Ben, age eighteen, requests,

In high school there should be posters which are supportive of gay people. Also, there should be support groups in high school. There needs to be a connection for gay kids in high school, because when you’re not out, you’re terrified.

Marc, age sixteen, says,

At school there should be programs for counselors so they know how to help lesbian and gay teens. Also, the schools could have assemblies and have gay people come in and speak.

Eighteen-year-old Stephanie shared with me that if she could change schools, she would take some of that football money and put it into the performing arts. Sex education would be more in depth taught and homophobia and homosexuality would definitely be addressed. If I could, I would change how people think about other people. To teachers, when you’re in that room with that teacher, like they are always telling you, they’re in control, and when they hear an argument or “faggot this” or some group being put down that’s when they should step in and say “look I think you can find a more appropriate word” or “look they’re people too.” While I’m not saying they should promote it, they should address it in a positive sense and if they do know somebody who is struggling be available for them—give resources, say “it’s not that bad.” (personal communication, 24 November 1990)

These recommendations are given by the lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths who have found their voice in the safety of lesbian, gay and bisexual youth groups. Given the nature of homophobia, however, those most silenced must depend on their lesbian, gay, and bisexual sisters and brothers, as well as heterosexual friends, to advocate on their behalf. What these narratives suggest is the courage, the risk, and the power people who face silencing in school experience.

CONCLUSIONS

Given that differences in race, social class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation do have important bearing on academic achievement and future success, it is important for professionals involved in the lives of students to be aware of how these components of identity are shaped in the minds and lived experiences of young people. While students may act out socially, experience depression, rage, truancy, or even drop out, viewing the source of these prob-

lems as existing within the students rather than in the contexts in which they live their lives contributes to a process of blaming the victim. Given the heterosexism and homophobia in schools, it is clear that for lesbian, gay, and bisexual students, the tragedies they may experience do not center around being homosexual, but are a result of being hated or devalued or having who they are systematically silenced.

The layers of silencing may also contribute to focusing on the tragedies rather than the successes. The fact that many students emerge with such strength and power must not be over looked or minimized. More likely, students experience school in a paradoxical mix of empowerment and conflict. The challenge for educators, as well as social workers, psychologists, and anyone else concerned about youths, is to work to understand the socioemotional context in which students exist and provide resources for overcoming and dismantling the systems that lead to silencing and victimization while supporting resources that build equity. Fourteen-year-old Sally sums up the contradiction of developing strength in response to systematic silencing:

One teacher told me it was normal. Also, a hot line told me it was normal. Sometimes I get sick of hearing it’s normal because if it’s normal, why do people make such a big deal out of it?
CHAPTER 10


15. Grayson, "Emerging Equity Issues."


21. Ibid.

22. Trenchard, Talking about Young Lesbians, 12.


26. Rubin, "Thinking Sex."

27. Fine, "Sexuality, Schooling, and Adolescent Females."


31. Dennis and Harlow, "Gay Youth and the Right to Education," 475.


41. Savin-Williams, Gay and Lesbian Youth.

42. Ibid., 5.

43. Ibid.


46. Ibid.


48. Ibid., 76.


70. Ibid.


73. Neisen, "Heterosexism."

74. Martin, "Learning to Hide."

75. Hunter and Schaecher, "Stresses."


78. Hunter and Schaecher, "Stresses."


80. Schneider and Tremble, "Gay or Straight?" 78.


82. Malyon, "The Homosexual Adolescent."


86. K. McCaffree, personal communication, 12 December 1990.