For Colored Kids Who Committed Suicide, Our Outrage Isn't Enough: Queer Youth of Color, Bullying, and the Discursive Limits of Identity and Safety

ERIC DARNELL PRITCHARD
University of Texas at Austin

In recent years anti-lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) bullying has been a pervasive discussion in popular and scholarly discourse. While such a discussion has documented the negative impact of bullying on the physical, psychological, social, and emotional lives of young people, it has not had a critical and sustained analysis of the ways that race, ethnicity, class, and other identities complicate discussions of how bullying and bias-motivated violence affects a diversity of queer youth. In this article, Eric Darnell Pritchard begins with a framework that assumes that the intersections of LGBTQ identities with race, ethnicity, and class offer unexplored critical possibilities within current discussions of bullying. He argues that in order to be more creative and effective in responding to the epidemic of bullying, we must expose and deeply engage the limits in the ways identity and safety are taken up in bullying discourse, which have resulted in flattened and less effective antibullying measures. Pritchard concludes with implications for practice in terms of curriculum, policy, and advocacy.

On the evening of April 6, 2009, Sirdeaner Walker found her eleven-year-old son Carl dead. Using an extension cord, Carl Joseph Walker-Hoover hanged himself from a support beam upstairs in the family home. In a note to his mother, Carl apologized for ending his life and bequeathed his Pokémon collector cards to his little brother. In the months and days before his death, Carl endured emotional and physical abuse by his classmates. At school, his peers threatened to hurt him and ostracized him, calling him gay. The reasons the youth gave for mistreating Carl was that he dressed and talked differently than

Harvard Educational Review Vol. 83 No. 2 Summer 2013

other boys (James, 2009; WCVB-TV, 2009). Sirdeaner had done everything a parent could do to protect her child—from making formal complaints and meeting with the school principal to regularly attending the school's parent-teacher organization, where she alerted all about bullying. In the end Sirdeaner's work did not spare her son's life. Carl joined the long and still-growing list of youth whose lives ended under circumstances of "bullycide" (Marr & Field, 2001).

Although many acts lead to bullycide, many cases, including Carl's, are a result of bias-motivated violence targeting people who identify as or are perceived to be queer. These bullycide deaths are closely linked to the other forms of bias-motivated violence that result in the deaths of numerous queer youth every day. GenderPAC (2007) reports that the majority of the cases of gender-motivated violence resulting in death are against gender nonconforming queer people of color.

This accumulation of deaths has resulted in an increase in public attention paid to bias-motivated deaths as epidemics affecting queer youth inside and outside of school. I am, however, concerned that the lens being used to create the policies that purport to solve this epidemic is not appropriately focused on sexuality as a raced, classed, and gendered experience. Consequently, although it seeks to be helpful, this "help" only perpetuates antiquated notions of identity that will not truly help many of the youth these issues affect, least of all queer youth of color.

Through a combination of critical analysis of media covering public events of bullying and grounded theory analysis of interviews, I examine here five dominant discourses about identity and safety as they show up unhealthily, unhelpfully, and unproductively in current discussions about bullying and safety:

1. Flattened theories of identity
2. The notion of youth exclusive of other identities
3. A one-size-fits-all approach to safe space
4. The idea that children bully but adults are safe
5. Thinking of safety as a normative property right

The media coverage of public events of notable or recent incidents of bullying contains details I use to identify the pervasiveness of the discourses. I also use in-depth interviews with queer people of color to explore the limitations of these discourses and propose new ways to conceptualize these discourses as a necessary step in interventions into bullying and bias-motivated violence affecting youth. The article concludes with implications for practice along the lines of curriculum, policy, and advocacy. With my research participants' reflections in mind, I argue that to meaningfully stop this epidemic, we must critique discourses of identity and safety in order to be creative and effective in proposed interventions.

The result of these narrow discourses is a flattened and ultimately less effective intervention into bullying. The ways scholars, teachers, and activists have rushed to an inclusivity or additive model to draft answers to the epidemic is one example of how these terms have been appropriated in conversations on this issue. Additive approaches mirror multicultural education models, which aim to solve the lack of diversity in school demographics or curricula by including more people and texts that accurately represent racial-ethnic difference. As critical race theorists of education have argued, multicultural education models have tended to not meaningfully critique power and inequality in teacher education and classrooms (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Dixson, 2011; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Yosso, 2006). Observing this, I am *not* arguing for adding literary texts that represent queer of color experiences, "centering" queer of color history and culture in class curricula, or increasing the number of teachers who identify as queers of color. Although each of these interventions is necessary, I find that they all require complexity to move beyond a simplistic and unimaginative additive approach. However, many advocates for creating a more welcoming and affirming experience for queer youth take this multicultural or additive approach and foster the idea that sexuality or race is the only identity on which LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) students or students of color experience bigotry, respectively. This flawed logic assumes that if we can fix, for example, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, then we have fixed the problems that queer students face.

Although my intentions and those of others, I believe, are sincere attempts to make life and learning better for queer students, there is no certainty that any particular proposal will speak to the experience of every queer person. To suggest such would be not only untrue but irresponsible. It is more prudent to be aware of and commit to the reality that we must perpetually return to this epidemic and the students it hurts in order to consider and reconsider how it affects their daily lives and how best to propose interventions at all levels. I am certain that viewing the issue to be more complex than we currently treat it will move us closer to the social change that we seek. It will also allow us to work in the interest of more queer students than are covered in our current scholarship and advocacy.

Literature Review

Bullying has been a major emphasis of American public discourse and scholarship, especially in recent years (Biegel, 2010; Olweus, 1994; Pascoe, 2007; Pellegrini, 1998; Savage & Miller, 2011). This work has documented the negative effects of bullying on the physical, psychological, social, and emotional lives of young people. My study joins the many people and organizations working actively to disrupt the epidemic of bullying and bias-motivated violence as it affects queer youth. Where my work departs from those important interven-

tions is that it begins from a framework that assumes that the intersections of LGBTQ identities with race, ethnicity, and class offer unexplored critical possibilities. The complexity that this observation brings to discourses on bullying is clear when we consider the It Gets Better campaign, the success of which has meant it has become a dominant social script for discourses about bullying in America's schools.

The It Gets Better campaign began as a video weblog on YouTube in September 2010. It was later published as a book of the same title (Savage & Miller, 2011). Dan Savage and Terry Miller (2010) made the initial video after a number of suicides by queer youth or those perceived as queer. In the video Savage and Miller discuss their own experiences of antiqueer bullying in their youth and how they have since led very rewarding lives as adults. They "created [it] to show young LGBT people the levels of happiness, potential, and positivity their lives will reach—if they can just get through their teen years." The video uses personal stories to tell youth that they will not reach the better life of adulthood if they take their own lives. In the days following its release, a number of individuals posted their own videos (Savage & Miller, 2011). While the campaign is earnest in its commitment to end bullying against LGBTQ and other youth, its conception of identity is narrowly conceived, cutting off critical possibilities for the intervention it seeks to make.

A 2009 report from the National Education Association notes that education "is still in the infancy stage when it comes to ethnographic studies that reveal how GLBT [Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender] complement or complicate our racial or ethnic identities" (Kim, Sheridan, & Holcomb, 2009, p. 9). Many queer youth of color, for example, "face what has been called a 'tricultural experience'" in which these students face "the homophobia or transphobia that white GLBT students face[,] the racism that heterosexual students of color face," and "exclusion from both the GLBT and ethnic minority communities with whom they would normally identify" (Cianciotto & Cahill, 2003, p. 217). Thus, when Savage and Miller and others urge youth to consider that being LGBTQ gets better with age, their assertions overlook that race, class, geography, religion, and other identities also inform experiences of bullying. According to Lance McCready (2008), "We need to develop teachers' ability to observe, interpret, and understand the relationship between multiple social and cultural identities of queer youth of color" (quoted in Kim et al., 2009, p. 11). In this article I offer new perspectives implicit to McCready's assertion by situating his observation within the issue of bullying to identify and work through the discursive limits of identity and safety.

Another area of education scholarship I am concerned with here is safe space and safe zone programs specific to LGBTQ students. In his recent book *The Right to Be Out*, Stuart Biegel (2010) summarizes safe space and safe zone programs as school spaces "where LGBT students can feel safe to be themselves and comfortable enough to talk about issues relating to their sexual and/or gender identities" (p. 126). Citing research by the Gay, Lesbian, and

Straight Education Network (GLSEN), Biegel notes the positive impacts that such programs have had on LGBTQ students in K–12 and higher education (p. 126). My research asks us to rethink the ways we implement such work by examining our assumptions about the meaning of *safety* within such initiatives, using narratives of queer youth of color to consider how we might collectively revise and extend the forms of support offered through safe space and safe zone.

Finally, the interventions herein are in conversation with education scholars who have researched issues in education as they effect LGBTQ youth (Blackburn, Clark, Kenney, & Smith, 2009; Sears, 2005a; Sears, 2005b) and with researchers who have specifically addressed the particular experience of LGBTQ youth of color (Blackburn, 2005; Biegel, 2010; Kumashiro, 2001, 2003; McCready, 2004). Each of these scholar-teacher-activists has given attention to the specific ways in which queer youth of color have experienced marginalization and, in many instances, how queer youth of color formulate their own interventions and methods to survive and thrive in the face of oppression. Intertwining analysis of media coverage with in-depth interviews, this article applies the charge of being attentive to queer of color experiences to critique the limits of antibullying measures.

Conceptual Framework

In this article I employ queer of color analysis as the conceptual framework. Queer of color analysis is

> a heterogeneous enterprise made up of women of color feminism, materialist analysis, poststructuralist theory, and queer critique [that] interrogates social formations as the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and class, with particular interest in how those formations correspond with and diverge from nationalist ideals and practices. (Ferguson, 2004, p. 149)

Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1991) coined the term *intersectionality* to characterize the way identities are multiple and interrelated, a theory of identity affirmed by writings by generations of feminist scholar-activists of color (Collins, 1991, 2004; Combahee River Collective, 1978; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1982). Queer of color critique draws on theories of intersectionality to explore multiple oppressions and identities in ways that do not elide the specificity of difference but resist the undertheorizing of identities by acknowledging their complexities in our analysis of the everyday. My research participants' observations about identity at times echo and at other times complicate theories and praxis of intersectionality. Their articulations of complex personhood take from and extend discourses of identity attempting to account for the interconnected experiences of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Applying queer of color analysis to discourses of bullying is one way to demonstrate the importance of intersectionality to education more broadly.

Methods

A large portion of this article is a critical analysis of recent media coverage of bullying. Through this analysis I aim to demonstrate the way language and other semiotic systems operate with social, political, and cultural consequence (Fairclough, 1989, 1992; van Dijk, 1993, 1997; Wodak, 1995). Analysis of discourses such as those from the media shows the ways that discourse can form, deploy, mask, or reinforce hegemony (Wodak, 1995) but also be the site of intervention into these hegemonic forces and social inequalities.

My analysis of public events is deepened by a grounded theory analysis of everyday life experiences of queer people of color retrieved from in-depth interviews I conducted with more than sixty black lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people over the course of four years. The interview data come from interviews conducted between 2006 and 2011. The interviews include people ages eighteen to seventy residing in various regions across the United States.

I recruited interviewees using a letter disseminated through the e-mail lists of community organizations, social networking Web sites, and my disciplinary and personal networks. I also recruited interviewees through flyers posted in dance clubs, churches, community centers, libraries, hair salons, grocery stores, and fitness centers. I then conducted interviews according to an interview script with a series of questions covering five broad topical areas: general information/family history, identity, literacy, schooling, technology use, and community/cultural connections. Each interview lasted approximately two to three hours. After the initial interviews, I performed follow-up interviews, if needed, for clarification or deeper detail. I did not introduce bullying as a question or topic in my discussions, but invariably it did come up as research participants reflected on their childhood, identity, and schooling. I conducted most of the interviews in person; however, in order to achieve demographic diversity, particularly in terms of geography, I completed a number of phone interviews using the same script I used for in-person interviews. After interviewing, I coded and analyzed interview data inductively according to grounded theory, a research methodology that stresses a close, systematic, and thorough search of participant's in-depth life story; accounts for patterns; and leads to strong conceptual explanations (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Dominant Discourses in Bullying Discussions

The dominant discourses examined herein are of identity and safety in current discussions about bullying. I consider these two areas the dominant discursive themes for a number of reasons. First, these two words—*identity* and *safety*—are the most recursive and frequently used in current discussions about bullying. Whether you are a detractor arguing that bullying is of little importance or an antibullying stakeholder, the issues of identity and safety are commonplace to those discussions. A keyword search through popular and scholarly

articles will reveal that *identity* and *safety* are frequent in discussions of bullying. Taken together, the recursive presence of these terms makes them dominant discourses. Second, scholars have argued that discourses produce and are produced by history, power, and ideology (Wodak, 1995). Accordingly, I argue that the dominance of these terms in current discussions of bullying, given their reference of social and structural positionalities, contains claims about history, power, and ideology that are not being teased out. Consequently, social inequalities that condition individuals' daily experiences of identity and safety go without critique, contributing to a less complex understanding of these discourses. This less complex rendering leaves the forces of power and structural inequality unchallenged.

Adult Perspectives of Bullying During Youth

While youth experiences are the focus of my claims, my methods and analysis take adults into consideration in ways that strengthen the centrality of youth in this article. My analysis includes individuals who were identified as youth at the moment of public events as well as research participants who recall their experiences of being bullied. Taken together, these data create a multidimensional and sociohistorical perspective on discourses of bullying. That is, we can see the issues of identity and safety from multiple vantage points that allow a perspective that is critically comparative in terms of temporality (present and past) and social position (children, adolescents, and adults). One potential limitation of the interview data is that it is based on adult recollections of past events. However, this potential limitation does not detract from the validity of the interview data for my claims. Reflection on traumatic experiences from the distance of time and space does offer a perspective that is equally useful to theorizing incidents of bullying. The advantage of talking to adults is that the distance afforded by time allows individuals to give language to the connections they may have felt but did not express in their childhood and adolescence.

In addition, by examining adult recollections of past bullying incidents in conjunction with recent news reports about today's youth, I push back on the idea that conceptions of complex identity and structural inequality are foreign to youth. This is a necessary intervention into conceptions of identity attached to youth versus those attached to adulthood. Such limited perception prevents us from examining the discourses of bullying that traverse childhood, adolescent, and adult experiences. If we think of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood as social constructions, the rigid perception that these stages of development are mutually exclusive of identity dissolves. This allows for a fluid uptake of what these identity categories share in our analyses of power, privilege, and domination. These are all characteristics of identity in youth that are relevant in adulthood.

As I examine the life stories of my research participants, I am reminded also that their contemporary experiences of adults are informed by their experi-

ences as children. As my analysis will show, adults figure heavily into youth experiences of bullying as not only those who have intervened on behalf of the youth but also as perpetrators of bullying. This is important given that the discourse of bullying tends to emphasize peer-to-peer youth bullying while overlooking adulthood.

Discourses of Identity in Discussions of Bullying

Flattened Theories of Identity

In my interviews, one of the things I watched closely was how people identified themselves. Although I told research participants that I was interviewing them because they identified as African American and LGBTQ, their responses to my query about selfhood yielded lists of identities. Phylicia Craig,[1] born in 1970 in a small midwestern city, described herself as "a full-figure, athlete, lesbian, queer, gender queer, same-sex-loving African American." Dominic Thomas, born in 1983, described himself as being in the "African American community or black . . . the gay community . . . a Christian—specifically Baptist—a Democrat . . . very liberal. I think that is the scrapbook of my associations." Thomas's use of *scrapbook* evokes images of different pieces coming together to represent the plurality of his identities as well as of collections of relics from various points in one's life. We may think of this as how identities are constructed and reconstructed across time.

My research participants' self-descriptions reemphasize the necessity of changing our discourse of identity to open layers of complexity through which we look on a person's sense of self. The multiple identities through which research participants describe themselves refashion normative discourses of identity. As Craig and Thomas show, individuals conceive of themselves with more complexity than many notions of identity enable. Listing their identities, they show a consciousness of complex personhood. This reading of identity is very different from a definition that takes identities to be mutually exclusive instead of co-constructing and fluid.

Typically, identity is understood as the ways individuals understand and express their sense of self or group and community affiliations. It can refer to a range of ways to name an individual or group. Cognitive, behavioral, and temporal matters, for example, also determine one's identity. Such factors affect how someone experiences their identities within the context of specific social roles as well as their image of self and community belonging. Identity is also a matter of how we are perceived to identify or be identified by others. We see the latter when multiracial youth are expected to racially identify with one group on the basis of phenotype or cultural relations, although the child or adolescent may actually identify with multiple groups (Herman, 2004). Such experiences point toward the necessity of complex identity concepts we might use as a critical lens as well as to honor the complexity of human experiences.

Discussions around teaching and learning are areas where intersectionality is especially relevant. Such discourses would better address issues affecting queer youth in ways that do not elide the experiences of queer youth of color or reductively engage LGBTQ youth in general. An example of this is the growing focus on LGBTQ young adult fiction in English education as examined in recent scholarly work (Ressler & Chase, 2009). This work emphasizes identity when discussing curricular changes that teachers must make in order to discuss LGBTQ identities and experiences in the classroom. The topics du jour are often issues about responding to homophobic student comments, resisting heteronormative conceptions of gender and sexuality, or the challenges for teachers and students "coming out" in the classroom. In such conversations, scholars rarely engage LGBTQ identities as intersecting with a student's or teacher's other identities. This oversight emerges from the regular impulse toward narrow discourses of queer identity. The result is that sexuality is situated as the sole way to read sexual identities and experiences with no regard for how sexuality converges with other identities. As such, any problems that LGBTQ youth encounter are exclusively predicated on sexual identity.

Catherine Fox (2007) offers an anecdote that shows this problem among teacher-scholars, writing that at a national academic conference, "a group of queer folks were discussing the need to recognize the complexity of LGBTQ people and our experiences" (p. 499). After some talk about the absences and often problematic ways in which composition course textbooks take up LGBTQ communities, a white gay male scholar made a comment Fox found troubling: "he had done the work to build bridges with 'other' races but . . . 'they' don't acknowledge LGBTQ folks in 'their' scholarly work. He asserted that 'we' need to insist that 'they' begin doing the work of recognizing and including the contributions of queers" (p. 500). Fox says that in these comments, "queers of color were rendered invisible within a discourse that relies upon singular and unified notions of identity and subjectivity" (p. 500). Paraphrasing Audre Lorde, Fox further states that the conversation "illustrates how queer White academics continue to render queer folks of color as 'too alien to comprehend' and how informal discourses around LGBTQ folks continue to operate within normalizing regimes of race and gender" (p. 500).

The failures of narrow identity theories are also clear, as the scholar's comments demonstrate his inability—or refusal—to read identity in a way that would embrace a diversity of queer lives and perhaps account for the dissonances in power and privilege that exist among LGBTQ people. Unfortunately, the attitude Fox encountered is all too prevalent in society. Consequently, such "identity myopia" (Wallace, 2006, p. 521) occurs within conversations about issues affecting queer youth in general, including bullying. An example of these too-narrow discourses of identity is the Carl Walker-Hoover case.

In news reports following Carl Walker-Hoover's death, one of the questions that emerged time and again was whether Carl was gay or whether his sexuality mattered. Several months after Carl's death, his mother, Sirdeaner, testified

before the Massachusetts Legislature's Joint Committee on Education about the bullying epidemic. In her testimony Walker said,

> Carl was only 11. He didn't identify as gay or as straight or anything like that. He was a child. Those kids at his school called him those names because they were probably the most hurtful things they could think of to say. And they hit their mark. (GLSEN, 2009, para. 24)

However, as an activist she has consistently championed the important message that bullying is an issue affecting all youth and must be addressed. Still, some LGBTQ and antibullying activists, though not claiming Carl was gay, have focused primarily on the antigay sentiments that characterized the bullying he experienced. As a result, Carl has been situated on the sadly growing list of queer youth who died because of bullying. Comments on news Web sites and blogs expressed displeasure with activists because they felt that Carl, at eleven years old and not sexually active, was not gay or bisexual and thus was not part of the LGBTQ community. They reasoned that the LGBTQ and antibullying movements were misappropriating his likeness and story for their own agendas. There are two major ways that the discussions surrounding Carl's sexuality illuminate too-narrow discourses of identity.

First, many comments emerge from a discourse that is too narrow to adequately engage the complexity of Carl Walker-Hoover's lived experience. Regardless of how his sexuality is being perceived, it remains the case that sexuality is tacitly positioned as the sole identity under consideration in the details of the case, what its cautionary tale will be and for whom there will be any implications or lessons learned. Refashioning our discourses of identity would allow for a more nuanced lens through which we see how the intersections of multiple identities, not just one, conspired to produce the particular kinds of violence that Carl experienced.

Second, complicating discourses of identity would point to the ways many youth, regardless of sexual identity or gender expression, are read as "queer" on the basis of other identities and targeted for violence. News reports suggest that what Carl's peers saw as queer about him—speech, dress, intellect, kindness—were, for his victimizers, all subconscious or conscious signifiers of a queered racial and racialized gender performance that drew the negative gaze of his peers, and perhaps adults. For example, news stories describe him as being studious and well-spoken. For many prepubescent and adolescent black boys, and even adult black men, each of these characteristics would be used to label one as effete in comparison to normative black masculinities (Young, 2007). These characterizations firmly position Carl as alien to normative performances of black boyhood that would make him less of a target for antigay bullying.

It is imperative, then, that we are attentive to how children like Carl Walker-Hoover are subject to bullying, not purely because of real or perceived sexuality but also because any number of raced or classed behaviors mark them as

queer. For example, the focus on Carl's speech reminds me of what Vershawn Young (2007) describes as the burden of black male authenticity, a burden that weighs on black boys and men when their use of African American vernacular English is deemed insufficient to qualify them for normative black masculinity (p. 76). The categorization and spectacle around racialized masculinities are doubly visited on youth of color. Black children, for instance, are born into a world that pathologizes and demonizes them according to racist gendered and sexualized stereotypes, while simultaneously requiring the performance of these stereotypes as the measure for whether one's masculinity or femininity is sufficiently normative.

My analysis of the Walker-Hoover case mirrors the experiences of research participants, like Simone Johnson, who tell stories from their youth in which their "bookishness" marked them as queer. This queer marker was often used to target them for particular kinds of violence because of real or perceived *non-normative gender and sexual differences given that the performance of intellect made them seem different, odd, or queer in the literal and theoretical sense.* A more complex discourse of identity is required if we are to have a clearer understanding of the ways intersections of identities condition experiences of bias-motivated violence.

Born in 1988 in a moderately large midwestern city, Simone Johnson is a black lesbian. Although Johnson was very popular among her peers, she described episodes when this changed and her childhood peers saw her as an outsider. Johnson attributed this change in attitudes to her bookishness. After her senior year, Johnson enrolled as a student at her state university. Johnson continued her intellectual development through her ongoing conversations with another research participant, Alicia Jefferson, who also attended the university. Johnson also found classes at the university that covered topics about black history, LGBTQ culture, and social justice. She recalled that as her own "consciousness" developed, she began to be treated differently by her friends back home and at school. Whenever she'd engage in conversations with some of them, they'd make comments like, "Oh, that's white girl or that's college girl or she thinks she's smart." Johnson said this opinion of her made it increasingly difficult to remain part of her group of friends or to talk without being dismissed when conversing with them. We see how Johnson's bookishness, in its convergence with her other identities, marked her as queer to the group of friends she had growing up.

Similar to Johnson, Wendall Riley recalled incidents in which he was mistreated because of his bookishness. I read these incidents as moments when intelligence marked Riley as queer. Riley is a black gay man who was born in 1969 in a moderately large southern city. He said that in school and in his neighborhood, he was mistreated by other youth many times because of how they perceived his gender expression. Some of the perceptions, he said, had to do with his bookishness. Riley said he learned quickly that he had to find

ways to protect himself from being seen as smart if he wanted to stop the harassment.

Certainly, there are many black youth, some LGBTQ, for whom this is not relevant, and I was one of them. Though many are targeted as queer because of their bookishness, they find, as I did, many others who were cheerleaders —from my mother and some teachers to the drug dealers, drug addicts, and other people in my community for whom my path was not always an option or choice, but who all shared enthusiasm for and encouraged my bookishness. Certainly, my studiousness made me a target for violence by some of my school peers, and I was called "faggot," "sweet," and other gay epithets throughout elementary and middle school. Still, because I was a child pursuing more knowledge by way of formal education, I was celebrated throughout my neighborhood in South Jamaica in Queens, New York. I say this not to dismiss the urgency of what Johnson, Riley, and others describe but, rather, to further signal that our discourses of identities must be attentive to the complicated and diverse range of issues that affect youths' daily lives.

The Notion of Youth Exclusive of Other Identities

Frequently heard within discussions around bullying among youth are the phrases "boys will be boys" or "it's just name calling." Addressing the recent documentary *Bully* (Hirsch, 2011), Colleen Gillard (2012) describes such sentiments as "commonly used advice to bullied kids" from adults that "minimizes the problem or blames the victim" (p. 2). For example, she writes, "how many times have you heard parents or teachers offering these kinds of counsel: Just walk away. You're being oversensitive. It happened to me at your age. You must have done something to provoke it . . . You're too geeky. Dress differently. Fight back" (p. 2). A recent example of this occurred in Indianapolis in May 2012 when Darnell "Dynasty" Young, a seventeen-year-old black gay high school student pulled out a stun gun given to him by his mother and pointed it toward the air to scare off students who bullied him because of his sexuality and gender expression (McLeod, 2012, p. 1). Young was expelled from school for this act of self-defense. The school's principal, Larry Yarrell, said of Young's experience of bullying, "If you wear female apparel, then kids are kids and they're going to say whatever it is they want to say" (CNN, 2012). The "kids will be kids" response to bullying is a discourse of identity that says some violence is to be expected from youth and peer-to-peer violence is a rite of passage for childhood and adolescence. This discourse is just one example of the many that undertheorize youth identity in ways that perpetuate bullying and other forms of bias-motivated violence among youth.

I submit that, within current discussions of bullying, one of the causes of this problematic discourse of identity is that the category of youth is separated from the rest of an individual's life experience and is therefore seen as outside complex theories of identity and structural inequality. Such positioning

obscures sites of necessary intervention around bullying. An intersectional approach to youth and bullying necessitates that we relieve youth identity of the watering down of its complexity. One means of doing this is to better engage the ways youths' ideas about identities condition their beliefs about themselves and interactions with others, including their experiences as victims and perpetrators of bullying. Youth identity is generally treated with a degree of innocence when it comes to bullying and violence. Unfortunately, this innocence does not extend to all youth, leaving some victims of bullying and bias-motivated violence to be seen as the cause of their own injury or, in some cases, as less youthful and therefore less hurt or less worthy of empathy or intervention by adults. Such discourses are an inaccurate perception of youth violence and the complexity of identity as it relates to youth. Recent events and research into participants' life stories demonstrate that separation of youth identity from the rest of life is a false and dangerous discourse of identity within conversations on bullying.

Violence among youth is a reflection of youth awareness of and participation in social arrangements that reproduce power, privilege, discrimination, and domination; yet representations of youth assume that when it comes to identity matters, they have "no skin in the game." A recent event in conversations around bullying shows the falseness of this discourse. In official court records, the parents of Kardin Ulysse, an eighth-grade student at Roy H. Mann Junior High School in Brooklyn, New York, filed a claim seeking financial damages against the City of New York. The Ulysses charged that the city was responsible for the ways school staff were "negligent" and "inept" in their lack of response to a pattern of bullying against their child (Khan, 2012). According to the reports, on the morning of June 5, 2012, Ulysse was beaten by two students in the school who repeatedly punched him in the face as they shouted epithets, including "fucking faggot," "pussy," "transvestite," and "gay" (Monahan & Marzulli, 2012). The beating resulted in injuries that left Ulysse blind in his right eye (Khan, 2012). Whether or not the parents' claims of individual staffers' irresponsibility will be proven remains to be seen; however, a 2011 New York City Department of Education (DOE) survey of Mann Junior High School showed that bullying had long been a concern of its students. The *New York Daily News* reported that "63% of students at [Mann] reported at least some of the time classmates are harassed or threatened based on their race, religion, ethnicity, citizenship status, gender, sexual orientation or disability" (Monahan & Marzulli, 2012). The survey also stated that "40% of the school's students didn't feel safe in the building," while "44% said students threaten or bully students "most of the time" or "all of the time" (Monahan & Marzulli, 2012).

Observing the Ulysse case, it is clear that identity and the social arrangement that produce or are produced by power and domination are much more a part of youth life than we may see in discourses of identity that parse youth from identity matters. The two students who bullied and attacked Ulysse did so

while shouting hate speech that referenced gender and sexuality. With every word and every hit of Ulysse, the two students were constructing him as an Other along the lines of normative perceptions about identity, while establishing themselves as more superior and normative, based on their perception of his gender and or sexual identities (Perry, 2001). The violence against Ulysse and the report of the many other students in the DOE survey of his school reveal that whether or not the description of youth in the discourse of identity is treated with greater complexity, when it comes to youth, identity matters. Unfortunately, the discourse of youth identity in bullying often minimizes youth-on-youth violence as a natural element of youth development.

Second, the discourse of youth identity in bullying negligently flattens the category of youth by assuming race, class, gender, sexuality, and other identities have no bearing at all. This overlooks the specific ways that youth of color and many queer youth are positioned outside the category itself, as the term references a normative child or adolescent subject. Youth of color are excluded from this class, as "young people of color are constantly policed, surveilled, criminalized and severely punished" (Rios, 2008). Such criminalization of young people of color does not only occur in relationship to criminal justice and incarceration but also within schools (Dance, 2002; Ferguson, 2001; Rios, 2006, 2008). Consequently, victimization of these youth tends to be ignored, for on the spectrum of violence, these youth are racialized as always and already criminals, not victims. The problem this poses for interventions in bullying are numerous: youths' acts of coping and protection are misread as aggression, or, more frequently, victims are blamed for acts of violence they have suffered.

A particularly egregious example of youths' identities disqualifying them as victim is the school shooting death of Lawrence King, a fifteen-year-old gay and gender-nonconforming teen from Oxnard, California. In February 2008 King was shot and killed by a classmate, Brandon McInerney, during English class. A *Newsweek* article paints a portrait of the King case as an ethical dilemma in which a queer child tormented by his peers needed support, but this queer child was also a bully. King is described as "a troubled child who flaunted his sexuality and wielded it like a weapon—it was often his first line of defense," tormenting his peers (Setoodeh, 2008, p. 1). The story reports that King, who wore brown stiletto high-heeled boots and makeup to school, expressed his love for McInerney in front of their classmates. King allegedly told a friend that he and McInerney had dated and broke up, and that if McInerney weren't nicer to him then he'd tell everyone, though McInerney's lawyers denied claims of any relationship. The claim was that King's flirtation and confession of love made McInerney and other students feel uncomfortable. The danger of this logic is that it suggests that though what McInerney did was horrifying, the violent event was precipitated by King's sexuality and gender nonconformance—a clear act of victim blaming. Anecdotes and comments in the story show that some held the notion that if King had been less

flamboyant in his gender expression, and had he not targeted McInerney for his romantic affection, he might still be alive. One takes away from this report the notion that King is as much a victimizer as a victim.

As with King and Dynasty Young, many other youths' identities are overtly or covertly used to blame them for the violence they encounter. Their identities are the basis on which people are inactive, see them as less of a victim, or ignore their calls for help altogether. An intersectional analysis pushes back against the notion that childhood and adolescence are not mutually exclusive of other identities. We need a discourse of identity that is attuned to the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality with the examination of LGBTQ student experiences; otherwise, the details that emerge in this particular incident are not legible to many of those wanting, positioned, or required to intervene. It is impossible to examine and intervene with any significance into violent events that youth experience because too-narrow discourses of identities result in an equally insufficient discourse of safety and safe space initiatives.

Discourses of Safety in Discussions of Bullying

Analysis of the ways antiqueer culture makes school an unsafe space for LGBTQ students and teachers has been the focus of education scholarship (Blackburn et al., 2009; Britzman, 1997; De Crescenzo, 1994; Eaton, 1993; Gray, 1999; Owens, 1998; Rasmussen, 2004; Unks, 1995). Concerns about the unsafety of schools for LGBTQ people, plus the rash of bullycide and antiqueer violence, have birthed safety as a powerful discourse in movements against bullying. The power of this trope of safety is evidenced in the proliferation of "safe space" and "safe zone" programs over the last fifteen years or so, in which institutions designate space "where LGBT students can feel safe to be themselves" (Biegel, 2010, p. 126).

Safety is the word most used in discussions about bullying. The dominance of discourses of safety is shown in the repeated emphasis of the themes of unsafety and safety within surveys and policy documents. For example, GLSEN has several initiatives addressing safety, including a guide for creating LGBTQ inclusive environments and a "safe space kit" (GLSEN, n.d.). The National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force jointly issued the report *Injustice at Every Turn* (Grant et al., 2011), which includes data about the prevalence of transgender students' experiences of physical assault, sexual violence, and verbal and emotional abuse in schools (p. 3). Also, schools such as New York City's Harvey Milk High School "cater to students who adopt LGBTQI [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex] identifications"; these schools are "deeply invested in tropes of 'safe space,'" as evidenced in the Milk High School mission to create "a safe and supportive environment" for LGBTQ students (Rasmussen, 2004, p. 138). That such an abundance of the conversation surrounding queer youth expresses concern for safety should be commended. Still, as with the

discursive limits of identity in discussions of bullying, there are limits in the discourses of safety as well.

My analysis shows that some discourses of safety are already vested with assumptions about identity that have an impact on the ways we read violence against queer youth of color and, ultimately, affect proposed safety initiatives. I maintain that, given these limitations, discourses of safety in discussions of bullying are apt to engender more injury and harm than safety. Much of this propensity toward injury and harm connects to the ways that our discourses of safety intersect with equally limited discourses of identities. The discourses around safety I focus on are threefold: first, the notion that what constitutes safe space for one is true for all; second, the assumption that all adults desire to and will provide safe space for queer youth; and, last, the idea that safety operates as a normative property right. While each of these discourses is specific to safety, they draw heavy connections to my previous analysis on discourses of identity.

A One-Size-Fits-All Approach to Safe Space

Fox (2007) notes that safety is often regarded as a priority in discussions surrounding diversity and difference, but such discussions usually "occlud[e] genuine reflection, dialogue, and struggle about what might constitute safety for marginalized peoples" (p. 503). One way this problem persists is through discourses of safety centered on oversimplified identity frameworks. It is troubling that there are still discussions about, and even promises made, building or offering safe space that do not take a person's actual identities (neither the perpetrator's nor the victim's) into consideration. With regard to queer youth, this limited discourse of safety is as frequent an occurrence as the violence affecting these youth.

In the days and months following Lawrence King's death, many attempted to learn the reasons why McInerney would do such a horrible thing. All of the early stories focused on King's sexuality and gender nonconformance. What prosecutors finally brought into the discussion were McInerney's alleged white supremacist views on matters of race (Hernandez, 2009). Though there were school, county, and state policies about gender discrimination and bullying, how would the policies work if the discussion about King's safety is only geared toward gender and sexuality when the crime against him was, allegedly, also precipitated by white supremacist hatred? The same narrow discourses of identity that limit our insights into the unique ways people are queered and experience violence emerge again to prevent the possibilities of building a more comprehensive and potentially effective conversation around what constitutes safety for queer youth of color. Part of doing this work is to proactively reconsider the ways these discourses of identity, violence, and safety are manifested within other issues effecting queer youth of color.

Concern around housing and homelessness, which disproportionately affect queer youth, offers another example of the discursive limits of safety

in discussions of bullying. In the United States, youth homelessness is a major concern. A 1998 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development study said that between 600,000 and 1.6 million youth are homeless (Wright, 2008, p. 82). The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force estimates that "gay kids represent between 20 and 40 percent" of homeless youth, while "there are as many as 640,000 homeless gay youth in America" (Wright, 2008, p. 82). There are numerous homeless youth centers across the country. However, despite intentions to offer a safe space for homeless youth, there have been reports of queer youth experiencing physical and emotional violence in homeless youth shelters and group homes. For example, the Covenant House, a homeless youth shelter in New York City, "insists that it treats all the kids who come through its doors equally," but there have been reports to the contrary:

> Stories of mistreatment are legendary among homeless queer youth—transgender young women being forced to wear male clothes and to sleep alongside young men in gender-segregated quarters, often leading to rapes and other violent attacks; gay kids getting discharged when they complain to staff about harassment . . . gay youth regularly chose to simply sleep on the street rather than suffer the degradations and dangers they felt awaited them at the shelter. (Wright, 2008, pp. 80–81)

I believe Covenant House and other shelters when they say they want to have a space available for all, and we should assume good intent. But these reports suggest that there should be some assessment about how to be more effective. For Covenant House, all youth are welcome for support, but all youth are not the same. This identity myopia prevents the program from being fully attentive to the reality that building a safer environment for homeless youth means being realistic about the diversity of issues that threaten each youth's safety. With this in mind, they might be able to conceptualize how the identities of each youth affect the various values and institutional privilege they have inside and outside the homeless shelter. Clearly, walls of discrimination and prejudice may need to be broken down among the youth and the staff in order to be more certain that everyone is committed to building an environment that is safe for all.

In response to complaints from queer youth, several homeless shelters and group homes were created specifically for LGBTQ homeless youth (Wright, 2008). I do not know whether all of these homeless shelters for queer youth have more complexity in their readings of identity; perhaps programs and initiatives were implemented to address the problem. However, as I reflect on the critiques of the Covenant House, I think about how easy it is to take for granted that all of these youth are safe in queer youth shelters and group homes. There is too often an easily assumed shared experience of queerness with no regard for how their differences must still inform the construction of safety even in a queer space. It is possible still that queer youth have been victims of violence—whether precipitated by race, gender nonconformance,

class, or ability—in some of these shelters and group homes. Administrators, staff, and queer clients for these shelters and group homes should examine their perceptions of safety to move beyond conceptualizing safe space for queer youth as something more than just protection from violence based on sexual identity. For example, white supremacist views position queer youth of color as racially and ethnically marginal within shelters, classrooms, LGBTQ campus centers, student organizations, and other spaces where they may be susceptible to forms of bias-motivated violence. An intersectional analysis of safety for LGBTQ youth would also call attention to the numerous other ways all queer youth experience violence in spaces that are supposedly safe for LGBTQ people.

The Idea That Children Bully, but Adults Are Safe

Within bullying discussions, characterizations of violent events that need our intervention are incidents among youth. We expect adults, as a sign of their age, to be the people who can remedy the injury and harm of such incidents. This assumption holds that adults would intervene in an act of bullying in a way that protects the child being bullied and positively influences the bully at the same time. The assumption, then, is that adults will act in good faith. More problematically, this conception of adulthood assumes that adults' identities and investments in social, political, cultural, and economic hierarchies operate exclusively of their treatment of children. What this perspective does not acknowledge is the reality that some adults are hostile to difference, diversity, and anything they deem non-normative. In such cases, these adults respond to bullying in ways that are complicit with the violence occurring among youth, while other adults bully their own peers and children.

The ageist assumption of bullies being only children is one of the first areas that needs to be reworked in order to construct the safe spaces that queer youth should enjoy. A major example comes from the United States federal government. Recently, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services created the Web site StopBullying.gov, which includes information on cyber bullying, risk factors, how to prevent and respond to bullying, and video tools and overviews of relevant laws and policies about bullying. The Web site portrays a clear belief about age and bullying: bullies are children and adults are those who intervene. For example, the first section, titled "What Is Bullying?" defines bullying as "unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). One way that this definition reflects the discursive limits of safety is that it conceives of a bully as a child. The definition does not acknowledge the reality that some children bully with complicity *from* adults, while others are just bullied *by* adults. The perception that only children are bullies is reinforced throughout a number of other areas on the

StopBullying.gov Web site. Also, the pervasiveness of this definition of bullying is further established in the online and print materials of stakeholders in the antibullying movement, including GLSEN and Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), which primarily describe bullying as incidents among school-aged children and other young people. News coverage of bullying also contributes to this discursive construction of the bully as a youth. While I am not questioning the sincere intentions and important work that these organizations and news reports do in raising awareness of bullying, I provide these examples to show how the depiction of bullies as children gets formed discursively and with problematic outcomes.

When adults do figure into discussions of bullying, the discourse is that the barrier to adults providing safe space is because they lack the tools or resources to do so. There is little awareness that adults can (and do) act as bullies or be (and are) complicit in youths' bullying of one another because of their own bias motivations around identity. Unfortunately, as a number of research participants' life stories and recent public events show, adults do bully or behave in ways that are complicit with bullying, which is contrary to how they are positioned in discourses of safety from bullying.

Janelle Steele, a black transgender woman born in 1979, said that in her youth her peers and adults created an environment in which she did not feel safe to explore her gender identity. Consequently, she said, while she did identify as a woman, she did not wear women's apparel or display anything read as feminine for fear of retaliation by peers and adults, many of whom already harassed her verbally. Steele's experience speaks to the point that bullying is not just a traumatic transaction among children, but it implicates adults as well. This point is further emphasized in Wendell Riley's experiences.

Wendall Riley, a black gay man born in 1969, shared a lot of stories about being bullied in school and the resulting psychological and physical trauma. I asked whether or not he ever brought this problem directly to the attention of an adult. Riley said he did not because he got the sense that telling an adult would position him to be further attacked by both his peers and adults:

> If they [adults] found out they [youth] called me that, then evidently—because in certain times it was seen that way, you had to be doing something. So what you did was you tried to hide, so if somebody hurt your feelings, you tried to suck it up because you didn't want them [adults] to know what they called you . . . you thought as a child that an adult would have intervened, but there was no saving you at that time, so you had to toughen up, not physically, but I had to wear a tougher skin.

Many youth do remain silent about the bullying they experience as a way to protect themselves. However, as Riley's story shows us, even if queer youth do approach adults and name the violence they are experiencing, they often bump up against the normative racial, gender, and sexual politics of adults, who the discourses of safety and safe space assume will advocate on their behalf

just because they are older. Riley anticipated that he could not count on adult intervention any more than he could count on that of his peers. Experience showed him that if he'd told an adult that he was being called a "sissy," this would have resulted in the adult suggesting that there was something wrong with him. As a result, he developed coping practices that did not rely on the support of adults. Overlooking the specific ways adults participate in bullying obscures our vision of adults like those Riley encountered, whose actions are not recognized as bullying because the discourse treats it as an occurrence among children and young adults.

Thinking of Safety as a Normative Property Right

U.S. systems of power and privilege along the lines of social identity position specific individuals and groups as already qualified for safety from bullying and other forms of bias-motivated violence. As such, safety is a commodity that is unequally distributed across identity groups. While scholars discuss the racialization of property equating it with whiteness (Harris, 1993; Prendergast, 2003), my discussion goes beyond race to consider the ways in which normativity and non-normativity are primary variables in the calculus of who qualifies for the property of safety and to what degree. Observing this point, I argue that the discourses of safety require a person to acquiesce to normative race, gender, and sexual identity performances as a prerequisite for unconditional safety.

Recall the *Newsweek* story in which the author reports that some staff at the school Lawrence King attended felt that he used his sexuality and gender expression to torture his eventual killer, Brandon McInerney, and his other peers, a sentiment represented in the actions of King's teacher, who made King remove his makeup and high-heeled boots, and school staff, who said his style of dress was a disturbance to the students and staff (Setoodeh, 2008). Through such actions, the school as an apparatus of the state attempted to justify its lack of focus on providing safety for King by implying that he was the one terrorizing the other students and ultimately having a negative effect on them. This sentiment implies that the school needed to protect the other students from King, thereby implying that it should be exempt from the responsibility it had to ensure King's safety as well. Safety, in this logic, is cast as a privilege of students who were not like King or of those LGBTQ students who were not seen by adults as dangerous, threatening, or terrifying.

In 2007 Rodney Evans, a black bisexual gender nonconforming student, was a sophomore at Eastern Hills High School in Forth Worth, Texas. Evans was called into the assistant principal's office and told to take off the wig and heels he was wearing. Evans refused to do so and was suspended from school for three days for "disorderly conduct" that violated the student code of conduct. In a television news interview, Evans explained to the reporter that the school was "discriminating against male cross-dressers" (KDFW News, 2007). The school refused to comment officially but said that Evans's suspension was

based on "class disruption," which it defined as behavior that "interferes with the teacher's opportunity to present material or any other student's opportunity to concentrate on the material or their assignments" (KDFW News, 2007). Three students walked out of class in support of Evans. One supporter said that the school's policy was a double standard because she and other girls "dress like boys" and the school doesn't reprimand them (KDFW News, 2007). One student was quoted on camera saying that Evans's dress was a distraction to her and that it should be worn outside of school. The school later indicated that Evans was suspended for using vulgar language when asked to take off his wig and heels, which Evans admitted to doing. Still, he maintained that the policy was discrimination and he planned to push back, saying, "I'm not going to sit down for the discrimination. I've done it too long and I refuse to do it any longer" (KDFW News, 2007).

The use of *class disruption* and *disorderly conduct* on the official complaints filed against Evans are telling, as they suggest that something "normal" has been transgressed. Given that his gender identity and expression were the source of conflict, gender identity and expression are the center of disruption from the administrative perspective. Sure, the school later blamed the suspension on vulgar language, but its initial response shows the gender anxieties and transphobia involved.

What is most pertinent for challenging the discourses of safety is that, in Rodney Evans's case, the school or students claimed that the student's gender identity and expression were a distraction to the learning environment and that he was suspended from school to entice future policy compliance. Consequently, Evans would need to acquiesce with a gender identity and expression that was less distracting, or more "normal." Under this notion of queer gender as a distraction, Rodney Evans, like Lawrence King and countless other queer youth, is identified as an individual who other students need to be made safe from. There is no recognition of the ways queer youth need safe space, given that it is their gender identity, gender expression, and sexuality that are targeted for normative regulation in society at large and apparently by some students and adults in their schools. The assumption that safety is the property of nonqueer kids is never questioned, nor do we question the ways adults hide behind school policies to suggest that these youth are a distraction, as if policy is not ideological. It also ignores the fact that each individual may require different interventions to be made if they are to feel as equally safe and protected as others, a reality that points toward the necessity of seeing students' different relations to power and privilege based on their social identities.

When we say we want to make safe spaces for those outside the "normal," there has to be a semantic shift that unseats safety from the unquestioned position that treats it as a property right of the sufficiently normative. There really is no other way to begin imagining and creating any tangible change toward making safer environments for more than the few. Otherwise, safety

is not safer at all; it becomes just another way to discipline and regulate nonnormative subjects in order that they may qualify for protection while claiming safety and safe space as a right of all.

Implications

In terms of curricular implications, thoughtful and serious consideration about the contexts of youths' various experiences, structural positions from which individuals engage youth, and the critical events of bullying and bias-motivated violence itself may be our very best teachers. The multiplicity of identities mandates that proposed interventions resist the limitations of monolithic ways to think about an individual's personhood. Recognition of this complex personhood must be the start of antibullying interventions, not an afterthought or the end of that work. This positions us to engage students in bullying as a matter of power, privilege, discrimination, and social inequalities that are experientially fluid given the ways identities intersect and co-construct experiences and relationships. Curricular and teaching resources may meaningfully apply this perspective in numerous ways, such as assigning print and television news reports, documentaries, and other media coverage of bullying to demonstrate the intersectionality of identities involved.

My analysis of public events and research participants' life stories exposed the many ways discussions of bullying contain a dangerously uncritical depiction of adults. The analysis showed that adults can be complicit in youth bullying and bias-motivated violence against one another, or that, in some instances, adults' actions were experienced by youth as bullying or bias-motivated violence. There is no regard for the fact that some teachers and administrators may be completely resistant to strategies to alleviate bias-motivated bullying because they share the beliefs that engender a culture of discrimination against queer people and others who are different. Accordingly, there needs to be a more direct policy on bullying as a form of discrimination to which adults, particularly those working in public institutions, should be held accountable.

From a policy position, a more complex treatment of adulthood in bullying could be to reframe the ways policy discusses bullying as an interpersonal incident (usually between youth) while ignoring the ways bullying is also a form of institutional violence. The focus on the interpersonal allows us to overemphasize youth while obscuring the ways that adults operate with power over the institutions that, through inaction or problematic actions, reproduce the violence that occurs among youth. In my analysis I showed the de facto practice of teachers and administrators bullying youth but able to essentially avoid being seen as doing violence or be held accountable by cloaking their actions in policy. A policy that acknowledges the unique ways adults are positioned to bully and do violence to youth, which is largely institutional in nature, would make incidents opportunities for intervention. A shift in antibullying policy

from interpersonal to institutional is more attentive to the ways adults are invested in or enact bullying; it does not just continue the dangerous pathology of bullying as a youth-only issue.

Conclusion

Bullying should always be recognized as a state of emergency. The ignoring of queer youth of color in this issue will only ensure that things will get far worse before they ever get better. This is a horrifying reality in general, and even more terrifying and unconscionable considering the many youth no longer alive because the issue has not been dealt with more responsibly. It is not possible to confront the violence against these youth or anyone when we are not attentive to the ways violence is embedded in our so-called "interventions." The sadness and outcries against violence after the deaths of Carl Joseph Walker-Hoover, Lawrence King, and others were a voicing of our pain and displeasure. But a more critical response than the one we currently have is one way we signal that queer youth of color matter and that every life is worth saving.

Notes

1. All interviewee's names are pseudonyms as each research participant gave signed consent to be interviewed for my research under the condition of confidentiality.

References

Biegel, S. (2010) *The right to be out: Sexual orientation and gender identity in America's public schools.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Blackburn, M. (2005). Agency in borderland discourses: Examining language use in a community center with black queer youth. *Teachers College Record, 107*(1), 89–113.

Blackburn, M., Clark, C. T., Kenney, L. M., & Smith, J. M. (Eds.). (2009). *Acting out! Combating homophobia through teacher activism.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Britzman, D. P. (1997). What is this thing called love? New discourses for understanding gay and lesbian youth. In S. de Castell & M. Bryson (Eds.), *Radical interventions: Identity, politics, and difference/s on educational praxis* (pp. 183–207). Albany: State University of New York Press.

CNN. (2012). Bullied gay teen uses stun gun at school. Retrieved from http://www.cnn.com/video/#/video/bestoftv/2012/05/07/exp-bullied-gay-teen.cnn

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cianciotto, J., & Cahill, S. (2003). *Education policy: Issues affecting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth.* Retrieved from http://www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/reports/reports/EducationPolicy.pdf

Collins, P. H. (1991). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment.* New York: Routledge.

Collins, P. H. (2004). *Black sexual politics: African Americans, gender and the new racism.* New York: Routledge.

Combahee River Collective. (1978). A black feminist statement. In G. Hull, P. Bell Scott, & B. Smith (Eds.), *All the women are white, all the blacks are men, but some of us are brave: Black women's studies* (pp. 13–22). Old Westbury, NY: Feminist Press.

Crenshaw, K. W. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review, 43*(6), 1241–1299.

Dance, L. J. (2002). *Tough fronts: The impact of street culture on schooling*. New York: Routledge.

De Crescenzo, T. (Ed.). (1994). *Helping gay and lesbian youth*. New York: Harrington Press.

Dixson, A. D. (2011). Democracy now? Race, education, and black self-determination. *Teachers College Record*, *113*(4), 811–830.

Dixson, A. D., & Rousseau, C. K. (2006). *Critical race theory in education: All God's children got a song*. New York: Routledge Falmer Press.

Eaton, S. (1993). Gay students find little support in most schools. *Harvard Educational Letter, 9*(4), 6–8.

Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power*. London: Longman.

Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. London: Polity.

Ferguson, A. A. (2001). *Bad boys: Public schools in the making of black masculinity*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Ferguson, R. (2004). *Aberrations in black: Toward a queer of color critique*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Fox, C. (2007). From transaction to transformation: (En)countering white heteronormativity in safe spaces. *College English, 69*(5), 496–511.

Gender Public Advocacy Coalition [GenderPAC]. (2007). 50 under 30: Masculinity and the war on America's youth, a human rights report. Retrieved from http://www.gpac.org/50under30/50u30.pdf

Gillard, C. (2012). Bully, the documentary. *Harvard Education Letter*. Retrieved from http://hepg.org/hel/article/535

Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network [GLSEN].(n.d.). Tools and tips. Retrieved from http://www.glsen.org

Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network [GLSEN]. (November 18, 2009). Sirdeaner Walker testifies before Mass. joint committee, urges passage of comprehensive anti-bullying law. Retrieved from http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/news/record/2491.html

Glaser, B. G. (1992). *Emergence vs. forcing: Basics of grounded theory analysis*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: de Gruyter.

Grant, J. M., Mottet, L. A., Tanis, J., Harrison, J., Herman, J. L., & Keisling, M. (2011). Injustice at every turn: A report of the national transgender discrimination survey. National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. Retrieved from http://www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/reports/reports/ntds_full.pdf

Gray, M. L. (1999). *In your face: Stories from the lives of queer youth*. New York: Harrington Park Press.

Harris, C. I. (1993). Whiteness as property. *Harvard Law Review, 106*(8), 1707–1791.

Herman, M. (2004). Forced to choose: Some determinants of racial identification in multiracial adolescents. *Childhood Development, 75*(3), 730–748.

Hernandez, R. (2009, July 14). Days before trial, McInerney attorneys say they have no defense. Retrieved from http://www.vcstar.com/news/2010/jul/14/days-before-trial-mcinerney-attorneys-say-they/#ixzz1zKOVhi40

Hirsch, L. (Director & Producer). (2011). *Bully* [Motion picture]. USA: The Bully Project/Where We Live Films.

James, S. D. (2009, April 14). When word's can kill: "That's so gay." Retrieved from http://abcnews.go.com/Health/MindMoodNews/story?id=7328091&page=1#.T-9lLGg5uFA

KDFW News, Dallas-Fort Worth. (2007, June 10). Double standard? Retrieved from http://youtube.com/UW4R-dLrDPs

Khan, Y. (2012, June 9). Injured student plans lawsuit against city for bullying. *New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/schoolbook/2012/06/19/injured-student-files-lawsuit-against-city-for-bullying/

Kim, R., Sheridan, D., & Holcomb, S. (2009). *A report on the status of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people in education: Stepping out of the closet, into the light*. Retrieved from http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/glbtstatus09.pdf

Kumashiro, K. (Ed.). (2001). *Troubling intersections of race and sexuality: Queer students of color and anti-oppressive education*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Kumashiro, K. (2003). *Restored selves: Autobiographies of queer Asian-Pacific American activists*. New York: Routledge.

Ladson-Billings, G. J., & Tate, W. F. (1995). Toward a theory of critical race theory in education. *Teachers College Record, 97*(1), 47–68.

Marr, N., & Field, T. (2001). *Bullycide: Death at playtime*. Langley, BC, Canada: Bewrite Books.

McCleod, K. (2012, May 9). NBJC appalled at school's expulsion of Dynasty Young. Retrieved from http://nbjc.org/media-center/releases/nbjc-appalled-schools-expulsion-dynasty-young

McCready, L. T. (2004). Understanding the marginalization of gay and gender nonconforming black male students. *Theory into Practice, 43*(2), 136–143.

McCready, L. T. (2008, July 17). Queer youth of color in urban school communities, Paper presented at NEA National Summit on GLBT Issues in Education, Chicago.

Monahan, R., & Marzulli, J. (2012, June 18). Family to sue for $16M after sick attack on son. *New York Daily News*. Retrieved from http://articles.nydailynews.com/2012-06-18/news/32303263_1_anti-gay-slurs-city-middle-school-students

Moraga, C., & Anzaldúa, G. (Eds.). (1982). *This bridge called my back: Writings by radical women of color*. New York: Kitchen Table Women of Color Press.

Olweus, D. (1994). Annotation: Bullying at school, basic facts and effects of a school based intervention program. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines, 35*(7), 1171–1190.

Owens, R. E. Jr. (1998). *Queer kids: The challenges and promise for lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth*. New York: Harrington Park Press.

Pascoe, C. J. (2007). *Dude you're a fag: Masculinity and sexuality in high school*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Pellegrini, A. (1998). Bullies and victims in school: A review and call for research. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 19*(2), 165–176.

Perry, B. (2001). *In the name of hate: Understanding hate crimes*. New York: Routledge.

Prendergast, C. (2003). *Literacy and racial justice: The politics of learning after Brown v. Board of Education*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Rasmussen, M. L. (2004). Safety and subversion: The production of sexualities and genders in school spaces. In M. L. Rasmussen, E. Rofes, & S. Talfurt, (Eds.), *Youth and sexualities: Pleasure, subversion, and insubordination in and out of schools* (pp. 131–152). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ressler, P., & Chase, B. (Guest eds.). (2009). Sexuality and gender variance [Special issue]. *English Journal, 98*(4).

Rios, V. M. (2006). The hyper-criminalization of black and Latino male youth in the era of mass incarceration. *Souls, 8*(2), 40–54.

Rios, V. M. (2008). The racial politics of youth crime. *Latino Studies, 6*(1–2), 97–115.

Savage, D., & Miller, T. (2010, September 21). It gets better [Video]. Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7IcVyvg2Qlo

Savage, D., & Miller, T. (2011). *It gets better: Coming out, overcoming bullying, and creating a life worth saving*. New York: Penguin/Dutton Adult.

Sears, J. (Ed.). (2005a). *Youth, education, and sexualities: An international encyclopedia* (Vol. 1, a–j). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
Sears, J. (Ed.). (2005b). *Youth, education, and sexualities: An international encyclopedia* (Vol. 2, k–z). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
Setoodeh, R. (2008, July 18). Young, gay, and murdered. *Newsweek*. Retrieved from http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2008/07/18/young-gay-and-murdered.html
Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
Unks, G. (1995). *The gay teen: Educational practice and theory for lesbian, gay, and bisexual adolescents*. New York: Routledge Press.
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (n.d.). "What is bullying?" Retrieved from http://www.stopbullying.gov/
van Dijk, T. A. (1993). Principles of critical discourse analysis. *Discourse and Society, 4*(2), 249–283.
van Dijk, T. A. (1997). *Discourse as social interaction*. London: Sage.
WCVB-TV, Boston. (2009, April 9). Mom: Son bullied in school before suicide. Retrieved from http://www.wcvb.com/Mom-Son-Bullied-At-School-Before-Suicide/-/9849586/11316496/-/item/1/-/7d7bflz/-/index.html
Wallace, D. (2006). Transcending normativity: Difference issues in *College English. College English, 68*(5), 502–530.
Wodak, R. (1995). *Critical linguistics and critical discourse*. Retrieved from http://emile.uni-graz.at/pub/04W/2004-11-0256.pdf
Wright, K. (2008). *Drifting toward love: Black, brown, gay, and coming of age on the streets of New York*. Boston: Beacon Press.
Yosso, T. (2006). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. In A. D. Dixson & C. K. Rousseau (Eds.), *Critical race theory in education: All God's children got a song* (pp. 167–190). New York: Routledge.
Young, V. (2007). *Your average nigga: Performing race, literacy, and masculinity*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.