are worth 3 points, and free throws are worth 1 point. If a player makes the basket they automatically go to the free throw line and shoot from there. Depending upon on the terms agreed by those playing hustle depends how long a player is allowed to stay at the free-throw line if they make the basket. In some games of hustle after making 3 free throws the player must take the ball out from out of bounds and advance towards the basket to make another shot and repeat the process. If the players decide free throws are unlimited a player is allowed to stay at the line as long as they keep making the shots. Usually if there is a time constraint time on the game or lots of people want to play players are limited to 3 and out. Ultimately the goal of hustle is to score 21 points total so you win. Once a player scores 21 the game begins again, and everyone has to keep track of their point totals. Usually no more than 6 people play a game of hustle at a time because of the limitations of physical space. In some games of hustle there is a no foul rule, which means any player can come into direct or indirect contact with the player who has control of the ball as they advance towards the basket without cause. Again, it is up to the players if fouls will be called during each game of hustle that is played. Hustle was a very popular game at Java High and was consistently played every morning before school by small groups of students. More traditional full court team basketball games were played during the lunch period and after school ended. Growing up in Hatfield, I started playing basketball with others when I was 6 years old. By the time I was in the 4th grade I regularly played hustle on the playground with other kids-mostly boys at the public school I attended.
playing?” Midway through collecting data Nathan and a few students who regularly played hustle or full court games of basketball started calling me “Teach” rightfully positioning me as an adult researcher in the school who was not quite a teacher nor staff member but privileged enough to learn by doing and listening. The majority of the students at Java High called me by my first name, Tanya, and an even smaller group of youth called me TK. The students who most often called me TK did so because they thought “TK” was a cool nickname. The teachers’ choice to call me Tanya was both a friendly gesture and a way of maintaining stable and professional boundaries between us.

The relationships negotiated between adults and students at Java High is indicative of school culture that had established an important step towards cultivating mutual respect, responsibility, and safety by allowing every person to address each other on a first name basis, regardless of that name being given by birth or cultivated by choice. Word got around after the first couple of weeks of data collection about who I was and what I was doing. Although when I was able to talk to students individually throughout my time in the field I always reintroduced myself and reiterated my reasons for being there. I shook my head at Nathan in defiance of The Miami Heat winning the NBA championship yelling to him, “Ok, I got you. I’ll play next week during lunch.” I sat off to the side watching the students itching to get in on the game but held back from playing till the following week because of a few reasons. I felt shaky about my hustle skills at the tender age of 33 knowing that playing hustle was not for the faint of heart. I grew up playing hustle, and you couldn’t half-ass it. You had to play hard and with heart or you would not earn the respect of the people you were playing with. I was uncertain about the ways playing might impact the ongoing negotiation of power relations between the
students and I maneuvering the unstable boundaries of the researched researcher terrain. Yet, I had a responsibility to this dissertation project as a University affiliated researcher and I did not want to do anything to jeopardize the integrity of the project because my name was on the line and honestly I couldn’t afford to mess anything up because my future as a professional depended upon it. I knew deep down the IRB people would frown upon a researcher essentially playing street basketball with youth participants because they would deem playing hustle some kind of breach of safety guidelines. The possibility of getting hit in the face with an elbow, body checked while going up for a rebound, getting sweaty and stinky from running back and forth trying to score points, and getting emotional about your point totals were all realities of the game that transgressed simple researcher researched boundaries. The physicality of bodies and the intimacies between bodies while playing hustle was part of the game. Hustle was a messy yet serious game in Hatfield and at Java High. I knew I would think less of myself as a researcher if I didn’t play because I would miss out on significant learning opportunities that were facilitated by students. But more importantly I would think less of myself for not playing.

I grew up in Hatfield playing hustle on school playgrounds, Catholic churchyards, or public parks. Hustle is not just a game of basketball skills. Hustle was a symbol of your heart, your character, and your willingness to try to score points despite the odds against you. You couldn’t get respect if you didn’t play hustle with heart. Just because I was a researcher who had acquired some privilege(s) by various degrees of educational attainment didn’t mean I lost my heart, or I forgot where I came from. I leaned against the wall deep in my thoughts about respect and felt something rub up against the back of my head. I turned around to see a white 11x18 poster taped to the gymnasium wall with
three questions on it: Is it Responsible? Is it Respectful? Is It Safe? In that instance I remembered seeing another poster taped to a wall in the second floor that had the words respect, responsibility, and safety in black bold letters with a list of corresponding behaviors under each heading. I wondered what was the intent behind these posters? I wondered if these posters were pointing me towards the school’s culture and the ways it was informed by notions of respect, responsibility, and safety. I asked myself if I was overreaching, being too sensitive, or even paranoid. They were just posters, right? I had a hunch the posters could mean multiple things to the range of people who made up the Java High school community. The posters did not warrant definitive answers but pointed towards more questions. I took out my smartphone and took a quick photo of the poster on the gymnasium wall just as I heard a familiar voice come on to the public announcement system reminding everyone first block classes would start in five minutes.

**At-Risk Youth & LGBTQ Inclusivity as Neoliberal Educational Reform Strategies**

Early morning pick up games of hustle, students scattered all throughout the building listening to music or talking to each other, and students getting to school well before the school day formally started are representative of just how significant Java High became to a significant majority of its’ students. Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school had become a school space that connected kids to school in ways that cultivated both positive academic and non-academic outcomes. There was always something going on at Java High, and I couldn’t possibly grasp everything. Recognizing that reality was both difficult and overwhelming because I had to learn to regularly make decisions about how I was going to situate myself in the field that were complicated and significant, which is indicative of conducting ethnographic research. I cannot stress
enough how participating, actively listening, and keenly observing short and often fleeting moments throughout an average day at Java High opened up possibilities to understand how different students made different kinds of meaning of Java High coupled with the way Java High as an institution constructed itself as an inclusive school space for at-risk LGBTQ youth. The multiplicity of meanings associated with respect, responsibility, and safety that emerged throughout data collection are indicative of the ambiguous and diffused effects of Java High as an inclusive charter school. Therefore, the posters about respect, responsibility, and safety I grazed with my head that morning in the gym practically pointed towards Java High teachers and staff attempts to manage the at-risk stigma ascribed to LGBTQ youth as a discrete subpopulation whose access to equal educational learning opportunities has been historically thwarted because of repeated institutional biases and individual incidents of victimization. On the other hand, the posters pointed to particular discursive conceptualizations of accountability and efficiency operating on an institutional level indicative of neoliberal reforms of Education that sanction the justification for the establishment of Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school in the urban city of Hatfield. On the one hand, the academic and non-academic outcomes had positive influences upon a significant amount of Java High students yet those outcomes were not completely transformative factors in the lives of students. Ultimately, in this chapter will use a mix of data sources to demonstrate the ways LGBTQ inclusivity at Java High hinged upon affirming particular kinds of at-riskness upon certain groups of students while using at-risk youth as a vehicle for institutional inclusion that is constructed through neoliberal reform strategies of
accountability and efficiency that continue to naturalize education as a market and affirm a discourse of public schools as failing and in perpetual crisis.

**Recognition of LGBTQ Youth as an At-Risk Population**

According to Miceli (2005) the development of LGBTQ youth as an at-risk population occurred over a period of time and because of a, “combination of academic and governmental research, experiences, and reports of various agencies who work with youth, the experiences of those in organizations that serve the gay and lesbian communities, and the voices of the youth themselves,” (p. 20). Therefore, the trajectory of Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school fits into this larger narrative of at-risk youth that has been used to mobilize a variety of constituencies within the humanities, social sciences, and activist circles to change the circumstances and experiences of LGBTQ youth in schools. The institutional responses of HMI, HMHS, and Project 10 coupled with the statistics of the 1989 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Report of the Secretary’s Task Force on Youth Suicide “gave credibility to arguments that harassed gay and lesbian students are denied equal access to learning opportunities” (Talburt, 2004, p. 118) all solidified a platform for an LGBTQ inclusive charter school like Java High to emerge in the Midwestern city of Hatfield in 2005. The development of HMI, HMHS, Project 10, and Java High all point to the significant role adult educators have in the lives of LGBTQ youth attending schools. Teachers have a sincere compassion and dedication for their students and demonstrate the ability to mobilize their professional expertise towards the betterment of their students who identify or are perceived to be LGBTQ. It is clear the educators who had a hand in establishing Java High are in step with educators who have come before them and took it...
upon themselves to do something different aimed at better ways to support and serve LGBTQ youth as a subgroup to further the impetus they deserve equal access to learning opportunities. It is critical to consider the implications of the development and establishment of Java High within a different historical moment than HMI, HMHS, and Project. The implementation of educational policies of NCLB in 2001 and A Race to the Top in 2009 have been driving forces in retooling the values of accountability and efficiency as neutral tools of educational reform which posit standardized high stakes testing, teacher accountability, and individualism are now the best indicators of educational achievement and success. Coupling the trajectory of LGBTQ youth as an at-risk population with the merger of neoliberalism is significant because it broadens the scope of analysis to understand how Java High as an LGBTQ charter school operates alongside interlocking trends shaping key policies and practices in educational reform.

A Significant Merger: Neoliberalism & Educational Reform

Neoliberal policies have been transforming public education and its role in society for more than thirty years, and the rhetoric of educational reform in the U.S. has always been laced with discourses of crisis and failure. Duggan (2003) argues traces of neoliberalism can be seen in the 1940s and 1950s in the U.S. as a significant merger between international governments and corporate businesses that set a range of policy imperatives that, “sought to recreate the globe in the interests of the unimpeded operation of capitalist free markets, and to cut back public, non-commercial powers and resources that might impede or drain potential profit making,” (p. xii). But how does neoliberalism specifically impact educational reform? According to Apple (2006) and Hursh (2007) neoliberal reformers ultimately seek to convert educational systems into markets and
privatize educational services. Therefore, NCLB and now President Obama’s educational policy entitled A Race to the Top have successfully solidified a discourse of educational reform to be privatization, high stakes standardized testing to measure ability and potential, deskillng teachers, eradication of teachers’ unions, outsourcing of tutoring, and scripted curriculum (Hill & Kumar, 2008; Weiner, 2007). Investigating Java High’s educational and charter documents in conversation with actively participating with and keenly observing Java High students provided insight into how the school architecture was constructed on the premise of the Hatfield city public school system’s failure to mitigate the inequality LGBTQ youth face in school settings; effectively discursively positioning the school infrastructure as inclusive of LGBTQ youth and capable of generating positive and measurable academic and non-academic outcomes for LGBTQ youth while Hatfield district schools were not. Furthermore, investigating Java High’s educational and charter documents alongside nuanced student experiences points to the ways students exercised agency and styles of self-representation\textsuperscript{12} that affirmed their at-riskness was mitigated by the small specialized charter school as efficient and inclusive while the large public district schools as not accountable, unsafe, and failing which is suggestive of a neoliberal framework of educational reform.

\textbf{New Visions of the Public: Small Charter Schools in Urban Communities}

One of the ways neoliberalism has restructured education is by the using charter schools as a choice initiative to increase and position philanthropic foundations to re-frame and retool urban infrastructures like those of Hatfield city materially and ideologically

\textsuperscript{12} In Chapter 2 of her ethnography Kysa Nygreen (2013) cites Bettie (2003) to make the point students at The Last Chance High School did exercise agency and styles of self-representation throughout her field work but they did so in opposition to discourses of these kids that operated at The Last Chance High School. Something similar was happening at Java High in that students were exercising agency and developing styles of self-representation but they were doing so within the framework of at-riskness established by institutional forces of Java High.
towards a new vision of ‘the public’. According to Anyon (2005) schools now in the 21st century need more than ever additional resources to address significant social needs due to the decline in the Welfare State and corresponding cuts to public social service programs over the past thirty years. Yet over the last decade the scholarship of Orfield & Eaton (1996), Anyon (1996), Ravitch (2010, 2013), Lipman (2012), and Kozlo (1991, 2006, 2012) point to the lack of urgency to address the negative impact the consistent decline in resources, funding, and services for public educational institutions that serve a range of students deemed “at risk” who constitute significant majorities in predominantly urban cities. Noguera’s (2006) work also points to how the continued discourse of public school failure, “blends in easily with the panorama of pathologies afflicting the inner city and its residents,” (p. 229). Today The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation started by Bill Gates the creator of the computer company Microsoft and has assets of approximately 30 billion making it the largest foundation in the world. The Grant Makers of Education (2008) found that leading foundations look to Gates for leadership in educational philanthropy demonstrating the kind of influence a venture philanthropist can have upon urban education. This intimate partnership between big business and educational policy makers index how the corporate sector primarily responsible for deindustrialization and cutting wages while receiving tax breaks that starved cities of revenue is now repositioned as benevolent donor, if not savior for failing public education. According to Educational Historian Diane Ravitch (2010):

The Gates Foundation selected a problem in American education that it wanted to solve: boosting high school graduation rates and college entry rates, especially in urban districts. The foundation leaders decided the primary obstacle to reaching these goals was the traditional comprehensive high school…The Gates initiative began when the small schools movement had become the leading edge of school reform in urban districts…It promised that its schools-most with fewer than 400
students would promote rigor, relevance, and relationships. Therefore, Gates pumped $2 billion between 2000 and 2008 into its campaign to restructure the American high school (p. 205).

The development of a “grants culture” (Lipman, 2012) is essential to understanding how Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school came into existence in 2005. The five founding teachers that made up the planning team wrote a grant to the Gates Foundation seeking monies to fund the school because the idea of creating a small charter high school that was LGBTQ inclusive fit directly in line with the educational ideology set forth by the Gates Foundation. But integral to the success of the planning team was enlisting the assistance of the Technical Assistance & Leadership Center located in the city of Hatfield is also funded through the Gates Foundation. According to the Technical Assistance & Leadership Center website,

TALC serves as intermediary for “A New Vision of Secondary Education in the city of Hatfield,” a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, TALC New Vision connects schools, workplaces, and other community resources to improve pathways for youth to postsecondary learning, careers, and effective citizenship. TALC New Vision provides and brokers services to new school founders, convenes key stakeholders under the grant, monitors fiscal responsibility, measures outcomes of the reform efforts, and promotes policies that sustain effective small school options. TALC is funded by the Bill and Melissa Gates Foundation.”

TALC works as an intermediary within the local city of Hatfield community ensuring that grant monies that are allocated through the Gates Foundation get dispersed properly and provide two years of support once the charter school is established to ensure it is a sustainable example of what TALC calls “a new vision of the public.” That vision TALC articulates is absolutely congruent within a neoliberal framework that emphasizes a narrative of failing public schools and schools exist in the 21st century to give all consumers access to a valuable form of educational property. “Grants become

13 http://talcnewvision.org/About/HomePage
investments, programs are ventures, and measures of impact generally involve the ability to scale up the initiative…in this way, these foundations have become central and active drivers of policy making, research, and advocacy,” (Scott, 2009, p. 108). As a result of Java High being funded by the Gates Foundation and TALC as charter management organization (CMO) funded by the Gates Foundation, TALC serves as a critical bridge to the sustainability of charter schools within the city of Hatfield locally and nationally furthers the vision of a new public that is laced with business strategies, practices, and assessments solidifying a private educational market in the state in which the city of Hatfield resides. Gates declaring in 2005 public high schools were obsolete laid significant groundwork for other philanthropists to investment in and create an educational market focused on restructuring high schools. Yet without the boundaries created by the district public school system charter schools would cease to exist in Hatfield. What constitutes a charter school and how it functions varies from state to state based on the historical, economic, and sociopolitical factors of individual states and those local communities (Lubienski & Wietzel, 2010). Adopted on April 27th, 1999 and revised again in 2001, 2004, 2006, and 2007 The Charter School Law of the state in which Hatfield resides in authorized:

The Hatfield Board of School Directors ("Board") to establish by contract Hatfield Public Schools ("HPS") charter schools. No HPS charter school shall be established until a contract has been negotiated, reduced to writing, and formally approved and executed by the Board President and the Superintendent. As set forth in more detail in Section (9) below, an HPS charter school may be an instrumentality of HPS or it may not be an instrumentality of HPS (p. 1).

This charter school law further makes a critical distinction in operationalizing the charter school governance structure by denoting if a charter school is “an instrumentality” charter or “non instrumentality” charter. Essentially this operational distinction constructs the
boundaries of the relationship the Board and the charter petitioners will have. Java High is defined as an instrumentality charter and the six tenets of employee relations, necessity of public hearings, use of school facilities, legal status in case of the revocation of the charter school, per pupil expenditures, renewal of contract terms, and revocation of charters and termination of charter contracts. Java High as an instrumentality charter in Hatfield city means the Board is authorized to hire all employees and all teachers specifically must be issued a charter school instructional license by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) in the state and is only required to have at least a minor in the subject area and participate in ongoing professional development in the subject that the teacher is teaching. If the teacher has no minor in the subject matter they are teaching the Department of Human Resources can make a judgment allowing said teacher to teach based on significant life and/or professional experience which that make up for a lack in educational credentials. The geographic location of Java High is intimately shaped by larger intersecting forces and well established patterns of residential racial segregation, gentrification, and deindustrialization of Hatfield as an urban city in the Midwest demonstrating how sociocultural, political, and historical forces continue to shape local education policy and “reforms” that are consistent with national urban trends. Interestingly, Hatfield has specifically been imbued with educational reform since the 1990s as a result of the city participating in a voucher program. “Voucher schools are private schools that might or might not be religious in nature. Children with public vouchers enroll in them by choice. The vouchers usually cover only a portion of the tuition,” (Ravitch, 2010, p. 121). Ravitch’s scholarship articulates three critical consequences of the voucher program that are intimately connected to Java High as an
LGBTQ inclusive charter school coming into existence. First, “the voucher program
opened the door for the spread of other forms of school choice, including charter schools,
which have taken innovative paths and have been growing rapidly in enrollment,” (p.
131). Also, a decade after the voucher program was instituted:

Enrollment in the regular public schools dropped just below 80,000, and the
NAEP reported disturbing implications for Hatfield’s public schools. The gap
between White and African American students in the State was one of the largest
in the nation. This reflected poorly on Hatfield, where two-thirds of African
American students attend public school (p. 132).

Therefore, Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school is quite similar to other start
up charters strategically located in urban communities demarcated by decades of intense
racial segregation, deindustrialization, and gentrification and operates within a troubling
neoliberal discourse of public school failure. Like other charter schools that are located in
urban cities, Java High is located in an area in which the regular Hatfield City public
schools are struggling. Tryjankowski (2012) affirms this point noting:

Charter schools are typically located in areas where traditional public schools are
struggling. They are presented as an alternative for families who are not satisfied
with education their children are receiving. In communities where public schools
are thriving—typically upper middle class and upper class communities there is less
public demand for educational alternatives because upper middle and upper class
families have the means to send their children to private schools, and pay tuition
in those schools, if they are not satisfied with their district schools (p. 9).

Christina Hanhardt’s (2011) Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of
Violence traces the development of LGBTQ politics in the U.S. from 1965-2005 and
explains how LGBTQ activism was transformed from a multi-racial coalitional grassroots
movement with strong ties to anti-poverty groups and anti-racism organizations to a
mainstream, anti-violence movement with aspirations for state recognition. Therefore, the
pattern of charter schools like Java High being funded by grant monies from the Bill
Gates Foundation that have emerged in neighborhoods that are intensely racially segregated, undergone significant deindustrialization, and invested in projects of gentrification like those in Hatfield City is indicative of larger structural shifts within the sociocultural, political, and economic landscape of the U.S. to diminish the public and increase the private. Hanhardt’s work affirms the “safe space” agenda embedded within the premise of Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive school and urban renewal initiatives signify LGBTQ progress is linked to public school failures and indicative of a privatized vision of public that is problematic. After a decade of a voucher program in Hatfield did not yield the significant results posited by voucher proponents it was supposed to, the opportunity to recast choice initiatives with an inclusive lens demonstrates how the urban city of Hatfield continues to be a Midwest hotbed for contested educational reforms that have particular importance for marginalized students (many who identity as students of color and LGBTQ) because they are at a higher risk to face multiple and substantial structural barriers that prohibit their achieve academic and non-academic successes.

**Java High Organized to Improve LGBTQ Outcomes**

During the first month of data collection I was able to begin examination of Java High educational and charter documents established by the five founding teachers which outlined the school’s educational vision, mission, and philosophy as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school and new publicity materials that would be used to recruit new students for the following academic year. A key piece of publicity I examined was titled, The Java High Charter Review presentation, which indicated in the 2010 Hatfield School Climate Survey, “Java scored higher than the district in the areas of safety, climate, and academic challenge… and Java High itself has not been identified as a school identified for
improvement under NCLB legislation,” (p. 2). These recruitment materials point to discursive patterns within Java High’s educational and charter documents of positioning itself as a school inherently more capable and willing to mitigate risk and eliminate failure while Hatfield public schools are unable to mitigate risk and repeatedly failing is significant. In the educational philosophy, Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school positions itself as an educational space that is more capable to mitigate the risks a significant majority of youth face in the Hatfield City Public Schools:

A progressive, urban environment where many of the residents are economically disadvantaged and occasionally come from unhealthy backgrounds. The district is comprised of 59.8% African-American students, 15.5% Caucasian students, 17.1 Hispanic students, and less than 10% of students from Asian, Native American and other minority groups. 78% of elementary school students in the district are eligible for free lunch. Java High is dedicated to serving the needs of students who have been harassed, discriminated against, or bullied in the regular school environment. The district graduation rate is 61% compared to a 91% graduation rate for the state (p. 3).

In this sense, Java High is positioned as a space where it can get better for youth and the Hatfield public schools are a place of continued decline and inevitable victimization for at-risk youth. Further down in that same section on educational priorities laid out by the State, the failure of the Hatfield City regular district schools to mitigate the at riskness of many of its students while Java High is positioned as an LGBTQ inclusive space where all kinds of risk is successfully mitigated and progress is not just possible but achieved through “an atmosphere that fosters cooperation, tolerance, and accountability,” (p. 2). The following sections indicate how the language of “at-risk” youth in Java High’s infrastructure is strategically used to map distinct kinds of risk on students of color and LGBTQ youth differently:

Java High will serve students who are traditionally at-risk for dropping out of high school. Studies show that one of the main reasons that students stop going to
school or drop out is because of continuous harassment or bullying. The goal of Java High is to create a safe environment for students who have been bullied or harassed in the regular school environment and who have either stopped attending school or are at risk of dropping out due to harassment (p. 7).

Hatfield City enrolls a large percentage of at-risk students and economically disadvantaged students. By connecting students and families with service agencies and community programs, Java High expects to see a significant increase in standardized tests scores and attendance rates, thereby reducing the achievement gap. This philosophy is grounded in the belief that when students needs for safety and security are unmet, they are unable to focus on education (p. 7).

In the first passage risk is ascribed to specifically LGBTQ bodies by evoking rhetoric of bullying and victimization that affirms statistics and narratives that, “gives credibility to arguments that harassed gay and lesbian students are denied equal access to learning opportunities,” (Talburt, 2004, p. 118) while the second passage constructs at-riskness that is ascribed to bodies of color by evoking rhetoric of, “the disparities in the standardized test scores between Black and White, Latino/a and White, and recent immigrants and White students,” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 3). These two passages indicate a misleading positive correlation between raising standardized test scores and attendance rates and decreasing the achievement gap while serving the multitude of needs of at-risk youth that falls solely on the shoulders of Java High as an educational institution. These two passages also parse out school based issues associated with race from those associated with sexuality reaffirming the mitigating factor of inequality for LGBTQ youth are victimization and bullying reaffirming the mitigating factors for students of color is the achievement gap. Yet the impact of homophobia reaches kids of all gender expressions, sexual orientations, and sexualities but is implicated in their educational opportunities in distinct ways. Not all LGBTQ kids leave their schools because of homophobia; a lot of kids stay and make space for themselves (Blackburn,
2003; McCready, 2007) demonstrating the ways altered subjectivities and possibilities for agency are always present in spite of the restraining institutional forces of schools. The achievement gap is not a simple one-dimensional issue that has continued to generate educational disparities between students of different races and socio-economic backgrounds. Ladson-Billings (2006) redefines the achievement gap as an educational debt pointing out the debt owed to students of color and socio-economically disadvantaged students has been cultivated over generations of systemic discrimination that are indicative of interconnected factors such as educational resources, composition of the school, students’ sense of control of environment, teachers’ verbal skills, and family background. Developing and advocating for safer school environments is a necessary aim for all types of schools that seek to improve academic outcomes. At the same time developing safer school environments cannot solely increase standardized test scores and increasing attendance rates cannot reduce the achievement gap because there are multiple factors outside of the school which impact academic and non-academic student achievement and success inside the school, and standardized test scores and attendance rates are not the sole arbitrators of claiming student success. Therefore, Java high discursively positioning itself as more inclusive because it is better equipped to mitigate multiple kinds of at-risk and capable to overcome systemic forces of discrimination and harassment is unrealistic and an over generalization. These two passages from Java High’s guiding documents positions LGBTQ youth at-risk because of victimization and students of color and socio-economically disadvantaged youth at-risk because of the achievement gap hinging the concept of inclusion at Java High within discourses of risk and safety that makes significant racialized distinctions between at-risk youth that
ultimately cannot be mitigated by the Hatfield City district schools.

**Positioning Youth of Color as an At-Risk Population**

While the discursive language in the Java High institutional documents described LGBTQ youth at-risk for overt violence related to non-normative gender and sexual expression and youth of color at-risk for academic failure different reasons, the Java High teachers’ use of the term at-risk points to underlying deficit thinking in regards to students of color specifically. Patty, the Java High Social Worker and teacher, used the term at-risk as an umbrella term to describe the Java High student body in this way:

The kids here are all at-risk. They are at-risk for a lot of things. Kids come to Java through word of mouth though. Sometimes kids here see Java like a family and they replace their family because their family of origin is not positive. And lots of kids come here because they have had behavioral problems in other school settings. Kids stay at Java because they feel like adults care about them and aren’t gonna give up on them. I see lots of young people give up on themselves and it’s harder to do that when you have cheerleaders around. Diversity is the power of Java. And it’s harder to say you dislike someone if you have a face to a name. So exposure to one another informs new kinds of relationships. We build community and we let kids have a voice here (Individual Interview, March 27, 2012).

Patty’s response reveals the importance of connecting students to positive school environments so there are more opportunities to cultivate positive academic and non-academic outcomes for students which is intimately linked to developing ongoing authentic teacher to student relationships. Patty’s response also highlights the risk involved in using the term at-risk as an umbrella term to describe the Java High student body because it conflates the stigma of risk as the same for all the students at Java when discursively in Java’s institutional documents risk is ascribed to students of color and LGBTQ youth in strategically distinct ways. Conflating risk obscures larger structural issues that prevent marginalized youth from achieving academic and non-academic success turning systemic problems into individual problems that can only be overcome by
individual students making different choices. The use of the term at-risk continues to be used by an array of professionals in the fields of education, social work, and psychology to:

Denote individuals who suffer emotional and adjustment problems. Educators use it sometimes to refer to young people who are at risk of dropping out of the educational system, sometimes to refer to youth who are not learning skills to succeed after graduation, and sometimes to refer to children who current educational mastery makes their future school career uncertain (McWhirter, 2007, p. 8).

Yet the overrepresentation of youth of color as an at-risk population points to the pervasiveness of deficit thinking coupled with racism in the architecture of schooling by locating the lack opportunities and continued marginalization of individual children of color rather than in educational institutions themselves. Patty’s comments underline the subtly of deficit thinking which demonstrate her use of diversity as coded language for race signifies the students of color at Java who are perpetually at-risk can achieve incorporation into the student body by taking personal responsibility and making better individual choices. There is also the underlying assumption incorporating youth of color into the Java High student body will lessen their perpetual risk of failure (academic or non-academic) yet the institutional norms and architecture of Java High embedded within the framework of neoliberalism are not questioned for any bias because the school is premised upon LGBTQ inclusivity. Wanting to affirm Patty’s comment about exposure and visibility as critical building blocks to developing authentic teacher to student relationships I also wanted to probe the ways the racial dynamics between students and teachers informed her understanding of those authentic teacher student relationships. I asked Patty if she ever considered why Java High had a significant amount of students of color who did not identify as LGBTQ within the student body at the same time all the
Java High teachers were White. Patty responded to my question in this way:

I don’t know why that is exactly. I’m very conscious of this and I try to talk to students about it. I mean Denise the lunch lady, Jordan the building service worker, some substitute teachers, and consultants that come in aren’t White. But I’m White and I’m always gonna be White. So yeah, the shortfall of Java is the teaching staff is predominantly White and our staff doesn’t reflect our student body. But the staff doesn’t talk about it. I have never been in a place that wasn’t predominantly White so I really didn’t pay attention to it (Individual Interview, March 27, 2012).

Patty’s response reveals that as a member of the all White Java High teaching staff she prided herself on being aware of her own racial identity at the same time she was not able to recognize her own White privilege as a contributing factor to sustaining racial inequality by letting her off the hook from challenging the status quo. These kinds of statements underscore what Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994, 2009) coined as dysconscious racism “an uncritical habit of mind that justifies inequity and exploitations by accepting the existing order of things as given” (p. 35). The absence of teachers of color in the Java High teaching staff becomes an inevitable shortcoming rather than a structural pattern of racial inequality that implicitly informs labeling LGBTQ youth and youth of color at-risk for different reasons. Sustaining distinct kinds of stigma to LGBTQ youth and youth of color justifies the reparative mission of Java High at the same time sustains the inherent failure of the Hatfield City district schools. The deficit language used in Java’s institutional documents coupled with deficit language used by Patty points to the way Java’s architecture decouples race from sexuality by mapping the stigma of at-risk youth to LGBTQ youth and youth of color differently at the same time binding that quality of risk inherent to students mirroring a general trend in neoliberal educational reforms. The linguistic distinctions of at-risk labeling of student populations at Java High point out how Java High’s LGBTQ inclusivity operates within a deficit paradigm by locating both
LGBTQ youth and youth of color as distinct kinds of problems that can be better served through reparative means. Therefore, the discursive and literal labeling of students of color as at-risk positions them as individual problems to be fixed and their incorporation into the Java High student body reduces their inherent risk for academic and non academic failure proving the architecture of an LGBTQ inclusive charter school is effective whereas the Hatfield City district schools fail. Even though Java High’s LGBTQ inclusivity is discursively predicated on small charter school success and the Hatfield’s public school system inability to create safe and positive learning environments, there is value in examining the way a variety of Java High students make sense of the tension between agency and structure. If we look at the range of experiences of some Java High students alongside Java High’s discursive trajectory we can examine how the inter sections between experiences and institutional documents mutually constitute the kind of LGBTQ inclusivity that operates at Java High linking neoliberalism and educational reforms by positioning specialized charters as efficient and inclusive and large public schools as failing and unsafe.

**Palpable Tensions: Student Agency & School Architecture**

Field Notes 2-16-12, 10:50amish Creative Movement Class

_I am sitting at a long table watching the majority of students line dancing to a Chris Brown song. Ugh. I don’t like Chris Brown. His voice is whiny to me and he’s not all that. I’m sure older people said that about singers I listened to when I was their age. I guess this means I am getting older...sigh... Three students I have come to know as Vero, Shani, and Darius stop dancing and start walking over to where I am sitting. Now I am nervous. (Closing my journal.)_

Vero: Hey TK, what is that little brown book? Tell us why you are here again because I know I forgot. Sorry.
TK: (opening the researcher journal I show them my handwriting) Hi guys. Well, I write little notes to myself about what I see and sometimes I write convos I have with students, teachers, staff, or volunteers. I’m here because I found out about Java last summer and that it’s vision and philosophy supports LGBTQ students in ways they need and I wanted to understand what happens here; what makes Java Java, and I am curious to know why you all came to school here and what it’s like here.

Vero: (shouting over the music) I’m here because I got kicked out of my other school in 6th grade and I didn’t want to take online classes. I wanna be in school.

Shani: I overdosed. You already know that because I told you last week when we met. I just got here. I went to Sterling High and I skipped everyday because I hated it. I can’t go back there. I was in the hospital, like a mental hospital and they told me about Java.

TK: (to Shani) So did they give you a choice to come here [Java]?

Shani: Kinda. They said I had to stay in the hospital or go to Java. Joanne and Sandy said I had to be responsible. I want to come to school. I like it here. I am not failing. I’m getting A’s and B’s. I’m doing good you know?

Vero: Nice talking. It’s lunch. See ya.

Shani: Later TK.

I smile and wave back at them as they walk away. Darius gives me a head nod and heads out of the gymnasium.

Explicit in this ethnographic excerpt between Vero, Shani, Darius, and myself is the multiplicity of reasons students attend Java High and the various types of at-riskness mapped onto different student bodies. Implicit in this excerpt are the multiplicity of ways at-risk youth developed a more positive connection to a school environment that was absent prior to attending Java High. Vero was a freshman at Java during the time we spoke in the gymnasium that day and had been a student for two years. Shani on the other hand had only been a Java High student for roughly three months. She was old enough to be academically classified as a junior but as a result of her perpetual truancy during the majority of her second year at Sterling High she had to be classified academically as a
sophomore at Java High. Although Darius didn’t say anything during our brief interaction that day in the gymnasium I later learned through interactions with him that he had to enroll at Java High because his mother moved their family to Hatfield after suddenly losing job and sought economic and social support of extended family members already living in the city. Vero, Shani, and Darius all exhibited different kinds of at-riskness that impacted their placement at Java High. While Vero, Shani, and Darius did not have much power in the decision making process forcing them to attend Java High, they did have a degree of control once they became students. Vero, Shani, and Darius all found themselves at Java High for different reasons, but the LGBTQ inclusive infrastructure opened up possibilities for each of them to make more positive connections to a school environment that long term had positive academic and non-academic outcomes for each of them ultimately demonstrating the ways a school’s infrastructure can aid in the mitigation of marginalization often associated with at-riskness attributed to low personal efficacy, low academic achievement, truancy, expulsion, and changing schools mid year.

Java High’s LGBTQ inclusive infrastructure opened up opportunities for students like Shani who self-identified as a Mexican-American gender non-conforming lesbian to just ‘be’ herself and ‘be’ herself at school. It is important to note Shani’s decision skip school regularly at Sterling High stemmed from intense feelings of alienation and isolation that developed over time as a result of not being able to express her non-conforming gender and sexuality while at school and at home. Shani also described intense feelings of shame, isolation, and alienation that resulted from not being able to “be” herself with her family because of her refusal to conform to traditional heterosexual gender roles and expectations placed upon girls who identify as Mexican, Mexican-
American, Chicana, Puerto Rican, or Latina. For many students of color the family is a space that thwarts racism and affirms positive cultural identities (Hurtado, 1998) and Shani’s non-conforming gender expression and lesbian identification positioned her outside of the social boundaries of her peer group and the cultural boundaries of her family. Shani’s non-conforming gender expression, sexuality, and race fused together which created signification feelings of shame, alienation, and isolation that were exacerbated by two critical institutions in her life- the family and the school. After leaving the ‘mental hospital’ after a failed suicide attempt, Shani was enrolled by her parents at Java High and my conversations with her demonstrated the stigma associated with her non-conforming gender expression, sexuality, and race that made up her most salient identities did not prohibit her from actively participating in academic and non-academic activities at Java High. The LGBTQ inclusive infrastructure of Java High mitigated her at-riskness by cultivating a school environment that recognized Shani’s marginalized identities as not disruptive to her academic and non-academic successes but still positioned those multiple identities as at-risk.

Java High’s LGBTQ inclusive infrastructure was not as salient for Vero a self-identified White bisexual low-income young women and Darius a self-identified Biracial (Black and White) low income young man. Neither Vero nor Darius expressed feelings of fear, alienation, or isolation in their previous schools as a result of their actual or perceived gender expression or sexuality. Darius chose to enroll at Java High rather than a Hatfield district school because mid October Java High was not at full capacity and because he thought he might have an easier transition academically because it was a smaller school environment. Java High’s LGBTQ infrastructure mitigated Darius’s
potential at-riskness based on its’ academic flexibility, small school environment, and smaller class sizes. Java High’s LGBTQ inclusive infrastructure also mitigated Vero’s at-riskness associated with her record of multiple suspensions that led to a school expulsion. This ethnographic snapshot reveals Java High’s LGBTQ inclusive charter school infrastructure was successful as an institutional response that mediated the multiple forms of marginalization (Lance & McCready, 2011) faced by Vero, Shani, and Darius. While Java High’s intentional LGBTQ inclusive infrastructure did challenge the different kinds of at-riskness attributed to Vero, Shani, or Darius as consequences of marginalization the structural attentiveness to LGBTQ inclusivity opened up possibilities to mitigate these students’ feelings of isolation, alienation, victimization, extensive truancy, and unstable economic conditions ultimately connected them to Java High as a more positive school space that partially increased their academic and non-academic outcomes.

In a second follow up individual interview with fifteen year old Java High student Jessica, a self-identified Mexican-American girl who likes girls, she points to the positive impacts and outcomes of Java High’s infrastructure as an LGBTQ inclusive school that affirms the ways Java High is positioned as safe and efficient while Hatfield district schools are positioned as failing and unsafe. Her narrative also highlights the importance of recognizing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer identified students’ as a heterogeneous rather than homogeneous group, and the ways intersecting sociopolitical and cultural contexts of urban communities impact those nuanced experiences of LGBTQ

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14 Hatfield district schools have a zero tolerance policy when it comes to expulsions, and once a student is expelled from one Hatfield city district school they cannot attend another for one full year. After one year students can petition to enroll in a district school. I will go into greater detail the way Hatfield City district schools and Java High are implicated in zero tolerance policies in the chapter five that discusses Java High’s restorative justice program and individual class.
youth in Hatfield. Finally, Jessica’s narrative affirms Horn, Kosciw, and Russell’s (2009) and McCready’s (2004, 2009, 2011) calls to examine the nuanced ways social context shapes the lives of LGBTQ youth as well as the importance of examining narratives that do not situate LGBTQ youth as a monolithic or homogeneous group in order to complicate positioning them as either resilient or at-risk.

TK: I only have a few questions to follow up with you since we last talked.

Jessica: Okay that sounds good TK. What’s up?

TK: Based on some of the things you mentioned last week about your experiences last year at the John E. Kirby Middle School and this year at Java, I was wondering if you could talk more about any issues that you think other trans, gay, lesbian, and bi students face at Java that are similar or different from you? Or do you have a sense of issues that trans, gay, lesbian, or bi students face that do not attend Java based on your experiences?

Jessica: Well I have a bunch of gay friends everywhere [in the Hatfield district schools]…transgenders…and everything….and they be like I wanna come to your school. They ask me like when can I shadow or whatever? And I’m like I don’t know you gotta talk to your principle and your principle has to talk to my principle… And basically they say that they don’t like it in public schools and like the majority of my gay friends got jumped in public schools just for being gay. Like Eddie, you know Eddie who goes here. Well, he got punched in the face by that guy Fatfat I was telling you about.

TK: Oh right, Joey aka Fatfat? Remember I felt a little uncomfortable calling someone I don’t know out of their name? lol

Jessica: lol right right TK…I got you but …well that’s his name and how I know him as Fatfat. Anyways Eddie…. You know Eddie right? He sometimes hangs out in the hallway a lot…well she told me that he was on his way to school and Fatfat punched him in his face because he was walking around the south side with heels on… yeah and just sometimes… my gay friends can’t go to school. Like when I first came here [Hatfield City]…I knew this guy who was like Lance¹⁵, you know

¹⁵ Throughout my fieldwork there was a Java High student who self-identified sometimes as an African-American trans girl and other times as an African-American boy. When Lance came to school dressed in traditionally male gendered clothes such as an oversized t-shirt and loosely fitted jeans with sneakers he used the male pronoun and referred to himself as Lance. But on the days Lance came to school dressed in heeled shoes, wore a skirt or tight jeans, had longer hair, and wore makeup, he used the female pronoun she
Lance/Sofia who goes here...yeah well he goes by Tori and anyway... we was just out kicking it with mutual friends at this his school after school and Tori went into the boys bathroom which is attached to the boys locker-room which is all the way on the other side and there is a hallway where the girls and the boys are supposed to meet up...and I was coming out of the girls locker-room towards him but there were people in front of me...so it was hard for him to see me. Well, all of a sudden this boy ran out the boys’ locker-room and started beating on Tori in the hallway. So I see this and start running towards him pushing these girls out of my way trying to get through and by the time I got to Tori this boy was just stomping on him and yelling “don’t come back to this school”...so like Tori goes to school like maybe once or twice a week if that because you know he can’t take all that,” (Individual Interview, June 6, 2012).

It might be that Tori received virtually no attention from any school personnel and any other students in the hallway when she was attacked because she identified as an African-American transgendered girl. The fact this incident of violence occurred after official school hours is significant because it demonstrates the importance of resources all students need and could have access to after the academic school hours are over. It is also significant this incident happened in the hallway outside of a locker-room. Bathrooms, locker rooms, hallways, and gymnasiums are significant intra-school spaces that have value and meaning in the lives of the students. Grossman & D’Augelli (2006) and Sausa (2005) point to these in-between spaces as locations that can contribute to increased gender segregation for transgender youth because they do not rigidly identify as either male or female and these in-between spaces can also heighten transgender youth from connecting to the school community because their peers do not accept them as the gender in which they identify most. Jessica’s retelling of the jarring incidents of intrapersonal violence that happened to two self identified African-American transgirls outside and inside of their respective district school affirms transgender students face pervasive

and referred to himself as Sofia. Like Jessica does in my second interview with her, the majority of Java students I observed and talked with accepted Lance/Sofia’s fluid gender presentations and talked openly without malice about Lance/Sofia seamlessly.
harassment and violence because of their gender identities or perceived gender identities (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2006; Guiterrez, 2004; Sausa, 2005; Wyss, 2004). What is particularly poignant to me though is how Jessica does not re-victimize Eddie or Tori in her retelling of their attacks. On the contrary Jessica points to the need for more qualitative studies to account for the ways these in-between spaces within and around a school can push students like Tori, Eddie, and Lance/Sofy to the margins and mitigate or intensify the factors that marginalize youth. Jessica also points to the dangers in labeling an educational institution as completely failing or entirely succeeding because institutions as Sara Ahmed (2012) points out are not simply containers in which activities happen within them, those activities shape and reshape the sense of an institution. Jessica offers examples of the kinds of violence (risks) African-American transgender girls are faced with on the way to school and within the in-between space of the boys’ locker-room and school hallways. These in-between spaces in which the violence occurs points to the places that significantly contribute to students sentiments of whether or not a school is safe or has a positive school climate. While Grant et al (2011), Greytak, Kosciw, & Diaz (2009), McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, & Russell (2010) present the quantitative data that affirms a significant amount of transgender youth experience regular victimization at school they also point to decreased feelings of school connectedness because of negative experiences of increased scrutiny and or pervasive harassment and assault because of their perceived or expressed gender identities within the school that leads to transgender youth skipping school or dropping out altogether. Jessica’s counter story telling articulates two significant outcomes of Java High functioning as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school. First, Jessica affirms Java High’s infrastructure has created a positive
school climate in which possibilities exist for Lance/Sofia to identify with the gender identity he/she wanted to and a majority of the school community actively developed an understanding to respect his/her choices. Jessica’s insights point to how important the lack of scrutiny, lack of gender specific dress codes, a gender neutral bathroom students have regular access to, and affirming practices to call students by the names they choose (even if those names change from day to day) are strategies embedded within the Java High vision & philosophy of “safety, security, and personal affirmation are met…and students feel safe, cared for, and comfortable” that all contributed to cultivating a positive school climate. Furthermore, Eddie getting punched in the face for walking down the street wearing high heels on his way to school demonstrates how the violence African American trans girls face outside of the school cannot be prevented by school personnel, but the impact of violence LGBTQ youth face outside the school can impact the academic and non academic outcomes often attributed to school climates. Jessica’s counter story telling about Eddie, Tori, and Lance/Sofy and inserting herself as a witness, friend, and peer affirms that to effectively offer resources to LGBTQ youth in urban communities like those of Hatfield schools like Java High have to take into account the complexities of their experiences in order to understand the intersections among their multiple identities. Payne & Smith (2012) affirm that school climates that allow sexual harassment and bullying to flourish have a negative impact on all students. The violence Tori endured in the hallway of his district school was jarring and abhorrent yet Jessica’s retelling of that experience offers an example of how even in the face of unrelenting homophobic violence resistance is possible through collective agency through counter storytelling (Delgado, 1989; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Dixon & Rousseau, 2006). Jessica
says, “well…he just couldn’t take it anymore…so he goes to school maybe once or twice a week,” points to the violence and infrastructure of the school as the problem that serves as a major barrier to Tori not attending school rather than Tori’s “at risk” sexuality, race, gender expression, and or identifications as the problem. The gesture of affirmation changes the meaning of “she couldn’t take it anymore…so she goes to school once or twice a week” from an at-risk African American trans girl dropping out or getting kicked out to an African American transgender girl exhibiting strategies of self care and holding on to one’s humanity by staying away from a hostile school environment. Cruz (2011) discusses this kind of “changing the script” by LGBTQ youth in her analysis of the “ethnographic snapshots”¹⁶ that describe experiences of containment and regulation LGBTQ street youth faced regularly in southern California. Jessica’s retelling of Eddie and Tori’s assaults in concert with her affirmation of Lance/Sofy’s gender expressions and presentations inside Java High gestures towards the way LGBTQ youth at Java High have taken up discursive sentiments of respect, responsibility, and safety and cultivated their own nuanced understandings. Second, Jessica’s counter story telling demonstrates that an LGBTQ inclusive charter school can serve in a variety of functions differently based on the needs of the heterogeneous student body. The nuanced language and understanding Jessica articulated in our interview regarding the gender expression and identification of Lance/Sofy demonstrates how “safety, comfort, and personal affirmation” of Java High students is not just a discursive presupposition but opens up collective possibilities and moments for Java High students like Jessica to share her own

¹⁶ Cruz (2011) articulates ethnographic snapshots as, “intense bursts of information that in a very few words tell us so much about the daily conditions of LGBTQ youth in the city,” (p.550). My interview with Jessica affirms Cruz’s point and takes it further by pointing to the importance of way LGBTQ youth tell their stories is also significant.
awareness of issues within the LGBTQ community, advocate for school level changes (infrastructure: policies, practices, curriculum, and pedagogy), and recognize the impact providing LGBTQ youth with an affirming school space can do. Jessica points to the nuanced strategies of self care exhibited by African American transgender girls by sharing that African American transgirls like Tori “can’t take it” so they demonstrate self care by attending school once or twice a week and African American transgirls like Eddie demonstrate self care by attending school at Java but are often “hanging in the hallway-not going to class.” Jessica’s counter story telling affirms the work of McCready & Blackburn (2010) by demonstrating how homophobia negatively affects LGBTQ youth academic achievement and performance by forcing some queer students to leave the school environment periodically or altogether, and forcing others to stay and ‘make space’ (Lance & McCready, 2011) for themselves within the school. Finally, Jessica’s counter story telling points to the potential of an LGBTQ inclusive school that cultivates an infrastructure that intentionally supports lower levels of victimization, decreased gender segregation, cultivates positive self efficacy of its students, decreases absenteeism, and improves academic achievement that can positively impact LGBTQ youth and non LGBTQ youth alike.

**Possibilities & Limitations of Strange Bedfellows**

The intentionality of the educational vision and philosophy of Java High to function as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school was both a benevolent and necessary undertaking. As an LGBTQ inclusive charter school Java High is able to intentionally create an alternative educational institutional infrastructure that forges possibilities for LGBTQ youth who are deemed at-risk and other marginalized students who are also
deemed at-risk to explore temporary and partial moments of solidarity with one another on their own terms, increase individual self-efficacy, decrease levels of victimization, and develop an ethic of empathy for one another. At the same time, Java High’s ability as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school to keep the range of at-risk youth safer and minimize those risks better than Hatfield City public district schools is both temporary and partial producing ambiguous and diffused effects. Establishing Java High in 2005 as an LGBTQ inclusive school is embedded within the legacy forged by the 1954 Brown v. Board decision and have expanded it’s boundaries by insisting there is a primary relationship between identity (read sexuality) and school politics; effectively pushing educational institutions towards a primary responsibility in mitigating the inequality that at-risk LGBTQ youth face. Linking school and identity politics acknowledges that, “…society’s problems play out in schools and that schools offer an opportunity to open dialogue about race and equality, yet this dialogue is never easy,” (Jervis, 2008, p. 2). Java High is an example of an LGBTQ inclusive charter school that has created more possibilities to connect at-risk youth to have access to more resources, networks, services, and better educational opportunities effectively increasing and sustaining an infrastructure of what Noguera (2008) articulates as social capital. At the same time the creation of Java High as LGBTQ inclusive school is entrenched within a neoliberal social imaginary (Lipman, 2012) that has gradually normalized educational institutions as markets and the concept of freedom as exercising choice positioning the “at risk” sexuality of LGBTQ youth as a private and individual concern that cannot be completely folded into the public sphere. Therefore, the emergence of LGBTQ inclusive charter schools render the racialized metaphors of the concepts of public and private as natural by positioning the Hatfield
City public district schools as failing to protect LGBTQ youth from violence and failing to adequately meet their educational needs. As a result of this failure of Hatfield City public district schools a group of five teachers staked a claim in LGBTQ inclusivity as remedy to this conundrum. But there are educators (Fine, 1991; Kumashiro, 2008; Blackburn 2011, 2012; Cruz 2011, 2012, 2013; Mayo, 2014) who demonstrate through an extensive archive of scholarship that public schools are not inherently violent, and that always positioning LGBTQ youth at-risk for victimization and verbal and physical violence warrants specific educational modes of management, protection, and containment is problematic. It is heteronormativity not the increased pervasive violent tendencies of heterosexual students that is at the roots of the violence perpetrated against LGBTQ youth that sanctions the homophobic language and harassment within institutions of education. Therefore, LGBTQ inclusive charter schools like Java High are constructed within an untroubled neoliberal framework as Giroux (2004) argues “has to be understood and challenged as both an economic theory and a powerful public pedagogy and cultural politics” (p. xxv). The evolution of an LGBTQ inclusive charter school in an urban city in the Midwest demonstrates an evolving link between school and identity politics in the historical present that is embedded within neoliberal discourses of public schools as failing and in perpetual crisis that position charters schools as inherently more efficient and accountable re-conceptualizing institutional values of respect, responsibility, and safety.

Ultimately this chapter expands the paradigm of research on LGBTQ youth in Education to challenge the field of Education and educational institutions to reassess fundamental questions about schooling in the 21st century. What are the purposes of
schools? What role does the institution of education have in remedying the social,
political, economic injustices that play out within their walls and impact the
marginalization of youth differently? Who gets to decide the roles educational institutions
play in mitigating inequalities perpetrated by marginalization and discrimination knowing
that schools cannot solve societal problems even though schools are intimately linked to
society? Mike Rose (2009) urges educators to remember that, “The kinds of opportunity
we make available are profoundly affected by what we think education is for, by our
beliefs about intelligence, and by the way we conceive of public responsibility,” (p. 7).
This chapter wrestles with a significant tension in that Java High was funded by a small
school grant per the Bill Gates Foundation that is invested in privatizing public schools
through increasing charter schools, at the same time Java High incorporated as an
LGBTQ inclusive charter school into the Hatfield City repertoire of schools opened up
possibilities to increase positive academic and non-academic outcomes for a number of
students deemed at-risk. The creation of Java High and the justification of Java High to
mitigate various kinds of at-riskness mapped onto certain youth bodies are significant and
consistent with historical trends of educational reform in the U.S. Educational historian
David Larabee (2010) poignantly states:

> Throughout history educational reforms in themselves are the deliberate efforts by
groups of people to change schools in a direction they value and to resolve a
social problem. And we measure the success of these movements by the degree to
which the outcomes match the intentions of the reformers (p. 193).

District public schools like those of Hatfield City continue to be positioned as failing to
redress issues of the achievement gap, low graduation rates, low attendance rates,
bullying, and harassment at-risk youth face; while Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive
charter schools is positioned to remedy those failings by taking in those ‘at risk’ youth
who drop out, are kicked out, or refuse to attend them. Yet the necessary resources, teacher autonomy, and financial monies given through grant monies acquired through the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has cultivated an infrastructure that is in a better position to cultivate positive academic and non-academic outcomes than the Hatfield public school system because state funds for education continue to be reduced. The existence of Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school is a neoliberal project of school reform that has limitations in a larger narrative of using schools as a vehicle for transformation. Dean Spade (2011) hits on the head the failure of inclusion as a primary vehicle for legal and legislative changes because within the context of neoliberal reforms that inclusion is always partial and does not destabilize structural inequalities that people of color and LGBTQ people of color face.

Given the context of neoliberalism, we face serious questions about how to reformulate transformative demands and tactics. We have to carefully consider the limitations of strategies that aim for inclusion into existing economic and political arrangements rather than challenging the terms of those arrangements (p.69).

This chapter demonstrated through an analysis of Java High institutional documents and ethnographic snapshots of Java High students Vero, Shani, Darius, Jessica, Eddie, and Lance/Sofia demonstrate the significance of an LGBTQ inclusive school infrastructure in cultivating more sustained positive academic and non-academic outcomes for at-risk youth by lessening harassment and physical violence, boosting attendance rates, reducing gender segregation, and cultivating positive self-efficacy. LGBTQ youth face a multiplicity of risk that serve as significant barriers to their academic and non-academic success and educational institutions are in a unique position to partially mitigate these risk factors by cultivating safer spaces. The creation of Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive
urban charter school demonstrates if educators and policy makers alike intentionally couple an LGBTQ inclusive infrastructure with committed educators who have the autonomy to act on behalf of and with their students the possibilities of cultivating and maintaining a more welcoming school climate, reducing absenteeism, increasing graduation rates, and developing positive self-efficacy can increase beneficial academic and non-academic outcomes for students are possible. However benevolent the intentions were in the creation of Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school to intervene in meeting the needs of at-risk youth living in Hatfield City better, there are limitations to the school because that inclusivity is privatized and dependent upon positioning local public schools as in perpetual decline and ultimately failing. Creating an LGBTQ inclusive school like Java High can cultivate more positive academic and non-academic outcomes for LGBTQ youth and connect students to school that often become implicated in a cycle of disconnection from schools. But do those school connections and positive academic and non-academic outcomes as successes warrant privatizing inclusivity through a charter school? What gets lost when those successes are only deemed possible in a small charter school environment? In the next chapter I explore the ways Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school mediated and intensified marginalization of at-risk youth by focusing on Java’s restorative justice approach as an alternative form of school discipline and a primary vehicle to reconnect disconnected at-risk youth to the school environment. This exploration offers a deeper understanding of the ambiguous and diffused effects produced by Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school by demonstrating the ways the complexities and nuanced ways youth who attended Java High were shaped by their social contexts, but also the ways their marginalized
subjectivities and social contexts impacted the way they engaged with and experienced their school world.
Hey Lady, You Can’t Sit Outside the Circle

I am sitting in a chair that’s way too low to the ground for someone my age, but this awkward vantage point offers both interesting and uncomfortable perspectives on the overlapping sights and sounds happening inside this Java High restorative justice classroom. Sipping my coffee I look around to see some students hurry in and out of the classroom while a teacher uses a rotary phone hanging on the wall to make a call to what I assume is the main office. The natural light entering the room from the two adjacent windows softens the gray cinderblock that lines the basement walls of classroom D107. No two chairs in the room are the same. Some chairs are metal, some are low to the ground video game chairs, and other chairs are plastic and have a wide cloth backing. All four rectangular metal tables in the room are pushed back against one end of the wall perpendicular to where I am sitting. The mismatched classroom furniture is consistent with the random swatches of carpet that unevenly overlap one another throughout the floor hiding faded black and white linoleum. From my video game chair I rock back and forth awkwardly shifting my weight while looking into the hallway where several students are standing in small groups talking to each other, voices all overlapping to create quite a clamor. One White female student with very short brown hair I haven’t seen before looks up from her cell phone, stops texting, gets up from her chair, and walks purposefully towards the hallway stopping abruptly in the doorway enabling her to straddle the conversations happening outside in the hall and inside the classroom. One White male student with light blonde hair and fingernails painted black in the far corner of the classroom yells out loud, “Who has the triangle?” Another African American male
student wearing a zip up windbreaker standing on the opposite side of the room yells back without looking up from a black crate tucked behind the teacher’s desk, “I don’t know man! I am trying to find the talking piece. Have you seen it?” I hear a young voice come over the announcement system, “It’s about that time ya’ll. It’s 1pm. Make your way to block three classes. Let’s go ya’ll.” Still sipping my coffee I open up my notebook and jot down notes about what I see happening in classroom D107. “Hey lady, you can’t sit outside the circle. This is restorative justice class. Come sit over here with us.” I look up and realize I have just been called a lady. I smile sheepishly at the Latino male student wearing an oversized cookie monster t-shirt whose name I do not know yet, and gradually make my way to the circle. There are nine chairs set up in a small circle in the center of the room. I sit next to a student eagerly extending his hand to me. “Hi, I’m Esteban. What’s you name again? I saw you in the office the other day, but I can’t remember your name or why you are here.” I introduce myself to Esteban and tell him my name is Tanya and I’m a researcher from a University in Illinois working on a project at Java High. Esteban responds by telling me:

Restorative justice is my favorite class. You picked the right class to go to. The circle is gonna start soon. We’ll show you what’s up. Oh yeah Jessica told me about you. Mexican right? I’m the only Puerto Rican at Java…so you know. She told me she calls you TK. Is that you?

I thank Esteban and tell him I have had a few conversations with Jessica and TK is my nickname. “Can I call you TK too?” I laugh out loud and say, “Yeah, I’m Mexican. Well my dad is Mexican and my mom is White. I define myself as a Chicana more than Mexican. Sure you can call me TK. Just don’t call me a lady again, ok? I am a lot of things but a “lady” is not one of them.” Esteban laughs at me and says, “I got you TK.” I feel the knots in my stomach churning as I put my coffee under my chair. I fidget with
my pen as I wait. The teacher who was on the phone hangs it up and pokes her head out into the hall telling the students to get to their classes and shuts the door. Emily marches from the doorway to the small black create behind the teacher’s desk and pulls out a triangle, and grabs an oblong blue rock from underneath a pile of scattered papers on the teacher’s desk bringing it into the circle. “I found a new talking piece, let’s get this going.” The teacher walks up to the circle looks around and says, “Well it looks like we’re all here. Diego, will you start us off?” The teacher and the other five students in the room walk purposefully towards Esteban and I already sitting in chairs set up in an intimate circle. Esteban stands up and motions for me to do the same. Emily strikes the triangle and the restorative justice circle begins. The students and the teacher pull out a white binder with words written on the cover, and begin to say in unison, “I dedicate myself to holding this circle and helping it accomplish its task. I take responsibility for my words and actions. I will listen to you and I will listen for guidance.” Esteban is standing next to me and moves his binder slightly so I can read the words and recite what I will come to learn as the opening Restorative Justice Circle Keeping pledge read at the beginning of each restorative justice circle. Amanda the Java High Restorative Justice teacher and freshman/sophomore English teacher welcomes everyone and picks up the oblong blue stone thanking Emily for her quick thinking to use her failed paperweight as a talking piece. Amanda informs us after the talking piece is passed around and everyone gets a chance to say a few words about how they are feeling the group is charged with discussing one interpersonal conflict between a pair of students and ongoing behavior concerns with two individual students that have all escalated to a point of intervention. Esteban, Amanda, Emily, Joel, Diego, and Tony all repeat their names and share a little
bit about how their days are going as they pass the talking to around the circle before it
lands in my hands. Joel smiles in my direction as I nervously share my name and
nickname, while briefly outlining why I am sitting in the restorative justice circle in the
first place. I keep my comments brief, sensing the intimacy of the circle space does not
need to be formally infiltrated by the aims of my dissertation project. At this point I am
uncertain about the links between the restorative justice class and my dissertation, but
that is irrelevant because it feels like something important is happening that I get to
witness and be a part of. I literally have no idea what I am doing inside the circle but
recognize the best thing to do is listen and figure the rest out later. Joel’s small gesture
settles my nerves a bit and I calmly pass Amanda the talking piece. She begins to share
information about an escalating interpersonal conflict between a student named Lucky
and a staff member named Doris, and individual behavior concerns of a student named
Cindy and another student named Isabel. After listening to Amanda give the details of all
the situations Diego raises his hand and says, “Please pass the talking piece.” Diego goes
on to pose a question to the circle, “What’s up with Cindy to make her get ten green slips
in one day? That’s a lot a green slips.” Joel’s hand goes up quickly and Diego leans
across the circle to hand him the talking piece. Joel asks, “Has Isabel gotten all of her
green slips from the same teacher or from multiple teachers? Maybe she has a beef with a
teacher or a teacher has it out for her. We don’t really know.” Emily is sitting next to Joel
and snatches the talking piece from him shifting the conversation towards outcomes by
asking, “Can students who get so many green slips pick up trash around the school?”
Tony, a self identified half Mexican half White male student who is always in an out of
juvie, leans back in his chair folds his arms exposing a fresh tattoo that’s already starting
to scab and says assertively, “I think all these fools need to talk to Joanne in her office with their parents there.” Emily stands up and walks across the circle to hand Tony the talking piece. She stops directly in front of him and he looks up making a face at her. Diego, who I learn a couple of weeks later in a different circle struggles negotiating being a half Black and half Puerto Rican young man, raises his hand motioning for the talking piece. He asks the group, “So do we all agree that these behaviors Cindy and Isabel are doing need to stop or what? I get what you are saying about parents Tony but parents aren’t in school. Kids are. We are. You know people gonna act how they gonna act. Things get heated and things get outta hand. It is what it is. That’s life.” Esteban grabs the talking piece and says, “Yes and no. You’re right D people gonna act how they act, but if I knew what I was doing here hurt my moms I might chill. Joanne can’t make people change, neither can we. We gotta figure out why Cindy and Isabel are acting like this—it’s gotta be something we don’t know about. They ain’t like that. And I know there has to be a beef between Lucky and Doris because lots of people beef with Doris. Ya’ll know. Them hating on each other is messed up because it’s a student and a teacher person.” That familiar student voice comes back on the announcement system announcing third block classes are over. Amanda quickly looks around the circle and asks everyone to think of two questions for each conflict situation that will be discussed during class tomorrow to create a plan for four separate circle interventions next week. Amanda also reminds everyone of the importance of confidentiality before she motions for us all to grab hands as the closing Circle Keeper’s Oath is said in unison to end the circle process:

May today there be peace within. May we trust that we are exactly where we are meant to be. May we not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith in ourselves and others…May we use the gifts that we have received, and pass on the love that has been given to us. May we be content with ourselves just the way
we are. May we let this knowledge settle into our bones, and allow our soul the freedom to love, be loved, belong, and be of use.

At-Risk Youth, School Connectedness, and Restorative Justice

It might seem counter intuitive to wonder how impactful a restorative justice approach at an LGBTQ inclusive charter school can be because the purposeful pairing of LGBTQ with inclusivity in the architecture of Java High on some level implies not just a set of best practices but an intentional restructuring of a school culture to be completely inclusive. But seriously, how does a school premised on LGBTQ inclusivity and promises safety, tolerance, respect, and responsibility use a restorative justice approach to turn away from the approaches that continue to put disciplining students for misbehavior at the center of the school culture? A task easier said than done. The opening narrative of this chapter purposefully gets at what using a restorative justice approach at an LGBTQ inclusive charter school looked like and felt like pointing to Java High’s attempt to make a restorative justice approach more than just an add on strategy by implementing the circle process as an intentional curriculum intervention to reconnect a diverse student body to the school environment. The opening narrative points to the intersectional and nuanced interplay between the ethos, process orientated, and skill building underlying a restorative justice approach. But how has an approach used primarily within criminal justice systems made inroads into educational institutions, particularly at a school like Java High that is cognizant of how the school-to-prison pipeline disproportionately effects at-risk youth? How effective can the circle process as an institutional intervention to reconnect a diverse student body deemed at-risk to experience negative school outcomes if the Java High school infrastructure is intimately connected to neoliberal reform strategies? Put another way, are there tensions between the administrative school
function of a restorative justice class as a neoliberal school space and the possibilities of school connectedness forged by the students using radical story telling (Cruz, 2011) within the circle processes? Ultimately this chapter troubles the promises of a restorative justice approach by pointing to the contradictions produced through the circle process. On the one hand the circle process opened up possibilities for a core group of Java youth to develop positive academic and non-academic outcomes by connecting them to the school environment. Yet these outcomes are embedded within an institutional infrastructure constituted upon neoliberal values of accountability, efficiency, and individual responsibility- so a restorative justice class is inherently a neoliberal project of school connectedness. On the other hand, the circle process foreclosed possibilities to connect with the school environment for a significant amount of students that identified as students of color because the circle process did not bridge academic learning with the cultural frameworks students brought with them to school.

**Restorative Justice as a Neoliberal Institutional Practice**

The movement and agency I observed from my uncomfortable chair on the floor of the restorative justice classroom is representative of how the students at Java High created a school culture that was at times fast paced, sometimes overwhelming, other times at a stand still, but always alive. Witnessing the in between spaces unfold and collapse in real time during an average school day points to the diffused impact of a restorative justice approach had on such a diverse student body that was not required to take the class but found themselves in a Circle process if variety of impacts using a restorative justice approach to resolving school conflicts and repairing harms had on Java High students. Some students like those in the hallways appeared untouched or
unconcerned with the restorative justice ethos and practice, while others like Esteban, Joel, Diego, Emily, and Tony became moderately invested in the possibilities of a restorative justice approach offered their school community and interpersonal relationships between peers and between the teaching staff through the circle process. Being folded into the circle by Esteban indicated the restorative justice class was not something I could just figure out by watching from a distance. Stepping into the restorative justice class and the circle process so early in my fieldwork opened my eyes to the way the circle process became a way for a core group of students to connect with each other, connect themselves, and connect to the larger school culture because they saw themselves as an intricate part of the school culture by making decisions about how Java High students and teachers should be held accountable, responsible, and act respectfully. But what about the majority of the student body who did not take the restorative justice class for credit? Was the majority of the student body unaffected by a restorative justice approach or was it able to permeate the school culture in more subversive and indirect ways? It’s difficult to discern how effective the restorative justice class was because it was not required as a core class and the class itself had only become a part of the curriculum four months prior to my arrival to collect data. I opened with an engaging narrative to highlight the positive potential of the restorative justice class as a curriculum space that fostered interpersonal communication skills, increased self-efficacy, and connectedness between the six students who took the class for credit and Java High calling attention to the way institutional practices in this instance allowed students to take on some significant responsibility that had positive academic and non-academic outcomes. However, I did recognize after processing my first circle experience, reflecting
on the questions asked by Diego and Joel, the facilitation and appreciation of the rituals of the circle exhibited by Emily and Esteban, and the ways all the students wrestled with the uncertainty of future circle the impact of a restorative justice approach upon the Java High community was not representative of this one circle. I wanted to experience more circles within the class to develop a better understanding of the various kinds of impact if any the restorative justice approach was having. It took regular time, effort, patience, and reflective listening as a researcher participant observer to develop a basic understanding for how restorative justice and the circle processes were being used at Java. After participating in several types of circles, interviewing a part-time staff member, and listening to a range of Java High students and staff make meaning of the circle process throughout my fieldwork did I come to recognize its impact upon divers student body was diffused. I began to realize the variation of impact was dependent upon whether individual student feelings of school connectedness were intensified, lessened, or unchanged by participating in the circle process as responsible parties, as responsible party witnesses’, or as students taking the restorative justice course for credit. I also began to realize the students who were not taking the restorative justice class for credit came in and out of circle processes for one of three reasons: repeated or consistent individual misbehavior, involvement in an interpersonal conflict with another individual student, and involvement in an ongoing interpersonal conflict with a teacher. Finally, it was not until the data collection process ended and inundated myself in the data analysis process did I begin to recognize the themes of fostering interpersonal communication skills, peer-to-peer perceptions of one another, and teacher-student relationships had emerged repeatedly as significant catalysts for fostering school connectedness or
intensifying school disconnectedness in almost every circle I participated in. The next section outlines a context for how restorative justice as an alternative approach to discipline emerged within educational institutions and ends with an argument for why a restorative justice approach was cultivated as a specific strategy used at Java High to connect disengaged at-risk youth to the school environment.

**Dilemmas of Restorative Justice in Neoliberal Times**

According to Marshall (1999), “restorative justice is a process whereby parties at stake in a specific offense collectively resolve how to deal with the aftermath of the offense and its implications for the future,” (p.102). A restorative justice approach puts repairing harm between people and their relationships ahead of assigning blame and allocating punishment to guilty parties. Therefore, restorative justice is a process aimed to resolve conflicts and confront disruptive behaviors or misconduct that focuses on repairing harm, preventing harm, and reintegrating students that have caused the harm back into the school community. According to Braithwaite (1999) restorative justice as a term was first used in the mid 1970s and describes a series of processes designed to repair harm that a criminal offense inflicts on victims, offenders, and communities. Restorative justice has roots in the fields of criminology and sociology and is most often associated with the criminal justice system rather than the education system. Kurki (2000) outlines three significant components of restorative justice that challenge traditional modes of criminal justice practices:

First, it does not focus solely on crime as a law-breaking event. It looks at crime in a broader context and examines the harm crime inflicts on its victims, communities, and offenders. Second, it empowers more people. More parties are involved in redressing the crime—not just the governmental officials and the offender. Victims and communities play a role. Third, it measures success based on how well harm is repaired or prevented rather than how many offenders are
incarcerated and convicted. It stresses the victims’ and the communities’ needs and focuses less on guilt of offenders, the danger they represent, or their criminal histories (p. 265).

McCold & Wachtel (2002) point out that in contrast to a hierarchical and individually based punitive approach to criminal justice, restorative justice is, “a collaborative problem solving approach to social discipline intended to reintegrate individuals and repair affected communities,” (p. 113). Van Ness and Strong (1997) outline the informal justice movement, the movement to use restitution as a response to crime, the victim’s rights movement, the reconciliation movement, and the social justice movement as the five dominant movements that have contributed to a gradual and concerted shift from a punitive approach towards a restorative approach to address significant limitations and inequities in the traditional criminal justice system that persisted. However, a restorative justice approach reaches beyond dichotomous notions of perpetrators and victims by including stakeholders within the community that are impacted by the conflicts and harm.

Considered a founding thinker of restorative justice in the U.S. Howard Zehr (2002) attributes continued interest in restorative justice to the limitations associated with the traditional Western legal practices that are wound up in the associations of harsh sentencing practices has not reduced people from committing crimes and becoming incarcerated and that punitive criminal law does not appropriately redress the harms inflicted upon society and victims of offenders. Zehr’s (2003) work goes on to suggest that, “neither harsh sentencing nor punitive criminal law promotes peace and healing of victims, communities, or offenders,” (p. 4). Therefore, a shift in retributive justice to restorative justice in the context of the criminal justice system is a significant paradigm shift that challenges dominant Western configurations of justice and discipline.
Shifting Towards Restorative Justice Approaches in Schools

Yet while the historical imaginary of restorative justice is most often associated with the criminal justice system, the reach of restorative justice extends beyond that into fields like Education because the philosophy, practices, and processes of a restorative justice approach are applicable to repair harm (reconstituting discipline), resolve conflicts (problem solving), and reintegrate parties that have caused harm back into the community (inclusion) that happen within a school environment at the same time challenge the overall pedagogical approach used by educators within a school. According to Hopkins (2002) a significant paradigm shift from retributive justice to restorative justice occurred within educational institutions that began to take shape during the late 1990s and early 2000s. This paradigm shift was of interest to educators as a result of a restorative justice approach having the potential to prevent harm, reduce conflict, violence, alienation, and to resolve conflicts using a dialogue as a key component. Walker (2000) notes that administrators and teachers alike wrote grants to become trained in the restorative justice Circle process. Riestenberg (2003) cites the Minnesota Restorative Justice Grants Final Report at length to describe the top four aims and outcomes of using a restorative justice approach in many alternative schools in Minnesota:

1) Weekly, daily or homeroom classroom circle, used as a means of connecting with students and to build community and creating a positive school climate.

2) Students reported that they learned social skills: how to listen, how to talk respectfully, how to respect people who think or believe differently from you.

3) Circles repair harm: set up when students broke rules or caused harm. Fewer training participants using the process to repair harm, as that is a more difficult process. As the result of restorative measures training, individual schools reported significant changes in the way that they handled discipline.
4) Study circles and writing circles: teachers would send around a talking piece to solicit responses from all students to questions or to conduct creative writing groups. At best a restorative justice approach is concerned with the role schools play within society as a primary institution that facilitates democracy by developing a community of responsible citizens. Like the conflict resolution movement, character education movement, and emotional literacy movement a shift towards a restorative justice approach is also invested in pushing the boundaries of facilitating democracy through educational institutions. Zeher (2005) outlines that conflict resolution (CRE) introduced peer mediation programs and developed curricula to integrate conflict resolution into school like settings. The character education programs are designed to teach and encourage positive values and behavior, and a great deal of materials for teaching respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, and how to care for oneself have been developed. Emotional literacy attends to the affective and cognitive components to learning within a diverse school setting. A restorative justice approach builds upon these three movements implemented within education by positioning schools as a critical location in which conceptualizations of democracy are facilitated through the school constituency. Zeher (2005) indicates that using the six questions of: who has been hurt; what are their needs; whose obligations are they; what are the causes; who has a stake in this; and what is the appropriate process to involve stakeholders in an effort to put things right; are the guideposts to develop both creative and just solutions to repairing harm, preventing harm, and resolving conflicts that inform how we as human beings live and work together in a democratic society. A restorative approach then is invested in the continued evolution of the relationship between schools and society because it is maneuvering within and
negotiating that relationship to better meet the needs of an increasingly heterogeneous student population attending schools. As the Minnesota Final Report on Restorative Justice outlines, the potential of a restorative justice approach to transform a school classroom and entire school community is tremendous. However, the process orientation of a restorative justice approach demands a significant amount of literal school time and time for professional development trainings outside of school time from various school stakeholders. As Hopkins (2002) points out the restorative justice circle process in particular can be difficult to implement within a school curriculum or within an entire school because often the way classes are scheduled limits the amount of time that can be allocated to have an ongoing and steady circle processes. The opening narrative of this chapter offers nuanced insight into positive outcomes of restorative justice circles by demonstrating Java High students Joel, Esteban, Emily, Diego, and Tony actively promoting community, developing communication skills, and promoting democratic processes of decision-making. At the same time my analysis of an individual interview excerpt with Java High part-time staff member Karla later on in this chapter will demonstrate while those positive outcomes with a core group of Java High students are very real and should be celebrated, developing and then maintaining consistent circle processes takes an ongoing amount of effort, resources, and staff and student collaboration.

**Restorative Justice Organized as a Neoliberal Student Space**

I never facilitated a circle by myself or was put in a position to facilitate a circle with students. Yet actively participating in circles in which conflicts were resolved and circles that were full of silly get to know you kind of games connected me to the core
group of students, to several responsible parties, and to the Java High community because I put myself in a position to learn about the students as young people and the students got to know me as Tanya not just TK the researcher lady. The circle process is one of the most significant elements to a restorative justice approach because it facilitates and reinforces not only palpable communication skills but also the importance of the philosophy and process orientation of the approach. More importantly, my initial interactions with Esteban during my very first circle experience reinforce the underlying premise of the circle process that, “we all are in need of some kind of community and help from others, and in turn, that we all have something to offer other human beings,” (Pranis, 2005, p. 6). Therefore, the value of inclusion demonstrated by Esteban initially and is indicative of how the circle process operated inside the classroom as students who were very invested in the restorative justice approach integrated classroom practices within school wide practices. According to Greenwood (2005) the core principles of the circle process have to do with equality, respect, and empowerment and the, “circles may vary somewhat in style and structure, yet they all seek to cultivate a climate of mutual respect and caring that is value-oriented and heart based, that engages the emotions as well as the mind,” (p.2). In a historical moment in which schools are inculcated with regimented accountability measures, obsessed with structuring every moment of the school day, and school closures justified through mandatory budget cuts implementing a circle process within the curriculum at Java High signals a turn away from the test and punish regimens towards reflection, trust, listening, and building peer to peer and teacher to student relationships in schools. One of the ways the circle process was able to develop values of equality, connection, and inclusion is by using a talking piece to facilitate
reflective listening so that those inside the circle feels as though they have been heard. As demonstrated in my opening narrative, the questions Joel asked built upon the questions Emily asked and Esteban and Diego’s ability to listen to those questions and come out with potential paths of action are indicative of how reflective listening develops problem solving skills that are necessary to approach repairing harm as well as distinguishing between the behaviors students exhibit and the kinds of labels mapped onto students who misbehave.

**The Circle Processes Opened Up Possibilities for Radical Story Telling**

The potential of a restorative justice approach to connect so many at-risk youth who have become disconnected because of the test and punish regimens rests in the fact the circle process opens up spaces for all students that are participating to tell stories. The storytelling process that happened in the circles I participated in more often than not did not reveal earth shattering personal secrets, events, or relationships. On the contrary, the circles deescalated the spectacle and reinforced the ability of everyday issues to connect students to one another whether or not the students who sat in the circle were there as responsible parties or as student facilitators taking the restorative justice class for credit. The mundane rather than the spectacle connected the students to each other peer to peer by generating various scales of relatedness. In this sense, the circle process offered a consistent space in the classroom for students relate and connect to one another that did not flatten out the differences between them. The impact of the story telling component of the circle process is similar to the power of what author Cindy Cruz (2011) argues in her work with at-risk LGBTQ youth in California is the power of testimonio, “in sharing our critical stories, we practiced radical storytelling in the classroom,”(p. 460). Esteban
commenting to me within minutes of meeting me during my first circle experience that “restorative of justice is my favorite class” demonstrates when students are given the opportunity to make space (Venzant Chambers & McCready, 2011) through storytelling the potential to transfer those positive peer to peer connections cultivated in restorative justice class can be transferred to the curriculum and other elements of the school environment. Finally, the not only is the potential of the circle process to facilitate peer-to-peer connectedness through storytelling but the circle as a space for reflection and assessment of student learning that is indicative of developing positive interpersonal communication skills. Diego’s response to Tony’s suggestions that all the students in need of a circle should just have a private conference with Joanne and their parents suggests that Diego has developed a deeper understanding of how student actions can effect loved ones. His response to Tony in the circle also suggests a deep level of understanding the ethos of the restorative justice approach by clearly distinguishing the misbehavior and misconduct from who the future responsible parties are as people. Therefore, my participation in circles similar to and different from the one that opened this chapter documents the Java High staff and a small number of Java High students were committed to turning away from a punitive approach of school discipline and resolving interpersonal conflicts that do not reply on the misbehave you get punished model. Furthermore participating in the variety of circles facilitated in the Java High restorative justice class also documents the power of using a talking piece to develop reflective peer to peer listening, the power of focusing an intimate space to tell stories, the power of shifting student perceptions of each other, and the power to cultivate more positive student-teacher relationships is real and palpable. Participating in the circles at
Java High documents a school that is wrestling with how to rework, rethink, and reimagine classrooms and schools that reconnect disconnected at-risk youth who come through their doors by force or by choice.

Using a restorative justice approach to connect at-risk youth through the school curriculum opens up the possibilities to forge school connectedness peer-to-peer and student-to-teacher that are not dependent upon particular identity categories putting less pressure on identifications and more emphasis on integrating classroom practices that forge connectedness with school wide practices that forge connectedness as well. Also, positioning the restorative justice class within the curriculum cultivates a consistent space where at-risk youth can become reconnected to the school environment through different kinds of truth telling that begin to break down hegemonic practices of dominance that drive narratives of at-riskness. As I mentioned prior, the restorative justice class happened everyday but there were circle interventions everyday. The time in-between circle interventions gave teacher Amanda and part-time staff member Karla the autonomy to use the circle processes to cultivate interpersonal skills and reflective listening with that core group of students that lead to the circle space becoming an even more intimate space for students to tell their truths and in the process possibly alter their perceptions of each other. In the face of the test and punish regimens so often associated with zero tolerance policies in wide variety of schools in the U.S. can implementing a restorative justice approach through the circle process be a significant and meaningful alternative?

To a certain degree yes, a restorative justice approach and the circle process at Java High put this school environment in a better position to reconnect at-risk youth by creating a space to foster story telling to thwart negative student feelings of isolation and alienation
at the same time generate more opportunities to cultivate positive peer-to-peer and positive teacher-student relationships. At its best the restorative justice class affirms that, “Curriculum, how we shape it, whose communities are represented, and how histories are depicted is power,” (Cruz, 2012, p. 464). The circle processes did not always produce transformative outcomes but I think Cruz is spot on by naming curriculum (what gets taught and how subjects get taught and by whom) as a critical component to supporting students at the same time positioning them as knowledge producers not simply consumers.

My experiences participating in circles throughout my fieldwork afforded really interesting experiences, sometimes profound experiences, and other times just silly and fun experiences that affirmed just how necessary and urgent a turn away from the test and punish regime of schools is. Yet there were circles I found extremely difficult to participate in because during the process of reflective listening and storytelling the aims of mutual trust and respect failed miserably and those circles simply broke down unable to produce any kind of positive academic and non-academic outcomes. What happens if the circle process does not produce positive results? What happens if the circle process breaks down and students’ feelings of disconnection are intensified after participating in a circle? Why would a circle process breakdown and what is that breakdown indicative of? These are questions that emerged over the duration of fieldwork but came to the forefront during an individual interview with the part-time restorative justice staff person who I regularly interacted with in the restorative justice class. Turning towards an examination of excerpts from my interview with Karla offers an opportunity to travel and explore nuanced ways the peer-to-peer perceptions, interpersonal communication skills, and
teacher-to-student relationships emerged in the circles fostered a range of examples of student connectedness or disconnectedness to Java High. I use the word travel not in a voyeuristic sense but akin to Cruz’s (2012) point that, “traveling with playfulness and loving perception is about knowing other peoples’ worlds to understand what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes. Only when we have traveled to each other’s world are we fully subjects to each other,” (p. 462). Therefore, similar to the students who took the restorative justice class and those students who found their way into a circle for one reason or another, I too as a researcher am implicated in telling truths about myself inside and outside the circle. Karla’s interview excerpts opened up opportunities to explore pervasive structural forces informing student-teacher power relations, highlight the way LGBTQ inclusivity conceptualized through a neoliberal infrastructure foreclosed the bridging of academic knowledge and cultural frameworks students bring with them to school by decoupling race and sexuality.

Mitigating At-Riskness Through School Connectedness

Karla and I met a week later at a local coffee shop where we had more of a conversation than a formal interview, discussing for about two hours the impact restorative justice has had on the school culture over the last six months since she became a part-time staff member at Java High. During the two hour plus interview a wide range of school related issues from high stakes testing, to inadequate access to resources, overworked teachers, and over crowded classrooms at times detoured our conversation towards feelings of disillusionment and exhaustion as educators. When I initially listen to the interview with Karla post data collection I thought the detours were distracting but then I listened to the interview again rethinking the conversational style generated
between us as indicative of Karla and I modeling practices of the circle we regularly used in the restorative justice class where we met. During the interview I tried to make sense of the impact of the circle process a restorative justice process at Java High and be a witness to Karla’s experiences and she practiced reflective listening asking me clarifying questions and directing the path of the conversation demonstrating what Cruz (2012) calls a “radical storytelling” that began with an interrogation of our bodies two weeks prior by sharing memories from our youth that pointed to various traces of queerness and intersectional positionalities. Sitting across from Karla sipping my coffee while she sipped her fancy latte, I asked this Hatfield University graduate student and part-time Java High staff member to define restorative justice and it’s role at an LGBTQ inclusive school. She quickly replied:

It’s just huge! But in a nutshell it’s a community-based way to deal with problems. So in a school setting anything that warrants a write up, a detention, a suspension, or a citation. So it’s a way for students to learn to deal with it as a community, to claim ownership of their space… um and the people in that space…um and to help that person (makes air quotes) in trouble to take accountability for getting caught. It’s not punitive in a normal way discipline works in a school. So it works with the community to find a way for that person who broke a rule or got in trouble to reenter the community. So really the goals are community and accountability (Individual Interview, May 3, 2012).

Curious to know more of the specifics I asked Karla a follow up question to understand how the restorative justice class at Java logistically worked. She shared that initially restorative justice was an English class and whoever had to take an English elective had to take it. After the first quarter of trying to implement the class the staff made the decisions about whether or not students taking the elective should take it again. In Karla’s words “If they were a good fit or not. If they weren’t getting anything from it or if they weren’t giving anything back we not let them continue in the class.” However, since the
program has evolved over the last six months there is a core group of students taking the class and it’s beginning to flow on its own.

TK: Can you talk about the kinds of issues that come up in the restorative justice circles and in the classroom activities when there are no circles to facilitate?

Karla: Well I don’t know a lot of Java students per say. I know my core group of students, but I have learned a lot about students who come into the circles as responsible parties... those are the students who have inflicted harm on another student or a teacher. I think a lot of kids at Java in general that come here have been CO’d out of the regular Hatfield City school system.

Not understanding the abbreviation CO, I asked Karla to clarify what that meant by that term. She shared that a central office hearing nine times out of ten than not results in students being expelled from a regular Hatfield City school because of habitual truancy, extreme one-time situations of misconduct, or chronic instances of misconduct. Many of the students who get referred to Java High or other charter schools in Hatfield have been expelled for a variety of reasons that includes dropping out because they do not feel like they fit in because they feel different.

TK: So in what ways do you see restorative justice intervening in the lives of the core group you work with, or in the lives of the responsible parties, or the school community in general?

Karla: Well in class we play a lot of games-which is great because the kids get a chance to be silly and that helps them connect with me and each other. So we learn a lot about each other that way. But we also create a space that we can talk about problems during our check-ins that go way beyond the surface. They will say things like I got arrested this weekend, I got into a fight with my stepdad, I got kicked out of my house this weekend or whatever.

Having witnessed myself the serious issues that have come up in various circles I wanted to know if Karla thought the circles and the a restorative justice approach overall was having a positive impact in the lives of students at Java. I asked her if she thought Java was doing a better job than any of the Hatfield City schools to support students and
connect them to school because of the restorative justice class. Karla’s response turned
the conversation towards a familiar tension embedded in the intersection of school and
identity politics.

Re-Marginalizing At-Risk Youth: Intensifying School Disconnectedness

One of the most poignant facets of radical story telling that happened during the
circle process was when dominant narratives and normative ideas about at-risk youth
were disrupted. Like counter-narratives (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002), radical story telling
(Cruz, 2011) can be a tool that flips the script on reproducing deficit tropes about at-risk
youth bodies being criminalized, contaminated, undeserving, or in need of saving. In the
following excerpt Karla suggests the need for teachers and staff members who work in
any kind of school to engage in ongoing processes of critical self-reflection about their
own lives, experiences, and biases so that they can role model those processes of critical
reflection when working with students. What struck me when I asked Karla if she thought
Java High was doing a better job than regular Hatfield Schools to foster connectedness of
at-risk youth through a restorative justice course she didn’t answer the question directly.
Instead Karla’s pointed towards a Freiren (1970) approach to fostering connections
between students rooted in a critical theory style of pedagogy rather than alternative
forms of discipline and resolving conflicts like restorative justice. What also struck me
about Karla’s response was that she immediately used the subject of race and silence
around race as a limitation to the circle process and a restorative justice approach at Java
High. Karla briefly touches upon the potential implications of Java High as an LGBTQ
inclusive charter school that has a school culture that ignores the way ideologies of race
interacts with other social identities as well as deeply informs the structural power relations between Java High student-teacher relationships.

Karla: I feel like it starts with having really critical dialogues with young people. That we have somehow given them covert messages that are taboo-like race for example primarily. Like if you bring up race you’re a racist. Like you can’t talk about race which is ridiculous because it’s so important. And to a certain extent at regular Hatfield schools don’t talk about sexual orientation or gender identity and Java doesn’t talk about race. Like here I get the sense….how do I explain it? Like when we talk about “safe” and “acceptance” we sort of see….these…I get the same feelings when people talk about being colorblind…this sense that we’re all the same. So we should just love each other and forget we’re different. So I think having a space in all schools to have critical dialogues not just about what happened but what it means to be queer, or LGBTQ, or a person of color. I just think we need more spaces in Java and regular Hatfield schools- you know where like every second of every moment is accounted for-to have kids explore who they are as human beings in a larger society.

TK: So I hear you saying that critical dialogues need to happen across the board in all schools, Java included. Is that correct?

Karla: Yes. So critical dialogues for sure. But at Java specifically the staff should have a more critical stance rather than-like if you identify as queer or as a person of color to tell kids that these things matter. And if you have an all White staff what does that tell your students? Like Java has a large Black and Latino population and there are no teachers of color. So what kind of messages are students getting? I mean I’m part time and you’re a researcher, but that’s it. So yeah, they need to be way more critical about that.

Following Karla’s shift in the conversation towards the salience of the intersection of identity issues particularly about the way messages about race structure students-teacher relationships and the power relationships between students and teachers I asked her if she had witnessed any circles in particular that brought up the issue of race? Karla poignantly shared an experience that happened the day before in the restorative justice class. Her response points to the nuanced ways race emerges in schools like Java High that have implemented a restorative justice approach to intentionally to attempt to reconnect at-risk
youth to the school environment but has neglected to interrogate the ways race is explicitly linked to developing institutional processes, policies, practices, and programs.

Karla: Yesterday’s circle at Java was just …I don’t know. The student Lucky, the responsible party, clearly felt misunderstood but more so that these people, like the teacher, would not listen to her….literally could not hear her. It’s not a coincidence the student is a Black girl and the two teachers are White women. I watched her shut down more and more over the course of the hour and a half. When Doris said to Lucky, “I’m trying to help you so that you don’t have to work at Walmart for the rest of your life,” I couldn’t believe she said that but then I could. That was probably one of the hardest circles I have ever been a part of.

Explicit in this excerpt is the way Doris’s unchecked racial biases about Black girls informed her approach as a teacher by situating Lucky as a at-risk problem to be solved through her attitudes of benevolence informed by her White privilege. In this sense the circle process broke down because the broader structural inequalities that contextualized the student-teacher relationship between Doris and Lucky were not addressed at all. Karla’s comment about the messages an all White teaching staff are sending Java High students calls into serious question the ability of an LGBTQ inclusive school to foster connectedness to a significant percentage of it’s student population that does not identify as White. As Barajas and Ronnvist (2007) demonstrate in their study examining schools’ institutional processes, policies, and procedures, “In the schools studied, White space was created and reproduced through an organizational logic, a mechanism of informal practice and formal policy that rendered “difference” to disappear in order for the institution to appear race-neutral,” (p. 1522). Instead of race-neutral I would argue that Karla’s retelling of the circle experience at Java in particular points to the way Java’s LGBTQ inclusivity infrastructure silences differences of race positioning the school to appear to post-racial space that has figured out the race problem. In this case the circle held to resolve the conflict between Lucky and Doris was a space that could not resolve
the conflicts because even though the space was facilitated by students engaging in reflective listening and dialogue mutual respect and trust could not be reached between the two because the student and the teacher had two contrasting understandings of respect at the same time the racialized power relations between Lucky and Doris were not recognized or examined. The circle process intensified an already broken student-teacher relationship between Lucky and Doris leaving the rest of us participating in the circle to watch the structural inequalities of racism that contextualized their student-teacher relationship crystalize. Karla’s comment, “I couldn’t believe she said that, but then I could,” affirms the Circle process cannot be a substitute for addressing racist ideologies and attitudes harbored by teachers that rationalize White privilege and power and further marginalize already marginalized youth. These excerpts suggest the ongoing circles at Java High have significantly impacted academic and non-academic outcomes for the core group Karla has worked with in restorative justice class. At the same time, her experiences strongly suggest the circles at Java High could be more effective if race, racism, and White privilege were explicitly talked about critically among teachers and among teachers and students because according to her the students need more spaces to be able to understand themselves as human beings in a larger society. Karla’s reflections on the student-teacher relationship between Lucky and Doris also point to the urgency in which having serious ongoing conversations about race and racism in the context of power relationships could recalibrate the kind of LGBTQ inclusivity operating at Java High making it as a guiding principles less exclusionary. Therefore, the restorative justice approach facilitated through the ongoing circles compliment Java’s LGBTQ inclusive infrastructure by also opening up possibilities for students like Esteban, Emily, Joel,
Tony, and Diego to foster feelings of school connectedness that over the course of six months had more positive academic and non-academic outcomes for each of them ultimately demonstrating the ways a school’s infrastructure can aid in the mitigation of marginalization often associated with at-riskness attributed to low personal efficacy, low academic achievement, truancy, expulsion, and changing schools mid year. Equally important is the reality that a restorative justice approach facilitated through the ongoing circles also opened up spaces that intensified feelings of alienation, isolation, and disconnectedness that stemmed from racially biased attitudes and ideologies of teachers shutting down the circle space as one of safety and support for students of color.

**Restorative Justice is a Neoliberal Space that Engages Students**

Implementing a restorative justice approach and the circle process significantly impacted a core group of at-risk youth by fostering a sense of connectedness to the school environment that cultivated positive academic and non-academic outcomes. Cultivating a restorative justice approach takes time, effort, resources, and trust between all the school stakeholders. Throughout my fieldwork I witnessed the combination of skill development, attention to process, and a deeper understanding of the ethos of restorative justice in the behaviors and attitudes of the core group of students who enrolled in the restorative justice class. The intimacy developed between teachers Amanda and Karla and the small core group of students Esteban, Emily, Diego, Tony, and Joel who regularly attended the restorative justice class was instrumental in the beginning the process of shifting the Java school culture from a punitive to a restorative approach of resolving conflict and preventing negative behaviors. Implementing a restorative justice approach in the curriculum opened up opportunities to make spaces within the classroom
that did not just talk about inclusivity but constructed inclusivity by teaching students specific skills, reinforcing the long term benefits of the participating in a process, and broke down bigger concepts of philosophy into smaller and manageable parts using situations and connecting to personal experiences. In the restorative justice class I watched full-time teacher Amanda and part-time teacher Karla engage the students by asking them questions that required self-reflection and listened to and respected the way student stories students told. Amanda and Karla were actively present. Karla and Amanda held the attention of the students by role modeling reflective listening and challenging students to explain concepts to each other or clarify misunderstandings. Respect was a related practice among teachers and students rather than a required expectation for students but not teachers.

All of the restorative justice classes I participated in cultivated a fundamentally different class environment than every freshman and sophomore math class I witnessed. In the restorative justice class students were engaged and attentive, while in the math class students disengaged by hurriedly finishing their work and talking in small groups or disruptive demanding negative attention from the teacher. In every math class I observed the White male teacher was not engaged with the students through practices of mutual respect but sat behind a computer at his desk while the students were seated at tables learning math lessons from a computer simulated program the entire period. The students who did raise their hand and asked the teacher a question did so because they did not score high enough on the unit module to continue to the next online lesson. The questions asked by students required little to no analysis because the answer was focused on math outcomes rather than learning the process of math. Students who did not understand the
math module often walked in and out of the classroom during the entire class period. Students who walked in and out of the classroom hung out in the hallways talking to one another, checked social media sites on their phones, or listened to music quietly until the next block of classes. There was no intimacy in the math classes I observed which was completely opposite of the restorative justice class. The intimacy developed among the core group of students in the restorative justice class hinged upon consistent and patient teaching approaches by Amanda and Karla who co-facilitated the process of developing interpersonal skills, consistent communication, and used the space of the circle to deescalate chaos in students lives which the students nor the Java High staff had any control over. The stigma of at-riskness mapped onto the bodies of the students taking the class and brought into the class broke down throughout most circle processes because the restorative justice approach reinforced a person’s behavior does not encompass a person’s entire selfhood and the four components necessary to building positive skills, believing in the process, and understanding the ethos of restorative justice has the potential to disentangle the stigma of certain behaviors ascribed to at-risk bodies.

**Restorative Justice Doesn’t Work as an Add On**

Restorative justice rejects punitive approaches to reconciling negative student behavior and escalating conflicts therefore rejecting the school to prison pipeline that increasingly impacts youth of color, LGBTQ youth, and students with disabilities. Yet this rejection of punitive measures and methods is not a quick fix because inherently restorative justice is a process approach to repairing harm that takes consistency, patience, and commitment from all community stakeholders. In this way, a restorative justice approach goes against the neoliberal value of efficiency by rejecting simple and
one-dimensional approaches to repairing harm. In another way, restorative justice re-tools the neoliberal value of accountability by demanding those deemed the “responsible parties” must take responsibility for their actions and recognize their fault when they may not want to do so. A restorative justice approach also re-tools the neoliberal value of individual responsibility by using a school-sponsored curriculum that reaffirms tropes of deservedness by outlining what it means to be a productive respectable student worthy of connectedness to a school environment. My narrative that opened this chapter in particular touches on the significance of developing individually the skills, process, and philosophy of restorative justice just as much as being able to merge them during a circle in order to make inroads in shaping and reconstituting an entire school culture that is indebted to neoliberal strategies of educational reform. Furthermore, the restorative justice approach as an alternative to the zero tolerance approach reconstitutes what harm is and how conceptualizations of harm can impact all school stakeholders in different capacities firmly challenges traditional hierarchies among teachers, staff, and students that operate in so many schools. In this sense Java High an LGBTQ inclusive charter school has become a leader within the Hatfield City educational community by intentionally reconfiguring the reparation of harm and resolving conflicts by fundamentally challenging the ways schools too often are complicit in reproducing discipline as a prerequisite for establishing order and facilitating student academic and non-academic success. At the same time Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school does, “not disrupt school sponsored curriculum that clearly outlines learning goals and objectives associated with content areas,” (McCready, 2013, p. 513) acting complicit in putting forth a neoliberal image of education reform.
Not Bridging Academic Knowledge and Cultural Frameworks is Harmful

The restorative justice class and the circle process could not completely transform the Java High school environment by reconnecting disconnected at-risk youth because the circle process like the school infrastructure is limited by the fact that both do not actively bridge academic learning to the cultural frameworks (Delpit, 2012) that students bring with them to school. As much as restorative justice challenges punitive approaches to restoring order that are consistent with test and punish regimens it is still an approach to school connectedness that functions as a neoliberal project. A restorative justice class and the circle process will continue to have a limited impact connecting at-risk youth to the school if the majority of the White Java High teaching staff do not become capable or unwilling to broach the subject of race, racism, and White privilege as it shapes their own identities and their relationships with Java High students who identify overwhelming as African-American and Latino. This limitation affirms the scholarship of Blackburn & McCready (2009) who remind us the life experiences of queer youth of color and other marginalized youth exist beyond the school sponsored curriculum and the all White Java High teaching staff was simply not prepared or willing to address these issues with students. Karla’s experiences strongly reaffirm how and why student-teacher relationships and the student-staff member relationships matter and how those relationships can be enhanced through the Circles by role modeling inclusive practices that develop levels of mutual respect, trust, and relatedness between students and staff that must be ongoing. Karla’s approach to co-teaching and co-facilitating the restorative justice class with Amanda points to her own self awareness as a queer woman of color who assumed every student who came into the circle brought knowledge with them and
she created a classroom environment in which connectedness was possible by engaging students in their interests, histories, their lived realities, and their dreams. In short, Karla focused on the student as a complicated adolescent not the stigma of at-riskness mapped onto the students who came into the circles for whatever reason. The excerpts of Karla’s interview and listening to Esteban and Miles make meaning of circles that did not resolve conflicts or repair harm all point to ways the student-teacher relationships and the student-staff member relationships can disintegrate or completely break down if broader structural inequalities that contextualize the responsible parties and victim relationships between students and teaching staff members are not addressed. The circle between African American female student Lucky and White female teacher Doris that broke down demonstrates how the restorative justice process is ineffective to repairing harm when racialized power relations between and among teachers and students is not addressed.

Further harm can be inflicted upon marginalized students when systemic forces like racism are benevolently positioned as individual overt acts of discrimination rather than positioning racism at the center of ideological forces that reproduce subordinate and dominant hierarchies within power relations. Karla’s narrative in particular highlights the danger in making an assumption Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school is a completely safe space for all students when there is a comfortable absence of race in discourses about LGBTQ youth, and that creating safer schools involves interrogating the ways racism and whiteness shape and inform LGBTQ inclusive spaces. Karla’s narrative affirms what scholars Lisa Delpit (1995, 2012) and Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994, 2009) have been arguing for more than two decades, teachers working with students from different cultural and racial backgrounds than their own must develop an awareness of
students lives outside of the classroom to know their strengths and positively impact students academic and non-academic outcomes. Finally, Karla’s narrative affirms Venzent Chambers & McCready’s (2014) calls to examine the nuanced ways the social and cultural processes that run through our schools have the potential to intensify feelings of alienation and isolation of students who retain their cultural orientations as well as the importance of examining dominant neoliberal values of accountability and responsibility that position individual students solely responsible for their in ability to be successful in connecting to their school environment.

**Restorative Justice Opened Up Possibilities for Radical Story Telling**

Participating in the circle process opened up a methodological space for radical story telling to take place that was poignant and powerful. What radical story telling does best is offer an opportunity to “travel,” positioning a listener or an audience for self-reflection,” (Cruz, 2012, p. 462). Participating in many circles during my fieldwork challenged me to travel as a resistance researcher by forcing me to take the risk of finding findings that, “go against the official versions of the police, doctors, or social workers forcing you to develop different kinds of commitments in the field,” (Cruz, 2011).

Reflectively listening to students talk in the circles about their struggles with boyfriends addicted to heroin, little cousins getting racially profiled at the Quick Mart, feeling conflicted about having sex with their boyfriend because they didn’t want to get pregnant but they really wanted to have sex, or how the city bus they took to get to school was either always late created temporary spaces of solidarity and compassion rather than spaces bound by single stable social identities. The circles that were focused on making space for students to get to know each other beyond the surface level opened up
possibilities for this core group of students attending the restorative justice class to, “critically read the web of emotions, ideas, and oppressions that undergird their stories and the stories of each other,” (McCready, 2013, p. 514) that resisted the school sponsored curriculum of restorative justice at the same time benefited from the space a restorative justice class created. I learned as a marimacha researcher radical story telling is exciting and promising, yet risky because it required active practice of decentering the “I” so often caught up in the coherent hero narratives qualitative researchers that undergird normative beliefs about conducting research. Radical story telling created an opportunity to witness the ways youth positioned as at-risk at Java High are not the same and to recognize how their multiple subject positionalities and identifications pointed to the ways the discursive positioning of Java’s LGBTQ inclusive infrastructure is not as attentive to the intersections of multiple identities and identifications of it’s heterogeneous study body. Second, the radical story telling I witnessed in the circles affirmed positive student-teacher relationships between Java High youth and Java High teachers are a critical component to fostering school connectedness, and White Java High teachers in particular must recognize the complexities of risk that are mapped onto LGBTQ bodies, LGBTQ youth of color bodies, and youth of color to create qualitatively different understandings of respect, responsibility, and accountability that are informed by qualitatively different experiences of marginalization. Finally, radical story telling taught me the lesson that as dynamic and transformative as some circles were a restorative justice approach would never be able to inherently eradicate the stigma and multiple negative feelings associated with at-riskness mapped onto Java High student bodies. A restorative justice approach cannot be a substitute for critical, compassionate,
and intentional teaching practices nor can investing in the circle process be a substitute for a critical pedagogical approach to being an educator. In short, a restorative justice approach, like Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school is limited in scope because focusing acceptance and safety through a narrow LGBTQ lens foreclosed possibilities of intersectional issues of race, racism, and whiteness that regularly emerged inside the circles. Overall, the experiences I offered in this chapter from the restorative justice class and the way I offered them is an attempt at my own radical storytelling, an attempt to make some different kinds of sense of student-teacher relationships, peer-to-peer perceptions of another, and fostering school connectedness that refused a happy ending or simple resolutions. As I learned throughout the duration of my fieldwork participating in the restorative justice class, radical storytelling opens up possibilities to suture together these fleeting moments, snapshots, and traces of feelings that implode our comfort levels; pushing us to rethink the stories we tell about marginalized youth and rework the way we tell those stories to unsettle normative discourses that too often erase nuanced lived experiences of at-risk youth like those who attend Java High.
CONCLUSION

What compels us as writers, thinkers, and scholars to take up the research projects we involve ourselves in? Is it chance, professional networks, experience, determination, or privilege of University affiliations? I purposefully opened this dissertation with a series of quotes from four thinkers from different fields in cultural studies, queer studies, and educational studies to frame not only the interdisciplinary nature of my project but the interconnected factors that compel me to write. The scholarship of Sandra Cisneros, Kevin Kumashiro, Lisa Duggan, and José Esteban Muñoz deeply influenced my thinking and the contributions I offer in my dissertation. Like Sandra Cisneros I do not write to inspire others to change. I am not naïve as I once was as an adolescent. I know increasing visibility may produce limited incorporation into the mainstream but that recognition does not equate equality or equity. It takes much more than that to be committed to cultivating educational equity and social justice projects. I too write in the spirit of other Chicanas that have come before me who write about that which haunts you. Like Kevin Kumashiro I am an educational scholar who is concerned with the turn in Education towards safety before anything else when it comes to LGBTQ youth. I admire tremendously and share Kumashiro’s unwavering commitment to intersectionality as a conceptual vehicle to understand the interplay and the ways inter sections of social identities and social locations inform and shape the range of multiple marginalized youth experiences in educational institutions. Like other self-identified queer scholars of color I cannot detach myself, all that constitutes where I have been and who I am becoming, from the way I approach writing scholarship that explicitly bridges the personal and the political. Like Lisa Duggan I am troubled by neoliberalism’s ascension into the cultural and social fabric of our lives by the way it has gradually transformed our approach to
creating social, political, and educational reforms. I am also committed not to just
critiquing neoliberalism or denouncing it as the root of all evil, but more interested in
understanding the way it seems to permeate educational reform strategies unfettered. I am
committed to reinvesting in education as a vehicle for social change and democratic
purposes, but not positioning educational institutions as solely responsible for making our
society that much better when teachers continue to be deskilled, under valued, underpaid
and individual schools continue to be defunded, closed, and isolated from communities
by state and corporate powers. Like José Esteban Muñoz I am convinced we are not yet
queer and paying more attention to the feelings and conversations between subalterns
matters. Not only is a turn towards the affective potential of subaltern relationships
necessary to develop de-colonial projects in education but affect opens up possibilities to
challenge the master narratives of neoliberal educational reform that cast learning as only
understood through testing regimens, privatization, competition, failure, and success. José
Esteban Muñoz’s work challenges educational ethnographers like myself to slow down
and tune in to the affective register of the everyday relationships between subalterns
mired in complex power relations folding in on one another yet collapsing at the seams of
faint margins. Muñoz’s challenge pushed me throughout data collection and analysis
process to not dismiss feelings of getting stuck at the same time challenged me to not turn
those negative feelings of anger, helplessness, rage, exhaustion, and powerlessness into
something productive. Therefore, in this conclusion I do not offer definitive solutions to
conundrums that continue to drive the relationship between schools and society or the
conundrums facing the evolving purposes of educational institutions to better serve a
growing heterogeneous LGBTQ population. I do offer nuanced insights based on my
decision to conduct a qualitative ethnographic research project using a queer Chican@ feminist lens as a framework to think about and through conceptualizations of LGBTQ inclusivity, at-risk youth, and school connectedness. Therefore, in this concluding chapter I briefly revisit central themes of at-risk youth, LGBTQ inclusivity, and school connectedness in my analysis of Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school troubling dominant neoliberal reforms. I also point to some of the methodological contributions this project offers, showcasing the potential of taking on an interdisciplinary project in the field of Education. I end the chapter by demonstrating how using a queer Chican@ feminist theoretical lens opened up possibilities for nuanced, intimate, and contradictory understandings of this school indicative of my central thesis that the organization of Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school produced ambiguous and diffused effects.

**Reevaluating Discourses of At-Risk Youth**

A myriad of voices singing popular songs from the radio, small groups of students having animated conversations scattered throughout the hallways, students using the gender neutral bathroom to change clothes they came to school in, groups of students playing games of hustle in the gymnasium while their friends pretended not to watch, and other students lingering inside the classroom waiting for the teacher to begin the lesson for that period are all representative of an average day at Java High. Energetic at best and disorientating at worst, the spaces of the Java High classrooms, corridors, stairways, bathrooms, lounge areas, stairwells, and front stoop were all places a significant amount of students made space for themselves indicating going from one frame of mind to another and one place to another inside outside and around an educational institution
takes both movement and agency. The diverse student body at Java High made this school what it is and that’s why I was not able to discern one overarching theme in investigating the school. The students had a range of multiple and at times contradictory experiences and intersecting academic and non-academic needs. Observing, participating, and witnessing the range of student experiences and watching their needs unfold in real time often left me feeling exhausted and pensive as a researcher. Walking through the hallways watching students deliberately congregate in small groups to avoid getting to class, playing basketball with students in the gymnasium/cafeteria during the lunch hour, watching students walk in and or out of classrooms in the middle of a lesson and not come back, and listening to students share with each other insight into their latest tattoo or wardrobe decision is representative that Java High is not your average American high school. There were no cheerleaders, jocks, band kids carrying instruments, and no members of a chess club making alliances with the math geeks. There were no student assemblies, no homecoming, and no school sports teams to cheer for. The cafeteria served a double purpose as gymnasium and the food served for lunch arrived early in the morning each day and was warmed in a small warmer next to the bin of basketballs. At the end of the last block of classes there was always a mass rush by the majority of the student body for the main office to pick up city bus tickets, some students in a rush to get to a part time job across the city, some in a rush to get home to watch younger siblings, some in a rush to hang out with friends, and others in no rush to leave the school at all. Documenting, observing, and witnessing the consistent lack of sustainable resources and access to opportunity for the majority of Java High students is representative of how poverty operated in the everyday rather than the spectacle. Looking at poverty in real
time as it unfolded unevenly in the lives of so many kids at Java High demonstrated to me the urgent need of education policy makers to recognize poverty’s structural web is beyond the scope or responsibility of any one school (charter, public, private, or magnet). Any research that investigates at-risk youth or promotes educational reform must engage the pervasiveness of poverty’s systemic reach in shaping and informing the lives of youth rather than individualizing poverty. Instead of shuffling certain populations of youth into distinct categories of at-risk to vi for more educational funding aimed to provide access to resources and opportunities educational stakeholders should reassess the effectiveness of a neoliberal system of educational reform that purposefully demands deficit language to create visibility and awareness as a vehicle for systemic change that is ultimately ineffective and ethically hollow. Sue Books (2008) touches upon this dilemma by pointing to the scope of responsibility of teachers in urban schools who teach students who are significantly impacted by poverty:

> Teachers obviously cannot eliminate poverty single-handedly. They cannot reconfigure the nation's political economy or redraw its social landscape. They cannot reshape the job market or change social policies governing housing and health care. At the same time, teachers can-and inevitably do-respond to the injustice to which poor children bear such painful witness (p. 185).

I read the statistics posted on the Java High website prior to data collection and I listened to the lead teacher assure me in a pointed conversation months before I began collecting data, “this whole school is at-risk.” I realize now I intellectually prepared myself to collect data at a school with kids labeled at-risk yet had not considered the gravity of emotionally writing about marginalized youth. I repeatedly asked myself if the kinds of notes I took, the choices I made to participate in this versus that, or if my attentiveness to the multiplicity of effects happening at an LGBTQ inclusive school was in some way re-
marginalizing the student body. How do you write a dissertation that implicates at-risk youth without re-marginalizing them? I readily asked myself this question during data collection and during data analysis. I still do not have a definitive answer. Explicit analysis and discussion of poverty are not within the pages of this dissertation but if you read closely I tried to include nuanced details that point to the significant impact of poverty’s impact in the lives of the diverse student body deemed at-risk. My decision to use a queer Chican@ feminist lens as a conceptual framework opened up possibilities to document the how discourse of at-risk youth informs and shapes the school architecture of Java High by cultivating a risk focused logic about distinct institutional interventions.

My discursive analysis of Java High documents revealed the way the stigma of at-risk youth was mapped on to the diverse student body distinctly. The stigma of risk was mapped onto LGBTQ youth bodies as overt bias related violence and the stigma of risk mapped onto youth bodies of color as an achievement gap between White kids and kids of color. This distinct mapping of at-risk youth at Java High positions LGBTQ inclusivity and race as separate obfuscating the reality that LGBTQ inclusivity varies with race and is also constituted by and constitutes racialized meanings. On the one hand the language of at-risk youth is strategically used to justify the architecture and existence of Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive school, the discourse of at-risk youth functions as a linguistic tool that naturalizes embodied subjectivities attached to certain populations that warrants intervention. I am concerned about the pervasive use of the term at-risk to justify targeting certain populations of students for incorporation into educational institutions because doing so decontextualizes social problems that LGBTQ youth, youth of color, and LGBTQ youth of color face positioning them as individual problems to be fixed
through inclusion at the same time naturalizes deficit thinking about marginalized youth populations. Articulating why certain populations of students like LGBTQ youth are at a higher risk for violence and youth of color are at a higher risk for decreased access to resources and opportunities over time positions the responsibility of lessening the negative educational outcomes (Greftak, Kosciw, & Bosen, 2013) and educational debt (Ladson-Billings, 2006) for marginalized youth in eradicating practices, patterns, and logics that perpetuate inequality within educational structures.

**Recalibrating School Connectedness Through Cultural Frameworks**

I celebrate and applaud Java High for turning away from zero tolerance approaches to discipline that contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline by instituting restorative justice practices to repair harm, resolve conflicts, and create an ongoing school culture that is more concerned with cultivating positive relationships rather than assigning blame and administering punishments. While Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive charter school specifically opened up possibilities for the student body to engage in difficult discussions of gender expression and sexuality the interconnections between racialized sexualities and gender expressions often went unexplored. The absence of difficult discussions of interconnected racialized sexualities and gender expressions became most salient during the circle process in the restorative justice classes when colorblind frameworks emerged dealing with conflicts between white teachers and students of color. Therefore, understanding why the LGBTQ inclusivity at Java High produced diffused and ambiguous effects cannot be understood if race and sexuality are decoupled just as school connectedness was temporary and partial because cultural frameworks that students of color brought with them to school were not intentionally
bridged to academic and non-academic learning. The restorative justice class created connection through the circle processes and turned away from zero tolerance policies that underscore the pervasive school-to-prison-pipeline. Yet the circle processes were infallible because they broke down when structural inequalities that organized student-teacher relationships were not recognized as white teachers’ desires to impart knowledge and social change are distorted through dysconcsious racism. Therefore, developing more culturally relevant practices that inform teacher student relationships at Java High is necessary in order to reconstitute the culture of the circle processes and the entire school environment to become more equitable. White teachers must begin to do the necessary individual work to recognize their privilege and the all White Java High staff must reckon with the absence of staff of color not as an unfortunate inevitability but a consequence of institutionalized dysconscious racism. In order to be able to bridge cultural frameworks students of color bring with them to school to the academic and non academic learning the all White Java High teaching staff must recognize race as a positive interconnected social identity that contributes significantly to students of colors’ understanding of self. Equally important to bridging cultural frameworks with academic and non-academic learning are White teachers actively and intentionally confronting race and racism in themselves, in their classrooms, and within the Java High school culture. While the school architecture of Java High is predicated upon LGBTQ inclusivity that focus of incorporating non-normative gender and sexual expressions within the school environment as positive and normal, racial inequality can still be reflected and reproduced in the school culture, teacher-student relationships, curriculum, and policies.
Theoretical Contributions: Positionalities in Relation to Oneself and to Participants

With few exceptions, educational ethnographers who identify as queer Chican@’s have limited exposure regarding the ways their experiences as ethnographers are informed, challenged, and complicated by their multiple and often contradictory positionalities. How do self-identified marimacha researchers whose positionalities are intertwined as marginalized and privileged at the same time complicate, compliment, and change the power relations within the qualitative research process? What kinds of methodological dilemmas do they face in the field as a result of who they are and how they express their positionalities, how do they see themselves and how are they read by research participants, and how does the research process change by navigating contradictory positionalities? Who gets to tell the stories, and what stories should be told? How will those stories be told and for whom? Who decides what knowledge is? How is knowledge produced? These epistemological questions abound within the field of Education and in all disciplines. Yet this dissertation explored these epistemological questions by implicating the way my positionalities and social locations informed and impacted conducting research at an LGBTQ inclusive charter school in an urban city in the Midwest. Using different and multiple perspectives I theorized new interpersonal modes of intersectionality and negotiations of power relationships between the researcher and the researched during field work. Throughout the duration of my fieldwork I interacted with a significant amount of the Java High student body. On the very first day I came to the school the lead teacher Joanne took me to each classroom and introduced me to the students and teachers very briefly. Joanne was very supportive of my project and throughout the five months I conducted research I was given complete autonomy to go
where ever I wanted to without an explanation. This was a blessing and a curse. I often felt awkward in certain spaces and I did not particularly enjoy repeating to students mostly who I was and why I was there. I didn’t enjoy repeatedly explaining myself to students not because I didn’t like them but because there was always so much going on at Java I often felt like I couldn’t clearly articulate what my project was about to them. It felt like the project was always shifting beneath my feet while I was there. The only restraint placed on me was entering and leaving the school building. Just like the students, staff, and volunteers who entered the physical school building I had to get buzzed into the building by the administrative assistant. On the one hand the freedom given to me was a great benefit because it gave me a chance to interact with a diverse student body which gave me access to a wide range of nuanced experiences but then it was not a blessing because I often felt lost, vulnerable, and conflicted about the project. There are some students that did not know who I was or why I was in the school. There were other students who knew I was a researcher and seemed completely unconcerned with my presence or my project. And there were other students who demonstrated various levels of curiosity about the project and about me. When I had an opportunity to interact with students in the classroom by participating in and observing Circles, being quizzed about the bones in the hand before a science class started, or walking into adjacent neighborhoods of Hatfield city during a class excursion I opened myself up to be researched by the students not just as a researcher but as a multiple marginalized person. On several occasions students I did not know came up to me and bluntly asked me what my race was, what kind of neighborhood I lived in, what I did for a living, and if I identified as a LGBTQ person. The wide a range of encounters with Java High youth
asking me questions about “being” and belonging” to certain social identities and social
locations exposes the ongoing intersections between our positionalities and negotiations
of power relations as researcher and researched significantly informed the
methodological approach to this research project. Thinking through a mestiza
consciousness allowed the theorization of social and cultural intersections of racialized
sexualities, bodies, and gender expressions between the researcher and the researched to
become epistemological possibilities. Students continued inquiries and my purposeful yet
conversational responses demonstrate that although Java High is an LGBTQ inclusive
school the kind of inclusivity it perpetrated needed to be interrogated with an
intersectional lens. Like Berta-Avila (2014) I too recognized poignantly that when a
researcher conducts an ethnography, the way she positions herself in the research project
directly affects what she observes in two distinct ways, “1) what the researcher already
knows of the people, and 2) her own history and biases,” (p. 282). My encounters with
Java High youth that identified as students of color and LGBTQ youth of color in
particular pushed me to cultivate a practice of reflexivity in which I regularly asked
myself who gets to be a knowledge producer, who gets to receive knowledge, who holds
or wields power, and who gets to represent whom. In creating my research plan and
approach to research during the pre data collection phase I prepared myself intellectually
to conduct research at Java High that dealt with issues of sexuality, sexual orientation,
and gender non-conformity. But after the first two weeks of data collection and reflecting
on being questioned so blatantly I had to ask myself what was the significance of students
coming up to me, an academic stranger, asking what my race was? I had to ask myself as
a researcher who identified as a Chican@ butch how to make meaning of these intimate
yet unwarranted exchanges about racialized sexualities, gender expressions, and bodies within larger methodological dilemmas of positionality, authenticity, and belonging. Stich, Cipollone, Nikischer, and Weis (2012) affirm that conducting ethnographic research is a deeply personal experience because more often than not how you come to your research project, the questions you explore, and how you write up your data emerges through personal interests. Coming to an ethnographic project through various avenues of personal interests creates ongoing tensions throughout the research process. An ongoing tension within this dissertation became how do I negotiate my identities as a marimacha researcher while in the field at the same time those identities merge, overlap, thwart, or disconnect from the ethnographic others I encountered at Java High? How can I write ethically and compassionately about methodological dilemmas and theorize from these contradictory locations/tensions? I regularly came back to these macro methodological questions alongside more micro questions I encountered in the field such as: what kind of clothes do I wear when I am at Java, how much information should I share about myself and my personal life with participants, how much should I look at or use my cell phone during school hours, when should I write things down and when should I just listen, how will I create different kinds of boundaries with different participants, and what name should I ask the participants to call me? These intertwined methodological dilemmas that I experienced while conducting research at Java High are not new to qualitative researchers who conduct ethnographic projects. Weis & Fine (2000) coined the phrase ‘speed bumps’ to index these common methodological dilemmas ethnographic researchers ultimately have to ask themselves during fieldwork, and indicate their importance as they force researchers to slow down and reflect on the why decisions were
made and what constituted those decisions. As I reflect back upon these exchanges with the students of color and LGBTQ youth of color in particular I recognize the methodological significance of the positionality of subaltern bodies interacting with one another transgressing and trespassing upon the expectations of who gets to research whom; ultimately indexing the interplay of agency between Java High youth simultaneously as both participants and researchers when striking up a conversation with me. These interactions laced with identity politics demonstrate that although I was there to conduct research about Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive school I too was being researched. A range of Java students were watching me, reading me, and curious at least and interested at best in talking with me. I could not nor did I want to ignore being incorporated into the research project in a more intimate and deliberate way because it was the students who were forging this dynamic. I started to recognize the ways I presented myself, the ways I talked, and the ways I tried to listen, participate, and observe Java High as an LGBTQ inclusive school were not just different but an alternative kind of approach to collecting data indicative of my positionalities as a marimacha researcher whose mestiza consciousness approach was emerging in the field. These exchanges with Java High youth signaled the way I planned to actually “collect data” should not be through individually timed interviews in a quiet or removed location. On the contrary, the “data” would be primarily through what Cruz (2011) calls ethnographic snippets of informal conversations a researcher has with students during lunch, before school started or ended, and or participating in classroom activities or conversations in the hallway in between classes. During my interaction with Brandi, the student who specifically asked me what my label was, my decision to articulate what it meant for me to identify as a
Chican@ affirms a historical legacy of Chicanas using language to articulate self-determination. For some Chican@s like myself who have been denied the opportunity or forced to forget Spanish, the acquisition of the language is a critical political act (Cervantes, 1981; Moraga, 1983; Zavella, 1994). Although I did not have a conversation with students in Spanish, sharing with some students who self-identified as Mexican-American and Puerto Rican in my own words how my race, gender, and sexuality are interconnected to who I am created a space and discourse that is both intimate and resistant simultaneously. This eloquently and boldly articulated by Emma Perez (1991), “We cannot be friends as long as you think you know every part of who I am, as long as you think you can invade my space and silence my language, my thoughts, my words, my rage. Mi sitio y mi lengua” (p. 175). A student coming up to me in the hallways blatantly asking me “What are you?” evokes another important component of desire, the desire to be seen (space) and heard (language) on her own terms. Discourses of race, sexuality, gender, and class are inscribed upon the queer brown female body in ways that contain and restrain, concealing how systems of power have privileged the kinds of narratives that invalidate and undermine other more local and/or transgressive meanings and subjectivities (Cruz 2001; Saavedra and Nymark 2008). Ultimately, these exchanges between the students and I indexed a distant, neutral, and traditional ethnography at this LGBTQ inclusive high school was not going to happen because the students and I both simply would not allow it.
Concluding Thoughts and Possibilities in Nepantla

In her book *This Bridge Called Home: Radical Visions of Transformation* Gloria Anzaldúa (2006) uses the word Nepantla to theorize liminality and to talk about those who facilitate passage between worlds, who she named nepantleras. Anzaldúa associates nepantla with states of mind that question old ideas and beliefs, acquire new perspectives, change worldviews, and shift from one world to another. I use nepantla within the title for this section for two reasons. First, nepantla offers a literal and figurative space to theorize how my experiences as a Chican@ butch who grew up among absences, segregation, and violence in the Midwestern urban city of Hatfield informs my worldview as a marimacha researcher engaged in this ethnographic project. Second, my experiences of marginalizations and complicities as a marimacha researcher are not romanticized, ignored, or seen as a detriment to the research process; on the contrary my marginalizations and complicities inform the theory of knowledge and the interpretive framework that guide this project. Therefore, the theoretical contributions of a using queer Chican@ feminist lens to approach an ethnographic research project recognize the difficult work it takes to transform schools. Institutional practices of school connectedness, the conceptualizations of LGBTQ inclusivity generated within consideration of the intersections and interplay of race, and the positioning of at-risk youth to volley for nuanced resources cannot sustain a long term transformation of schooling. A queer Chican@ feminist approach recognizes the response to marginalization of LGBTQ youth within educational schools continues to be an area of concern and pause for all educators regardless if they fall into the practice, policy, activist, community member, and parent camp. What a queer Chican@ feminist approach
offered in this dissertation is a set of optics that recognized the urgency of those five
teacher’s who founded Java High to mitigate the at-riskness of LGBTQ youth is
warranted yet partial and temporary. Discursively positioning Java High as a successful
and failure free charter school compared to Hatfield public schools continued decline can
be read through a neoliberal lens as call for isolation rather than the autonomy to create a
safer and more welcoming school. A queer Chican@ feminist approach used in this
dissertation asks us all to pause and regroup in some collective reflection on the slippery
slope of autonomy and isolation as a driving force within educational reform. The
dissertation urges all educators to reassess the evolving relationship between schools and
society and between the role of the institution to better support and advocate for LGBTQ
youth attending our schools. The dissertation points to the possibilities of radical story
telling among people is both powerful and partial, bridging academic and non-academic
learning with cultural frameworks students bring with them to school is necessary and
urgent, the LGBTQ inclusivity cannot be decoupled from race or understood outside of
racial formations, and structural forces of poverty cannot be dismantled or overcome
through the creation of any one kind of educational institution or the care of even the
most compassionate teachers.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


The title of my dissertation builds upon Gloria Anzaldua’s (2002) article entitled, “now let us shift… the path of conocimiento… inner work, public acts,” published in the edited book *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*. Anzaldua’s articulates “the path of conocimiento” as an ongoing process of developing connections between the personal and the public that integrates knowledge, emotion, spirituality, and action within awareness of both the personal and the political/socio-structural that cultivates the risky terrain for this dissertation and my journey as a marimacha researcher.

Marimacha is a Spanish term evoked in discourse within the academy by Gloria Anzaldua and marks a body suggestive of linguistic and cultural transformation. Being a “lesbian” is a totally different experience from being a marimacha or a tortillera. The term marimacha, for example, focuses attention on the colonial legacy and its relation to marianismo and machismo. These concepts have been considered vital to understanding gender relations in Latino cultures. Marianismo is modeled after the Virgin Mary, which has created the feminine ideal of purity and passivity by which women are expected to live. On the other hand, the double body inflection in mari-macha symbolically alters the “Mary complex”-imagine the configuration of Mary as the macho woman. Although Anzaldua uses marimacha in general terms to substitute for and “translate” the possibilities of the lesbian body, including the Butch and Femme, the term challenges the gender system subsumed at the heart of marianismo, threatening the historically subordinate position of women established with the imposition of Christianity (Arrizon, 2009).