

Beyond **the Queer**
aLphabet:

**Conversations on
Gender, Sexuality and
Intersectionality**

Edited by
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Beyond the Queer Alphabet: Conversations on Gender, Sexuality & Intersectionality

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Beyond The Queer Alphabet

Teaching Equity Matters E-Book Series

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List of Abbreviations

ACT UP	AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power
AARGH	Artists Against Rampant Government Homophobia
AML	Association for Media Literacy (AML)
APA	American Psychological Association
DSD	Disorder of Sex Development
EGALE	Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere
FTM (F2M)	Female to Male Transsexual or Transgender Person
GID	Gender Identity Disorder
GLAAD	Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation
GLSEN	Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network
GSA	Gay-Straight Alliances
HRC	Human Rights Campaign
HTP	Homophobic and Transphobic
IGB	It Gets Better
ISNA	Intersex Society of North America (Accord Alliance)
LGBT	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgendered
LGBTIQ2-S	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgendered Queer Intersex 2-Spirited
LGBTTIQQ2SA	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transsexual Transgender Intersex Queer Questioning 2-Spirited and Allies
LGBTTQ	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgendered Two-Spirited Queer
LGBTQ	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgendered Queer
LGBTQAAI2-S	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgendered Queer Asexual Allies Intersex 2-Spirited
LGBTQIA	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgendered Queer Intersex Asexual
LGBTQIQ	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgendered Queer Intersex Questioning

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MCCT	Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto
MSGI	Minority Sexual and Gender Identities
MTF (M2F)	Male-to-Female Transsexual or Transgender Person
PFLAG	Parents Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays
QPOC	Queer People of Colour
SA	Straight Allies
SMUG	Sexual Minorities Uganda
SOCE	Sexual Orientation Change Efforts
SVR	Sexuality, Vulnerability, Resistance
TDSB	Toronto District School Board
TS	Transsexual
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
2-T	Two-spirited

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Preface and Acknowledgements

This e-book, *Beyond the Queer Alphabet: Conversations on Gender, Sexuality & Intersectionality*, emerges from two interrelated blog series on bullying and on LGBTQI2-S (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer, intersex and 2-Spirited) issues. We hope that the conversion of the blog series into an e-book will increase the social impact and portability of these important contributions to conversations about equity, diversity and social justice. One of the most important uses of the Equity Matters series on the Fedcan Blog is in teaching and learning. The blog's content is open access and readily linked to e-courses both in Canada and internationally. Many university teachers from across Canada regularly reported that they were using the LGBTQI2-S entries, as all the Equity Matters entries, for teaching and learning; this open access e-book also provides a handy resource for teachers in K-12 and university teachers. We also hope that this open access e-book reaches wider audiences, and alerts diverse publics to the work of the individual scholars, their research, and public intellectual and community engagement.

One impetus for the interrelated *Equity Matters* blog series on cyberbullying, harassment, and bullying-suicide, and on intersectional diversity *among* lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer, intersex, and 2-Spirited peoples – was an email from Ryan Saxby-Hill and Pierre Normand of the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences Communications team. Gay-bashing and cyberbullying had taken the life of yet another young person, this time 18-year old Rutgers University talented music student Tyler Clementi. How did I, in my capacity as vice-president, Equity Issues, want to comment? Given the spate of bullying-suicides that had taken the lives of so many young people in the United States and Canada, and the stories emerging from Uganda, Mexico, Australia and elsewhere, the Clementi story signalled the need for a more sustained attention to the human dignity and inalienable rights of LGBTQI2-S people. My initial response was “Queering In/Equality: LGBT Youth It Gets Better,” which was posted to the Fedcan Blog in October 2010.

Given the magnitude of the challenge of homophobia, transphobia and bullying-suicide, a one-off response was clearly not enough. Social media (blogs, Twitter, Facebook, podcasts) reach a diverse public and are an important vehicle for raising awareness and educating on equity, diversity, and social inclusion. Thus, from that initial event and e-mail emerged the idea for editing a blog series. There was an overwhelmingly positive response to my personal invitation to dozens of scholars, public officials and activists across Canada asking them both to contribute to a blog series and to recommend other potential contributors to me.

In the Fall of 2010 a mini-series on hate crimes, bullying and human rights, and bullying in schools and the workplace ran on the blog. The initial blog series aimed to do several things: first, to raise awareness of bullying and violence on the lives of LGBTQI2-S people, the impact on dignity, health and wellbeing and even on life itself; second, to enhance public education on the dignity and human rights of LGBTQI2-S peoples; third, to advance equity, diversity and social justice in Canada and abroad; and, fourth, to provide an open access resource for teaching and learning both in schools and in higher education.

Thoughtful and timely pieces were written by some of Canada's leading researchers, including Brian Burch, Rebecca Haskell, Lucas Crawford, Robert Nichols, Kris Wells, Wendy Craig, Joanne Cummings, Debra Pepler and Elsie Hambrook. Many of these entries eloquently spoke about the need to confront hate crimes, homophobia and transphobia –as well as the need to go beyond these issues in order to achieve a deeper understanding of resilience and the kinds of education and hard

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work needed to achieve equity across and within diverse LGBTQI2-S communities. This call to ‘go beyond’ phobias suggests a new orientation in what and how we address gender, gender identity and sexual diversity and, especially, intersectionality within the LGBTQI2-S communities in Canada and internationally.

From Blog to E-Book

The conversion of the blog series into an e-book is also the logical next step in the transfer of knowledge to our students and to various publics and, at the same time, to increase scholarly and social impact of equity and diversity research. Recognition of the social impact of the blogs, as social media generally, is growing. One result of the outreach effort to the social science and humanities community was the creation of an informal network of researchers who committed to write thoughtful entries for the series and, if they were unable to do so, to recommend others.

A second outcome of the outreach was the identification and building of an important and timely virtual network of senior and new scholars who are among the leading thinkers on LGBTQI2-S issues in Canada and internationally. This e-book, *Beyond the Queer Alphabet: Conversations on Gender, Sexuality & Intersectionality* comprises the work of 30 diverse scholars from some 15 social sciences and humanities disciplines, located in over a dozen universities in Canada, the United States, and Australia.

The e-book also embodies the insights that emerged from various social media conversations with diverse communities of interest in gender, sexual diversity, queer intersectionality and critical diversity studies. The productive conversations between and among the contributors, as each blog was posted, traversed a wide array of topics related to sex, sexuality, sexual orientation, gender and gender identity. The conversations also sought to complicate our idea of the ‘normal’ or ‘severely normal’ queer by insisting on an intersectional analysis that engages race, disability, class, age and other dimensions of human difference. In the blog series, as in this e-book, contributors stress the important role that schools and institutions of higher education play in advancing knowledge, a scholarship of engagement, and a more empathetic global citizenship.

The essays engage various ideas of ‘going beyond’ conventional thinking, practices and ways of being in order to imagine more humane ways of engaging each other in our everyday thinking and practices. One iteration of ‘going beyond’ relates to engagement with the queer alphabet – the multiple and overlapping meanings of the L-word, or the T-tensions, or the Q-questions and whether and how I-belongs. Undoubtedly the letters in the queer alphabet have multiplied over the past decades – from LG, LGB, LGBT and QLGBT to LGBTQI2-S, LGBTTIQQ2SA, among others. We’ve made an effort to map many of these acronyms in the List of Acronyms & Abbreviations. The essays also entail going beyond inclusion-as-sameness to a more substantive conception of equity as engaging and respecting human difference. And it especially encourages going beyond attention to LGBTQI2-S issues only in moments of outrageous acts of hate crimes, bullying, violence and crisis.

This e-book is organized in three parts. Part I is entitled, “The Queer Alphabet and Beyond” and includes nine essays that take up the ‘queer alphabet’ and ‘queer vocabulary’ from A to Z. Following Sirma Bilge and Rinaldo Walcott, the essays call for a queer intersectionality and critical diversity praxis in everyday interactions with persons who are different from us. Part II, entitled, “Resisting Closets: Hate, Bullying and Violence,” includes nine articles that explore semiotic, cyber and physical violence and the ways in which these are experienced and resisted. Part III, “Building Resilience:

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'Towards a More Inclusive Education,'" contains eight articles that map the critical role of education and the most productive ways of thinking and learning about and teaching equity matters.

Through this process, doctoral and postdoctoral students were able to connect with senior scholars working in areas of their research, and senior and new scholars alike were able to get constructive feedback on their ideas, share arguments from their new or forthcoming books and participate in a virtual conversation on effecting social change. As well, through this process, some scholars were invited to contribute to research projects, international conference panels, and edited books. This generosity and collegiality continued as each blog was posted. After each posting I shared an excerpt and the blog's link with an interdisciplinary virtual network of some fifty to sixty diverse scholars. These scholars also shared the entries via their social media networks – Twitter, Facebook, blogs, discussion forums – to further transfer knowledge and, in turn, fuel the astonishing growth in the blog's readership.

Like the initial blog series, this e-book is possible because scholars across the social sciences and humanities generously shared their time, research and knowledge. In particular, I want to extend a personal thanks to each contributor, as many others who could not contribute but took the time to connect me to other colleagues and students. Much appreciation is due to scholars who generously shared their networks, including Janine Brodie, Brian Burtch, Gloria Filax, Fatima Jaffer, Cressida Heyes, Gada Mahrouse, Catherine Murray, Donna Pennee, Richard Sullivan and Rinaldo Walcott.

This e-book is also the result of an everyday, often invisible, collaborative relationship with the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences' Communication staff in the Ottawa Secretariat. I especially want to thank the Directors and staff in the Ottawa Secretariat, including three people who have moved on: Pierre Normand was the Communications Director to whom I first proposed launching Equity Matters on the Fedcan Blog; and Caitlin Kealey and Ryan Saxby-Hill were two of the fabulous people with whom I initially worked. Since becoming the new Director of Policy and Communications, Alison Hebbs, along with Policy Analyst Karen Diepeveen, have vigorously promoted the Equity Matters series, while building the Fedcan Blog's brand in Canada and internationally. Each week Norman Forgues-Roy or Milena Stanoeva posted the blog entries that I invited, edited and forwarded to the Secretariat. I am deeply grateful to them for the collaboration, which has contributed to the astonishing success of the Equity Matters series.

Finally, this e-book has benefited in indelible ways from countless hours of fact and footnote-checking and the timely assistance of my talented undergraduate researcher, Eréndira Cervantes-Altamirano. I am also deeply grateful to my co-editor, Fatima Jaffer, who is known to many readers as the former editor of Canada's national feminist newspaper, *Kinesis*. This final work emerges from many early morning and late night telephone calls, text messages and virtual conversations with both Eréndira and Fatima. We hope readers will find this e-book a valuable resource.

Malinda S. Smith
Edmonton, Alberta
17 March 2012

PART I

THE QUEER ALPHABET & BEYOND

1

Queering In/Equality: LGBTQ, ‘It Gets Better’ and Beyond

Malinda S. Smith, University of Alberta

The increase in lesbian, gay and bisexual characters on primetime television not only reflects the shift in ... culture toward greater awareness and understanding of our community but also a new industry standard that a growing number of creators and networks are adopting.

The above hope for greater awareness and understanding of the diverse LGBTQ community is, at least, the desire of Jarrett Barrios,¹ president of the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD). Arguably there is a disjuncture between visual and virtual equality and the everyday lived experiences of many LGBTQ and Two-Spirited people.² This other reality – marked by bullying, persecution and violence – has been brought home by the recent spate of LGBTQ gay-bashing and youth suicides.

If popular culture was our principal guide then one might be forgiven for thinking it’s ‘in’ to be ‘out’. There is definitely a rapacious appetite for the glamorous camp and chic of queer, including the gender bending antics of Lady Gaga and American Idol contestant Adam Lambert. It is hard to miss the visibility – even hyper-visibility – of LGBTQ characters on television and the big screen, from gay characters in Hollywood movies like *Brokeback Mountain* to a wide range of ‘gay films.’ Ryan Murphy is an openly gay director/writer on the Emmy-winning musical comedy-drama *Glee*, which also features the ‘out’ character Kurt. The main protagonist in the popular vampire show, *True Blood* is a bisexual character Sookie Stackhouse played by Winnipeg-born Anna Paquin, and the show has featured at least six gay characters.

For five seasons *The L-Word* prominently featured lesbian, gay and trans characters including Jennifer Beals as Bette Porter and Cybil Shepherd as Phyllis Kroll. Following in the path of Sean Hayes who played a camp gay dad of a teen son on *Will & Grace* – the most successful show with principal gay characters – Jesse Tyler Ferguson and Eric Stonestreet are cast in *Modern Family* as gay dads in a multiracial family (their baby Lily was adopted from Vietnam).

These diverse representations do help to humanize LGBTQ and Two-Spirited peoples. Television characters may chart the possibilities and complexities of LGBTQ lives, but such popular depictions are not cases of art imitating life. Visual and virtual equality may radically differ from the everyday. Visibility may, at times, mask the everyday challenges of coming out, especially for youth.

The suicide deaths of American students, Justin Aaburg, Cody Barker, Asher Brown, Raymond Chase, Tyler Clementi, Billy Lucas and Seth Walsh speak to the violence and social exclusion experienced by LGBTQ and Two-Spirited youth in a society characterized by homophobia. In Canada, lesbian youths Chantal Dube and Jeanine Blanchette called friends to say goodbye, wrote

¹ World Entertainment News Network. (2010, September 30). GLAAD Praises “True Blood” and “Glee” for Gay Portrayal. *Aceshowbiz*. Retrieved from <http://www.aceshowbiz.com/news/view/w0006764.html>

² Two-Spirit. (2013, February 24). Retrieved February 24 from Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two-Spirit>

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pain-filled notes for family members – then committed suicide. Death was seen as better than the life they were living.

“These tragedies remind us that while society is working to eliminate prejudice on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans-identified (LGBT) youth still experience overwhelming adversity and many do not see a hopeful future ahead,” argues Cherie MacLeod, Executive Director of Parents Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) Canada.³

For years, groups like PFLAG have worked to educate teachers and administrators about the harmful impact of bullying and schoolyard violence against LGBT and Two-Spirited youth. PFLAG data shows:⁴

- 51 percent of trans-identified persons attempt suicide;
- 30 percent of youth suicides are LGBTQ or Two-Spirited;
- 26 percent of LGBTQ and Two-Spirited youth are told to leave home.
- LGBTQ and Two-spirited youth are more likely than peers to be homeless.

School clubs such as Gay-Straight Alliances⁵ have developed initiatives to educate peers about homophobia but the challenges often exceed the capacity, as many of these programs are small, voluntary and under-resourced. Numerous videos and documentaries⁶ have been produced to help teachers deal with combating homophobia in the classroom and bullying in cyberspace.⁷

Teen suicides tell us that much more needs to be done. In September 2010, 18-year old Tyler Clementi jumped off the George Washington Bridge after his university roommate virally distributed a video of him having sex with another man. His last message was posted to Facebook:

“Jumping off the gw bridge, sorry.” His tormentors were charged with invading his privacy but their actions, so banal, also revealed a stunning indifference to Clementi’s humanity. In a statement by Garden State Equality, Steven Goldstein named the devastating impact of homophobia on human life and talents: “We are heartbroken over the tragic loss of a young man who, by all accounts, was brilliant, talented and kind. And we are sickened that anyone in our society, such as the students allegedly responsible for making the surreptitious video, might consider destroying others’ lives as a sport.”⁸

It’s hard to believe it was only a year ago that federal hate crime legislation in the United States was expanded to include gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and disability. President Barack

³ PFLAG Canada. (2009). Home. Retrieved from <http://www.pflagcanada.ca/en/index-e.php>

⁴ PFLAG Canada. (2009). Home. Retrieved from <http://www.pflagcanada.ca/en/index-e.php>

⁵ Vancouver School Board. (2010). VSB committed to combating homophobia in school. Retrieved from <http://www.vsb.bc.ca/district-news/vsb-committed-combating-homophobia-school>

⁶ Queer Resource Directory, Ferris State University, Office of Diversity and Inclusion. Retrieved from <http://www.qrd.org/qrd/>

⁷ The Huffington Post. (2012). Antigay Bullying. Retrieved from <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/tag/antigay-bullying>

⁸ US student Tyler Clementi jumps to his death over sex video. (2010, September 30). *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/sep/30/us-student-tyler-clementi-death>

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Obama signed the *Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act*⁹ in October 2009. Young men such as Ruddy Vargas-Perez and eight other youth gang members were arrested by New York City police for the brutal beating, torture and acts of sodomy inflicted for hours upon three men before murdering them. Why? Because in the gang members' twisted belief system – their homophobia – it was socially permissible to torment, abuse, torture and even kill those who are gay.

In one of the latest efforts to reaffirm the human rights and dignity of LGBTQ people Dan Savage created a viral video campaign with one important message: “It Gets Better”. In explaining the campaign, Savage notes:

“Billy Lucas was just 15 when he hanged himself in a barn on his grandmother’s property. He reportedly endured intense bullying at the hands of his classmates — classmates who called him a fag and told him to kill himself. His mother found his body... I wish I could have talked to this kid for five minutes. I wish I could have told Billy that it gets better. I wish I could have told him that, however bad things were, however isolated and alone he was, *it gets better.*”¹⁰

The world for young people is challenging as it is, and even more so for LGBTQ and Two-Spirited youth who face harassment, alienation, and depression. In academe, we do have a responsibility to educate, including about the dangers of inequity, hate, violence and social exclusion. University-community programs like Camp fyrefly¹¹ aim to empower youth by helping them build personal resiliency and leadership skills. Similarly, initiatives like Interaction¹² develop and disseminate knowledge on Two-spirited peoples in Indigenous history and culture. We must also expose the cynicism that allows leaders to claim they support equal rights yet sanction discrimination through public policies that engender ‘separate but equal’ social worlds, as in the case of policies like ‘Don’t Ask Don’t Tell.’¹³

I don’t know how effective the *It Gets Better* social media campaign will turn out to be. But I do know that some of the most inspired efforts to combat homophobia and hate crimes against LGBTQ have come from activists, artists and film-makers, such as Artists Against Rampant Government Homophobia (AARGH)¹⁴ and the Embracing Intersectional Diversity Project.¹⁵ The *It Gets Better*¹⁶ campaign builds on these earlier efforts and it includes a YouTube channel,¹⁷ video clips on

⁹ Belge, K. (n.d.). What the Matthew Shepard Hate Crimes Act and how will it help gays an⁹d lesbians?. *About.com*. Retrieved from <http://lesbianlife.about.com/od/lesbianactivism/f/HateCrimes.htm>

¹⁰ It Gets Better. (2012). It Gets Better Project. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/itgetsbetterproject>

¹¹ ISMSS. (2012). Camp Fyrefly. Retrieved from <http://www.fyrefly.ualberta.ca/index.htm>

¹² McGill Project Interaction. (2012). Two-Spirited People. Retrieved from <http://www.mcgill.ca/interaction/mission/twospirit/>

¹³ Lesbiangayvideos. (2010, March 31). !!Larry King> Lady gaga Repeal Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell!!! [Podcast]. Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9G_UuxbWSA

¹⁴ AARGH (Artists Against Rampant Government Homophobia). (2011, September 30). Retrieved February 24, 2012 from Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AARGH_%28Artists_Against_Rampant_Government_Homophobia%29

¹⁵ Embracing Intersectional Diversity Project, Vimeo: <http://vimeo.com/channels/eidproject>

¹⁶ It Gets Better. (2012). *It Gets Better Project*. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/itgetsbetterproject>

¹⁷ It Gets Better. (2012). *It Gets Better Project*. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/itgetsbetterproject>

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Mashable¹⁸ and blogs. There are inspiring video messages from celebrities¹⁹ such as the cast of *Wicked*,¹⁹ Ellen DeGeneres,²⁰ Sarah Silverman, and Eve. The power of many of these videos is the compelling storytelling of celebrities who experienced homophobia as youth, struggled to survive and found a way to make their lives better.

Let's not kid ourselves. We know there are actors, professional athletes, politicians, and corporate executives who remain in the closet for fear of stigma and sanction. Things may get better. But that better world is some distance from the one in which we currently live. In the meantime, our challenge as humanists and educators is to mobilize every means necessary to engender a world in which life is worth living for LGBTQ and Two-Spirited people.

¹⁸ Five Inspiring Celebrity Videos Tell Gay Teens “*It Gets Better.*” (2010). *Mashable US & World*. Retrieved from http://mashable.com/2010/10/03/it-gets-better-youtube-videos/#_B-hVWQnjjM

¹⁹ Five Inspiring Celebrity Videos Tell Gay Teens “*It Gets Better.*” (2010). *Mashable US & World*. Retrieved from http://mashable.com/2010/10/03/it-gets-better-youtube-videos/#_B-hVWQnjjM

²⁰ Five Inspiring Celebrity Videos Tell Gay Teens “*It Gets Better.*” (2010). *Mashable US & World*. Retrieved from http://mashable.com/2010/10/03/it-gets-better-youtube-videos/#_B-hVWQnjjM

2

Developing Intersectional Solidarities: A Plea for Queer Intersectionality

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Contemporary progressive politics of protest frequently face a problem of legitimacy, authority and representation. Since at least the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, antiracist, anticolonial feminists and queer activists have taken issue with the politics of representation and the problem of speaking for/about others. Scholars like Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak²¹ and Linda Alcoff²² have urged us to acknowledge that systemic disparities in social location between those who speak and those who are spoken for have significant effects on the content of what is said.

Today, the elisions and exclusions that most contemporary progressive movements prompt in their claims-making receive almost immediate critique. Innovative new information and communications technological platforms enable both the viral explosion of these movements as well as their (internal) critiques from those who are marginalized, excluded, misrepresented, tokenized or erased in political struggles.

Consider the following examples of the SlutWalk,²³ the *It Gets Better* Project,²⁴ and Occupy Wall Street.²⁵ Although there is growing sympathy for these movements, in all three cases voices have been raised to deplore how well-intentioned movements inadvertently (re)produce oppression along one or several axes of power – even while attempting to combat it along other axes. In their attempts to contest domination and redress injustice, all three of these movements have been criticized for their failure to take into account the multiple and co-constitutive makeup of power/privilege complex, with its interlocking structural and ideological underpinnings.

Put simply, these social movements – SlutWalk, the *It Gets Better* Project and Occupy Wall Street – were criticized for their lack of intersectional political awareness, and very rightly so. In one of the worst-case scenarios, this lack of awareness was illustrated this past October first by white marchers at the SlutWalk NYC. They were brandishing a placard that said, “Woman is the n*gger of the

²¹ Spivak, G. Chakravorty (2007). *Can the Subaltern Speak?*. Wien: Turia & Kant.

²² Roof, J. & Wiegman, R. (Eds). (1995). *Who Can Speak? Authority and Critical Identity*. Illinois: University of Illinois Press.

²³ Slutwalk. (2011, December 26). Retrieved January 12, 2012 from Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SlutWalk>

²⁴ Itgetsbetterproject. (2004, September 16). It Gets Better Project. It Gets Better Project channel. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/user/itgetsbetterproject>

²⁵ Occupy Wall Street. (2012, January 12). Retrieved January 12, 2012 from Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Occupy_Wall_Street

world²⁶.” Although the slogan was a reference to the 1972 Lennon/Ono song,²⁷ it soon became apparent that social movements *still* could provide a platform for making much decried parallels between gender and race that black feminists deftly deconstructed some decades ago. Hazel Carby,²⁸ for example, offered a perceptive critique of such analogies over two decades ago:

The experience of black women does not enter the parameters of parallelism. The fact that black women are subject to *simultaneous* oppression of patriarchy, class and ‘race’ is the prime reason for not employing parallels that render their position and experience not only marginal but also invisible.



Three decades later, there is still a lack of intersectional analysis evident among some white protesters: There were N-word signs carried by at least two white protesters at the SlutWalk NYC rally. The signs seem to make claims in the name of a (universal) woman, by mobilizing the N-word in the fight against sexism and violence against women. Such developments disturbingly remind us that the “white solipsism” decried by Adrienne Rich²⁹ in her 1979 piece, “Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism, Gynephobia,” persists in contemporary feminisms. It still leads to single issue

²⁶ Quintero, S. (2011, October 13). They’re Going to Laugh at You: White Women, Betrayal, and the N-Word. [Blog Entry]. Retrieved from <http://www.racialicious.com/2011/10/13/theyre-going-to-laugh-at-you-white-women-betrayal-and-the-n-word/>

²⁷ Peterson, L. (2011, October 6). Slutwalk, Slurs, and Why Feminism still has Race Issues. [Blog Entry]. Retrieved from <http://www.racialicious.com/2011/10/06/slutwalk-slurs-and-why-feminism-still-has-race-issues/>

²⁸ Carby, H. V. (1982). White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood. In Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Ed.), *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s* (211-234). Birmingham: Routledge.

²⁹ Rich, A. (1995). *On Lies, Secrets and Silence*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

politics and as Kimberly Crenshaw³⁰ has argued in her 1993 article, “Beyond Racism and Misogyny: Black Feminism and 2 Live Crew,” “political strategies that challenge only certain subordinating practices while maintaining existing hierarchies [which] not only marginalize those who are subject to multiple systems of subordination but also often result in oppositionalizing race and gender discourses.”

The unspoken racial habitus of SlutWalk, white privilege, has been powerfully unravelled from black feminist and black queer/lesbian perspectives, which explain, once again, why women of colour cannot re-appropriate the term ‘slut’ the way white women in the movement seem able to do. The interlocking social challenges faced by Black women are not reducible to a question of dress.

In an “Open Letter from Black Women to the SlutWalk,”³¹ issued by the Blackwomen’s Blueprint on the 23 September 2011, the organization noted:

The way in which we are perceived and what happens to us before, during and after sexual assault crosses the boundaries of our mode of dress. Much of this is tied to our particular history. In the United States, where slavery constructed Black female sexualities, Jim Crow kidnappings, rape and lynchings, gender misrepresentations, and more recently, where the Black female immigrant struggle combine, ‘slut’ has different associations for Black women. We do not recognize ourselves nor do we see our lived experiences reflected within SlutWalk, and especially not in its brand and its label.

As Black women we do not have the privilege or the space to call ourselves ‘slut’ without validating the already historically entrenched ideology and recurring messages about what and who the Black woman is. We don’t have the privilege to play on destructive representations burned in our collective minds, on our bodies and souls for generations.

In another critique, “SlutWalk a Stroll Through White Supremacy,”³² Aura Blogando points out that, “We do not come from communities in which it feels at all harmless to call ourselves ‘sluts.’ Aside from that, our skin color, not our style of dress, often signifies slut-hood to the white gaze.”

The *It Gets Better* Project (IGB) has generated similar critiques about the racial and class habitus shaping the movement and its single-issue politics against homophobia. The project seems to be predicated on the assumption that there is a universal experience of being bullied because of one’s non-heteronormative sexuality.

In an incisive commentary, “In the wake of It Gets Better,”³³ Jasbir Puar notes that projects like IGB “risk producing such narrow versions of what it means to be gay, and what it means to be

³⁰ Matsuda, M.J., Lawrence III, C.R., Delgado, R., & Williams Crenshaw, K. (1993). *Word That Wound: Critical Race Theory, Assaultive Speech and the First Amendment*. Colorado: Westview Press.

³¹ An Open Letter from Black Women to SlutWalk September 23, 2011. (2011, September 26). [Blog Entry]. Retrieved from <http://www.womanist-musings.com/2011/09/open-letter-from-black-women-to.html>

³² SlutWalk: A Stroll Through White Supremacy. (2011, May 13). [Blog Entry]. Retrieved from <http://tothecurb.wordpress.com/>

³³ Puar, J. (2010, November 16). In the Wake of It Gets Better. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/cifamerica/2010/nov/16/wake-it-gets-better-campaign?showallcomments=true#comment-fold>

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bullied, that for those who cannot identify with it but are nevertheless still targeted for 'being different,' It Gets Better might actually contribute to Making Things Worse.”

The IGB project is chided for its lack of attention to difference and even for irresponsibility because it has ignored the effects of racism on how bullying and homophobia takes shape in the lives of those who are bullied. The need for an intersectional analysis has been powerfully argued by Latoya Peterson,³⁴ the Editor of *Racialicious*, in “Where is the Proof that It Gets Better?: Queer POC and the Solidarity Gap.” As well, IGB’s shortcomings in intersectional political analyses have led to the emergence of alternative projects, such as the video campaign launched by Canadian qpoocs (queer people of color) and explicitly named the *Embracing Intersectional Diversity Project*.³⁵

Similarly, as inspiring as it may seem for many, the Occupy Wall Street movement has engendered well-founded critiques³⁶ from an anti-colonialist and Indigenous perspective. In particular, the movement has been called to account for its propensity to further the cause of “ending capitalism” by inadvertently trampling on the rights of others, including corroding the rights of Indigenous peoples. As Jessica Yee observes in her article “Occupy Wall Street: The game of colonialism and further nationalism to be decolonized from the ‘Left,’”³⁷ the ‘occupy’ metaphor resonates differently for those activists, such as Indigenous peoples, whose land is already occupied. This difference is especially pronounced when the fact of occupation is conveniently forgotten or even denied within progressive movements claiming trans-solidarities.

The paucity of intersectional political consciousness is evident in the still influential single-oppression framework, despite loud declarations of commitment to diversity and solidarity. Stephanie Gilmore³⁸ in, “Am I Troy Davis? A Slut?; or, What’s Troubling Me about the Absence of Reflexivity in Movements that Proclaim Solidarity,” contends that the tendency to subordinate multiply-minoritized groups and the various forms of marginalization and silencing they face – through denial, displacement, misidentification, cooptation or tokenism within progressive political struggles can be addressed by a radical engagement in critical dialogues between queer theory and intersectionality.

Let me elaborate further how intersectionality and queer theory can complement and challenge each other and, further, why it is crucial to uphold and extend a dialogue between them in order to firm up a critical ethos and ethics of non-oppressive politics of coalition. Following Stacey Douglas, Suhraiya Jivraj and Sarah Lamble’s “Liabilities of Queer Antiracist Critique” we may call this

³⁴ Peterson, L. (2010, October 19). Where is the Proof that It Gets Better? Queer POC and the Solidarity Gap. [Blog Entry]. Retrieved from <http://www.racialicious.com/2010/10/19/where-is-the-proof-that-it-gets-better-queer-poc-and-the-solidarity-gap/>

³⁵ Embracing Intersectional Diversity Project. (2011). In *Tomee Sojourner*. Retrieved from <http://www.tomeesojourner.com/Creative-Projects/creative-projects.html>

³⁶ Montano, J. (2011, September 24). An Open Letter to the Occupy Wall Street Activists. [Blog Entry]. Retrieved from <http://mzzainal-straten.blogspot.com/2011/09/open-letter-to-occupy-wall-street.html>

³⁷ Yee, J. (2011, September 30). Occupy Wall Street: The Game of Colonialism and further nationalism to be decolonized from the “Left.” [Blog Entry]. Retrieved from <http://www.racialicious.com/2011/09/30/occupy-wall-street-the-game-of-colonialism-and-further-nationalism-to-be-decolonized-from-the-left/>

³⁸ Gilmore, S. (n.d.). “Am I Try Davis? A Slut?; or, What’s Troubling Me about the Absence of Reflexivity in Movements that Proclaim Solidarity.” [Blog Entry]. Retrieved from <http://afrolez.tumblr.com/post/11232563013/am-i-troy-davis-a-slut-or-whats-troubling-me>

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approach ‘queer intersectionality’ or ‘queer anti-racist critique.’ What is foundational, they insist, is the refusal to separate “questions of gender, sexuality and queerness, from questions of raciality and racialisation. This form of intersectional critique serves as a tool for building spaces and movements that are committed to interrogating gender and sexuality norms, whilst simultaneously identifying, challenging, and countering the overt and embedded forms of racism that shape them.”³⁹

If intersectionality can help ground queer theory into lived experiences and struggles where categories such as sexuality, class or race are contested as well as redress the evacuation of the social, then queer scholarship has a definite potential to counteract the dilution of intersectionality within neoliberal diversity mainstreaming.⁴⁰ This is true as long as what is understood as queer is not built upon an exclusive focus on, or privileging of, sexuality within identity/diversity politics. Instead, queer⁴¹ must be understood as a political metaphor without a predetermined referent that serves to challenge institutional forces normalizing and commodifying difference.

The kind of queer intersectionality I plea for builds on the remarkable pioneering work accomplished by queer scholars of color, such as Roderick Ferguson, David Eng, José Muñoz, Jasbir Puar, Jin Haritaworn, Fatima El-Tayeb, and Gayatri Gopinath. It can be seen as the outgrowth of reciprocal challenges and productive tensions between an *intersectionalized queer*⁴² and a *queered* intersectionality. Such a theoretical and political project requires that we analyse what is “queer about queer studies”⁴³ and that “queer epistemologies not only rethink the relationship between intersectionality and normalization from multiple points of view, but also, and equally important, consider how gay and lesbian rights are being reconstituted as a type of reactionary (identity) politics of national and global consequence.”

As persuasively argued by Douglas, Jivraj and Lamble, “[s]exuality, in the form of gay rights, is increasingly taken up by both liberal and conservative forces as a dominant marker of ‘western values’, which then serves as a key trope in the global war against terror and a pawn in the demise of even the most assimilationist notions of state multiculturalism.”⁴⁴ In the contemporary cultural and political climate, the need for a critical project – for a queer intersectionality and solidarities – is as important as ever.

³⁹ Douglas, S., Jivraj, S. & Lamble, S. (2011). Liabilities of Queer Anti-Racist Critique. *Feminist Legal Studies*, 19 (2), 107-118. Doi: 10.1007/s10691-011-9181-6

⁴⁰ Ward, J. (2008). *Respectably Queer: Diversity in LGTB Activist Organizations*. Tennessee: Vanderbilt University Press.

⁴¹ Ward, J. (2008). *Respectably Queer: Diversity in LGTB Activist Organizations*. Tennessee: Vanderbilt University Press.

⁴² Johnson, P.E., and Henderson, M.G. (Eds.). (2005). *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*. North Carolina: Duke University Press.

⁴³ Eng, D.L., Halberstam, J. & Muñoz, E. (2005). *What's Queer about Queer Studies Now?*. North Carolina: Duke University Press.

⁴⁴ Johnson, P.E., and Henderson, M.G. (Eds.). (2005). *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*. North Carolina: Duke University Press.

3

Queering the Language of ‘Sexual Minorities’ in Canada

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The term ‘sexual minorities,’ said to have been coined by Lars Ullerstam in the late 1960s, is now experiencing a resurrection. It is being used by Canadian government agencies, and at the same time, gaining popularity in some of Canada’s LGB (lesbian, gay, bisexual) circles.

The return of the language of sexual minorities is indicative of the largely uncontested prevalence of liberal ‘equal rights’ politics within some LGB organizations and governmental institutions. But many Canadian activists and scholars argue that while the liberal equal rights framework may afford people formal protections, it does little to challenge common assumptions of acceptable sexuality and the ways in which heteronormativity⁴⁵ permeates society. As this discourse becomes increasingly normalized, it is important to consider the meaning and power of the language of sexual minorities and its accompanying political framework.

Using a queer analysis,⁴⁶ I argue that the discourse of ‘sexual minorities,’ and its liberal equal rights framework, is problematic because it espouses assimilationist politics; it does not question how or why particular sexualities are rendered abnormal or deviant; and it fails to challenge the existence or coherence of the supposed sexual majority.

Simply put, the concept of sexual minorities describes people who, based on their sexual conduct, orientation or lifestyle, are other than of the ‘heterosexual majority.’ Following liberal equal rights based politics, the concept ‘sexual minorities’ emulates the concept of ethnic minorities: both terms are used to demonstrate that their respective minorities are in need of state protection against the interests and wills of ethnic and sexual majorities. The University of Alberta’s Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services⁴⁷ opened in 2008. It defines ‘sexual minorities’ thusly:

“Sexual minorities are those persons who constitute a minority population due to differences in their sexual orientations and/or gender identities. Groups characterized as sexual minorities across sex, sexual, and gender differences include lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transsexuals, intersexuals, transgendered, and Two-Spirit Aboriginals. Section 15 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* protects sexual minorities against discrimination in Canadian culture and society.”

⁴⁵ Roseneil, S. (2007, May 29). Living and Loving Beyond the Heteronorm. In *Eurozine*. Retrieved from <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2007-05-29-roseneil-en.html>

⁴⁶ Valocchi, S. (2005). Not Yet Queer Enough: The Lessons of Queer Theory for the Sociology of Gender and Sexuality. *Gender & Society*, 19 (6), 750-770. Doi: 10.1177/0891243205280294.

⁴⁷ ISSMSS. (2011). Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services. Retrieved from <http://www.ismss.ualberta.ca/>

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The organization leans on the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*,⁴⁸ and makes the case that the *difference* of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transsexuals, intersexuals, transgendered and Two-Spirited citizens places them in a minority position and in need of protection.

In order to attain equality, oppressed groups must first prove that they are an identifiable group and, second, that they have been treated unequally – through abuse, neglect or the denial of certain rights and protections – when compared to or at the hands of the majority. The minorities in question are burdened with having to prove that they are victims of abuse, neglect and/or inequality because of their (supposed) biological and thus immutable identities.

The term sexual minority was moderately popular when it emerged in the late 1960s. Its popularity waned however, as many scholars and activists began rejecting the mainstream, liberal equal rights project of some LGB organizations and accordingly opted for the more radical monikers of queer and/or sexual deviant.

Birthered in the 1990s, queer theory holds that sexuality should not be essentialized into strict identity categories because the meaning and categories of sexuality change and, moreover, vary over space and time. Queer theorists and activists accordingly argue that identity categories (such as lesbian, gay and bisexual) are normalized and that identity-based politics are confining and exclusionary. Yet, in recent times, the term sexual minorities is being used evermore, and often absent mindedly, by many Canadian governmental bodies and apparatuses, and LGB organizations.

The prevalence of the language of sexual minority is indicative of how naturalized and uncontested liberal equal rights discourse is within many North America's LGB social and political movements, and within state institutions as well. Arguably the term 'sexual minority' is more politically correct and palatable than its counterparts, which include the re-appropriated identifiers of sexual deviants and queers. Supposedly, the heterosexual majority will be more amenable to tolerating and accommodating the sexual minority than they will the indefinable and unruly queers.

But the term's digestibility is its ruin: First, using the language of sexual minorities shackles any debate about sexuality too tightly to liberal equal rights politics. Past and current equal rights campaigns certainly have assured some 'minority' populations serious and needed protections, in terms of employment, pay and housing rights and protections against abuses, mistreatment, or neglect. But in fighting for and eventually gaining these rights, minority populations are essentially asking to be accepted as part of the rights-bearing majority.

Diane Richardson⁴⁹ argues that since the 1990s, assimilationism has seen resurgence through mainstream gay and lesbian activism, most noticeably through the rhetoric of equal rights. As Richardson states regarding the current state of this faction of gay and lesbian activism: "This is a politics that by invoking – and simultaneously constituting – a 'gay movement' that seeks incorporation into the mainstream, rejects the earlier political language of women's, lesbian and gay liberation in favour of a 'lesbian and gay equality' rhetoric."

Steven Seidman⁵⁰ similarly argues that equal rights and minority rights language is reformist and assimilationist, rather than radical or revolutionary. Though he is speaking in reference to the current

⁴⁸ Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. (1982). Retrieved from <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/charter/>

⁴⁹ Richardson, D. (2005). Desiring Sameness? The Rise of a Neoliberal Politics of Normalization. *Antipode*, 37 (3), 515-535.

⁵⁰ Seidman, S. (2003). *Beyond the Closet: The Transformation of Gay and Lesbian Life*. New York: Routledge.

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state of American LGB movements, his observations are applicable to the equal rights and sexual minority agenda of some Canadian LGB groups and organizations:

These reformers do not wish to change America beyond altering the status of gays from outsider to citizen. An assimilationist agenda does not necessarily protest the dominant status of heterosexuality; it's about minority rights, not toppling the majority. Nor do these reformers wish to challenge the broader spectrum of sexual-intimate norms that govern behaviour, such as the norm of marriage, monogamy, or gender norms of sexuality. Assimilationists press America to live up to its promise of equal treatment of all of its citizens; they wish to be a part of what is considered a basically good nation; this requires reform, not revolution.

Although 'minority' groups have demonstrated their otherness to make equity claims, Mary Bernstein⁵¹ warns that the current mainstream lesbian and gay movement is abandoning its emphasis on being different from the 'straight majority' in favour of a moderate politics that highlights similarities to the straight majority. These groups are capitulating to a politics in which equality comes with acceptance and the quickest route to acceptance is assimilation. Formal but not substantive equality is granted once minorities are recognized (categorized), acknowledged (allowed to speak) and accepted (depoliticized). Ultimately, therefore, accommodation occurs on the terms of the majority.

Second, the term sexual minorities does not question how some sexualities are rendered deviant or abnormal. It merely assumes the position of being outside the majority. Contemporary, albeit contested, theories of sexuality posit that the majority of the population is heterosexual, therefore it is psychologically, developmentally and morally normal to be heterosexual (the logic seems circular because it is). By calling themselves sexual minorities, political groups are reaffirming the notion that the majority of the population is unshakably heterosexual, that sexuality should be pathologized as a fixed orientation or identity, and that any individual or group that does not fit the accepted criteria is abnormal and undeserving of certain rights and protections.

And third, the term gives the impression that there is a homogeneous sexual majority. But what exactly is the nature of the majority to which sexual minorities stand in opposition? Is there really a large, coherent majority of heterosexuals? Arguably, there are evermore people who do not espouse a heterosexual identity or lifestyle complete with traditional gender roles and monogamy till death. And it is not only the homosexuals or queers that stand outside this model but also those who are heterosexual, and whose sexuality is interpreted, constructed and treated differently because of their race, religion, ability, income and/or gender. Precisely because of their difference, such individuals have never completely belonged to the heterosexual majority. Thus, when we start adding up all the people who practice, espouse, support, are affected by or celebrate a sexuality other than those which are socially accepted and normalized, we are left with a large group indeed – a majority even.

While it is not surprising that Canadian government agencies are using the language of sexual minorities, it is of concern that a growing number of Canadian LGB organizations are choosing language and politics that are based on creating strict identity categories. This language excludes many Canadians who cannot or will not conform to society's normalized and accepted sexuality categories. Those who cannot easily assimilate are ignored or, worse yet, actively silenced by their supposed allies.

⁵¹ Bernstein, M. (2003). Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained? Conceptualizing Social Movement "Success" in the Lesbian and Gay Movement. *Sociological Perspectives*, 46 (3). Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/sop.2003.46.3.353>

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We must challenge the assumptions and language of our country's more powerful LGBTQ organizations, otherwise they will continue to monopolize discourse and public debates, and set restrictive priorities and agendas for Canada's sexually marginalized citizens.

4

Black Queer and Black Trans: Imagine Imagination Imaginary Futures

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Over the last few years I have had the opportunity to teach, to learn from and to learn with an incredible and impressive group of Black queer and Black Trans students. These students live and work at the interstices of communities, studies and politics and in each case they are often not imagined as belonging. In most cases they are rendered unbelievable. They, we, occupy the larger problem with which all Black people are faced -- that of being both unimaginable in the academy and simultaneously unbelievable. While the academy is a place that fosters the imagination in a wide variety of ways, especially in scholarship, the academy is also a place that lacks imagination when Black people show up in it. Black people seem to produce the limit of the academy's imagination, whether it is scholarship, policy, or just simple courtesies.

One of the many things that Black queer and Black Trans people learn very quickly in the academy is that none of the post-1960s' offices (Human Rights, LGBT, Disability, etc) can contain them, can address their issues and concerns and can adequately account for their presence as students, faculty and staff. These offices, policies and even studies, working tightly within the boundaries of, for example, LGBT identity, imagine their normative subject as always a queer Euro-Canadian subject. Thus the Black queer subject cannot be imagined to exist, nor can such a subject seek services, be written into scholarship, and be intelligible to and in policy.

The Black queer and Black Trans subject is indeed an unimaginable personhood, *un*believed as existing. To make the claim from the subjecthood of blackness that the academy lacks imagination when it comes to Black subjects, especially Black queer and Black Trans subjects, is not to cast aspersions on only the conservative side of the academy. Indeed many on the "progressive" side of the academy also find it difficult to imagine Black subjecthood. Many a scholar working on the difficult questions that the post-9/11 security culture has thrown up for us have consistently, and some might even say permanently, cast the Muslim body as a 'brown body,' making immediately absent and invisible, even unimaginable, a Black and or African Muslim body.

I have elliptically written about this particular problem elsewhere in the essay, "Reconstructing Black Manhood; Or The Drag of Black Masculinity."⁵² However, I revisit those ideas here to throw the net a bit wider in an attempt to demonstrate the depth of the problem that the Black queer subject, the Black Trans subject, and all Black people encounter in the Canadian academy. As the artist Abdi Osman⁵³ has powerfully shown, the limits of our imaginations have significant implications for our

⁵² Walcott, R. (2009). Reconstructing Manhood; or, The Drag of Black Masculinity. *Small Axe*, 13 (1), 75-89. Doi: 10.1215/07990537-2008-007

⁵³ Company for Collectors by Collectors. (2012). Abdi Osman. Retrieved from <http://www.welcometocompany.com/artist/abdi-osman>

politics of liberation, as I will demonstrate below. Let us take as our example the Black or African Muslim. How might we think about Muslim positionality in Euro-North America?

To help me do the work of thinking critically about the ways in which Muslim subjectivity is both always already present and simultaneously elided in North America we must confront what Waheema Lubiano calls the “failure of categories” in the foreword to Ronald Judy’s *(Dis)Forming the American Canon: African-Arabic Slave Narratives and the Vernacular*.⁵⁴ Both Judy’s study and Lubiano’s muscular engagement with the study’s limits and possibilities point to the contested nature of how blackness and Muslim-ness come to be in the colonial Americas.

Judy’s study makes use of “linguistic indeterminacy” as the premise of his investigation into how a Kantian, modernist Reason could not make sense of an enslaved Muslim presence, especially its representivity in Arabic, and in the practice of Islam, which had to be vigilantly denied and invalidated for Christian doctrine to endorse slavery. Thus all enslaved Africans had to be reduced to the non-religious, or the African practices of monotheism (in this case Islam) had to be ignored and denied since those practices troubled certain European reasons for African enslavement. Reading the Muslim presence then as much more than a mid-twentieth century one in North America presents a different kind of intervention. It is an intervention that blackens and thus complicates a number of histories, trajectories and politics. In this regard the Muslim presence has a far deeper and more extensive and complicated archive than is currently being accessed by both the Right and progressives alike.

This longer history and its elision haunt our contemporary conversations. Framed in this way, representivity is of utmost importance since the long history of Muslim presence in the Americas is in the first instance a Nigger, Negro or Black one. And, following Judy, it is a representivity that is both “linguistically foreign” and heterographic.⁵⁵ And it is crucially important to note it is a Black presence that speaks to the deeply profound ways in which the African body was not just stolen and made into a commodity but it was fundamentally denied that status of body in the first instance.

The Muslim body recently resignified as a ‘brown body’ in the context of post-9/11 discourses from a range of positions, has made recalling the longer history of a Nigger Muslim presence in the Americas crucial. The failure of the category ‘brown body’ to produce a thick representivity and performativity of Muslim-ness lends a certain indecipherability to Muslim-ness that might be productive for various kinds of interventions. Lubiano quarrels with Judy’s otherwise brilliant study for its inattentiveness to gender and in particular the gendered nature of Kantian Reason. I want to mobilize both Judy’s and Lubiano’s insights to position the queer images of the photographer Abdi Osman which mediate against the continued invocation of a ‘brown bodied’ Muslim as a failure to produce an adequate response to what Toni Morrison calls the “economy of stereotype.”⁵⁶

The Abdi Osman photographs reproduced below point to the limits of the imagination and offer a profound critique of contemporary conversations about Muslim representivity and performativity. These critical fictions require us to imagine a different kind of past, present and future. And since the photographs inscribe an iterative ‘queerness,’ the photographs call up the multiple ways in which the scholarship my students are creating attempts to produce a conversation in the Euro-Canadian

⁵⁴ Judy, R.A.T. (1993). *Disforming the American Canon: African-Arabic Slave Narratives and the Vernacular*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

⁵⁵ Heterographic. (n.d.). In *Encyclo Online Encyclopedia*. Retrieved from <http://www.encyclo.co.uk/define/Heterographic>

⁵⁶ Morrison, T. (1993). *Playing In The Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. USA: Vintage.

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academy that might make them believable on some plain of thought. They, us, seek to regain our bodies from failed imaginations and practices.

Photographs by the Artist Abdi Osman



© Abdi Osman, reprinted with permission of the artist.⁵⁷



© Abdi Osman, reprinted with permission of the artist.

⁵⁷ Ali Osman photos on Flickr: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/cfhss/6303037755/in/photostream>

Toward a critical diversity and social justice

These photographs ask us to confront what I have come to call ‘critical diversity.’ Critical diversity does not only work at the level of representational inclusion. Rather, critical diversity asks some difficult questions about inclusion and what inclusion signals and or means in each context. Critical diversity is about both the texture and the depth of diversity. And by taking into account the texture and depth of diversity, its critical balance and calculation comes into play.

Let me give an example of an ideal type of critical diversity. In the multicultural model it might be sufficient to have some form of Black representation, maybe even multiple forms. But with critical diversity those forms of multiple Black representations would have to account for a range of factors internal to blackness so that blackness is never homogenized. Such representations might have to account for questions of class position, of disability, of sexuality, of religion and so on in an attempt to get at the depth and the texture of how blackness is experienced and lived out in both its extra and intra-Black differences. In short, it might have to account for the ‘Black Trans lesbian disabled body,’ a caricature that has come to be characterized in Black vernacular political culture as some of the ways in which black bodies consistently disappear from our view.

Imagine such a person beyond the economy of stereotype! Blackness in this instance cannot only be framed and understood in relationship to race and racism. Thus critical diversity seeks to not just populate our various arenas with one-dimensional encounters; it seeks to provide encounters that strike deeply at the core of what it means to be human. Thus critical diversity is about the ways in which categories or genres of the human cross-cut each other. Critical diversity requires us to actively engage our imaginations and thus to imagine beyond the body presented to us.

I take it as an ethical given then that, fundamentally, only when some form of critical diversity is approached that we can move towards social justice. Social justice is the greatest unknown in all this work. Social justice cannot be decided in advance, it has no particular destination, it is a process of coming into, a “to come” moment as Jacques Derrida would put it. Social justice and indeed its achievement can only be known to be accomplished when those seeking it declare it to be so – that is declare that social justice has been done. Thus social justice is more a desire and a constant project to be worked on and worked at, than a set of programs, a product and or a concluding deadline.

The post-1960s movements of civil rights, feminism, gay and lesbian liberation produced moments through which movement towards social justice could be glimpsed, but those were merely moments in a process, an opening, if you will. Critical diversity provides other avenues along this process, but critical diversity is not the end point of social justice either, it is a part of it. What is most important and crucial about social justice and its philosophical and political call is that it opens us up to rethinking the entire process of any organization of more broadly formation, should it be necessary.

Social justice then embeds critical diversity as a ‘normative’ way of doing things and thereby social justice is a way of being in the world. Social justice is a whole way of life. It cannot be a type of training, and you can’t run social justice workshops and trainings, despite neoliberal equity and diversity mainstreaming claims. Social justice is both an approach to living life and an orientation to thinking and imagining differently the present and the past as a way of setting in place the conditions for a different kind of future. It is that future my Black queer and Black Trans students have set out to write and create by living, studying and acting out of the ordinary.

5

‘T’ Trouble: Structural and ‘Administrative En-gendering’ as the Academic-Corporate Complex

Bobby Noble, York University

As I sit down to draft this entry, Dean Spade’s important book *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Practice and the Limits of Law*⁵⁸ literally lands at my door. I’ve been thinking for a while now about the relationship between what Spade calls “administrative violence” and the structures of binary genders as they emerge as a modality of the identification practices of the academic-corporate complex. I quickly skim Spade’s book for entry points into a description of two monumental ‘personal’ problematics that preoccupy both my own institutional life and the way that such an institutional practice might possibly emerge both *in* and *as* a modality of a counterpublic – or more to the point, fail to productively materialize as such.

The first modality I reference is an impending trans human rights complaint I seek to launch against the federal government for their use of exclusively binarized sex categories on Canadian passport documents. The second is what I can only identify as a related and seemingly structural *virus* that seems to have afflicted the vast and decentralized computer network of my home university over the last five years, which prevent such systems from successfully processing my transgender legal name change (now at least six years old). The latter has been an ongoing struggle for myself and for many skilled administrative personnel across the campus: To correct instances where my no-longer-legal-birth name pops up randomly.

The affliction is not mine alone; universities across Canada seem ill-equipped to cope with the *trans-ing* of much of its student, and in some cases, faculty cohort. But this particular truth-effect is yet another jarring structural impasse between the perceived new kid on the block – trans-scholarship as a seemingly new cousin of sexuality and gender studies – in conflict with our institutional deployment of rigid en-gendering practices (strict use of binary sex categories and legal birth names) for our students. In actuality these binary sex categories compromise the integrity of learning environments for the same students in whose imaginary interest ‘equity’ policies are reiterated in the first place. The result is a violently performative refrain: ‘it isn’t our fault; we can’t change it.’

Both modalities – the legal grammars of a passport document and university admissions/registrant markers and their dependence upon the imagined transparency of sex categories – obviously reference each other. But such practices seem to be reaching critical mass at my institution right now. As I often pedagogically want to rush to explicate the complexities of trans-engendering, I find myself in this case coming face to face with a new and remarkable generation of trans-ing students for whom such complexity is, in the short term, a luxury too hastily accorded. As I prepare to do work across classrooms with this cohort, I realize that the context in which we do this work of ‘knowledge production’ instead renders such trans- embodiment quite distinct from and other to, the

⁵⁸ Spade, D. (2011). *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics and the Limits of Law*. Cambridge: South End Press.

kinds of queering practices that, as Currah Paisley, Jamison Green and Susan Stryker note in “The State of Transgender Rights in the United States of America,” we might imagine we have become accustomed to inhabiting:

“[N]either ‘gender’ nor any of the other suffixes of ‘trans-’ can be understood in isolation ... transing ... is a practice that takes place within, as well as across or between, gendered spaces ... transing can function as a disciplinary tool when the stigma associated with the lack or loss of gender status threatens social unintelligibility, coercive normalization ... a fundamental question we would like to pose is: What kinds of intellectual labour can we begin to perform through the critical deployment of ‘trans-’ operations and movements? Those of us schooled in the humanities and social sciences have become familiar, over the past twenty years or so, with queering things: how might we likewise begin to critically trans- our world?”⁵⁹

With such rethinkings of trans-, unmoored from the identitarian work of its suffixes but not from its potentials to articulate normativities of its own, I track the movement of trans-ing bodies as they transit across the rigidities of the academic-corporate complex. What emerges is an urgent need, in the imperative tense, to catalogue the disproportionate impact of normative en-genderings, thresholds we often imagine ourselves to be beyond: the assumptions that accommodating LGBTQ student lives is the same as accommodating those identified with the complex modalities and mobilities of the “T.” This is not the right case.

As one course of such documentary action, then, I reproduce below the letter that I addressed to my colleagues in a non-specific graduate program attempting to out the less than-obvious administrative en-gendering practices that do structural and daily violence across trans bodies at my own institution. The letter is as follows:

“I write to draw your attention to, and enlist your advocacy, on an issue that continues to not just damage access to educational infrastructures and safety for some of our incoming graduate students but which, as a structural issue inside the academic-corporate complex, continues to do violence to our numerous and committed feminisms at student, administrative and faculty levels. First, as we continue to accept trans and genderqueer graduate students into our numerous program, many of whom ask us to use chosen names (over legal birth names) and who use pronouns other than ‘she/her,’ our institutional, disciplinary and department/program structures make no room for such variance and gender self-determination.

Even as we attempt to correct for an overdetermination of ‘she’ in some programs, we still are nowhere near best practices working against administrative en-gendering where we can control these; and we remain under-utilized as knowledge producers advising this institution/administration on where we cannot. For instance, I recently completed a non-OHIP [Ontario Health Insurance Program] health form at a Toronto based and trans-literate community-based health facility that progressively, and in response to need, listed 6 different choices of pronouns; at least 3 different options to the question what is/was your sex?; an additional question of ‘what is your chosen gender?’ AND ‘what name would you prefer we use?’. The institutional, epistemological and methodological ‘best’ practices of the academic-corporate complex lag damagingly far behind.

⁵⁹ Currah, P., Green, J. & Stryker, S. (2008). The State of Transgender Rights in the United States of America. Retrieved from http://nsrc.sfsu.edu/sites/default/files/Trans%20Rights%20in%20the%20USA_10APR08-Final_12-19-08-2.pdf

Moreover, some of our transed and genderqueer graduate students also use names different from those that appear on their legal documents. While this is also a structural issue across universities in concert with other governmentalities, for those graduate students employed as our teaching assistants in classrooms, this creates a very dangerous, pedagogically confusing, inequitable and compromising situation across the board, a situation to which our less-than best practices actively contribute. In these cases, rather than sending trans- graduate students to talk to trans- faculty members (an individualizing solution at best), it seems imperative that those of us committed to social justice practices work with our students in an institution that makes no structural effort whatsoever to remedy this situation, one admittedly mired in provincial and federal legal structures.

Some of these legal structures trans- activists are attempting to change. I am about to launch with a legal team a human rights complaint against the federal government for their use of binary sex categories on passports as discriminatory. As evidenced from the above health form, other community based service providers are already far ahead of us in their practices. As such, it behooves me to ask this but aren't names also a political issue? Whether it be a feminist practice of choosing to keep maiden names and not take a husband's name upon marriage; using gender neutral names for children; changing names to reflect maternal lineages; insisting that names be pronounced and spelled correctly and with attention to linguistic precision; the right to be addressed as Ms and not the archaic Mr's unless one chooses this – the right to self-name has always been an issue of extreme political importance.

I can assure you that this is an issue of structural violence as well across stations and differentially precarious positionings inside the academic-corporate complex. I am a full-time tenured faculty member who has, years ago, both legally and socially chosen a name and sex different from that ascribed to me at birth, and the only place where that birth name and sex continue to appear is at my 'home' institution. Yearly, with the exception of my sabbatical year, I have visited many offices and capacities across our campus to discern the source of and then attempt to correct this structural and en-gendering virus.

Some examples remain pedagogically useful as illustrations of how this refusal to press systems to name and gender correctly has for me (one of the 'privileged' of our industry), actually worked: I have had benefits withheld because of a perceived discrepancy in naming. I fear thinking about what is happening re: names and my pension. And I have had SSHRC [Social Science and Humanities Research Council] funds frozen. The remedies offered to me by some of these administrative offices have been ridiculous (our benefits provider asked me for proof of a marriage license between my previous name and my current name before they would extend me my benefits; for two years, this occurred with each and every claim, even after I notified them in writing that this was not a marriage but a legal sex change). In other cases, when the registrar's office at my school has listed my birth name as Course Director I was placed in very difficult circumstances that required complicated explanations before I even began my teaching work with the students. This did not bode well for our pedagogical process and it created a very confusing situation for most students who were utterly befuddled and nowhere near ready to think through this issue with me as part of our curriculum. Yet, thankfully, many of them did.

If you have a student working for you as a teaching assistant who queries how a different name might be used (for example, on *Moodle* or other virtual classroom technologies), sending them to trans- faculty members as remedy is not helpful. Asking the student if something has worked elsewhere and then calling tech and support administrators to see what can be done

could facilitate the accommodation of our trans students within structures and systems that remain intransigent around the complexity of trans- embodiment – this is far more useful.

I ask that we do what the best of our social justice movements have taught us: to not individualize these situations as anomalies but instead to deal with them as current manifestations of the kinds of historical and structural problems doing a kind of violence that so many of our social movements and theoretical paradigms have seen fit to address. Either we engage in the dismantling of such practices or – and I go on record – we need to stop exposing our students to such daily violences in the name of reified systems and structures that supposedly ‘cannot be helped.’

I have now been at my university for six years, which have been arduous around these and other related trans issues despite my best efforts and those of a few of my cisgendered⁶⁰ colleagues (i.e. those colleagues whose gender identity ‘matches’ their biological or assigned sex). Year after year, I find I have the same conversations with my students – only this year they grow en masse – individually to marshal them through administrative engendering to which they are left without many allies or, seemingly, much widespread faculty support and action. The only reason why my legal name appears the way it does is because our astute and committed program assistants have each personally insisted that it appear no less than accurate. I ask each of us to make the same commitment.

At the very least, I ask each of us to begin to rethink how we might trans-conceptualize this complex terrain issue of regulatory and administrative en-gendering which is not remedied by the practices providing accommodation of LGBTQ bodies. Instead, we return to Trans 101 and think in far more complex ways about the proximities we erroneously deploy when we neatly imagine that we successfully LGBTQIQ our teaching and learning environments in the name of ‘equity.’ The reality couldn’t be further from the truth.”

⁶⁰ Cisgender. (2011, December 13). Retrieved December 31, 2011 from Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cisgender>

6

Disorders of Sex Development: De-Queering the ‘I’ in LGBTQI2-S

Catherine Clune-Taylor, University of Alberta

In 1993, activist Cheryl Chase founded the Intersex Society of North America (ISNA⁶¹), kick-starting what would come to be known as the intersex rights movement. Since then, the word ‘intersex’ has become more controversial, more contested and more divisive than ever before. First used in 1917 by biologist Richard Goldschmidt to refer to those conditions that gave rise to atypical sex anatomy – or what was generally referred to as ‘hermaphroditism’ – the word intersex was never officially adopted or consistently used by physicians, and only gained mainstream recognition after being reclaimed in the 1990s by activists seeking to dispel the stigma associated with these conditions and the vague, demeaning and often sensationalist term ‘hermaphrodite.’ As with many of the terms lumped under the ever-widening LGBTQI2-S [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered queer intersex 2-Spirited) umbrella, ‘intersex’ has always been at the centre of heated debate.

Which conditions counted as ‘intersex’ conditions? Must a condition give rise to ambiguous genitalia or genitalia deemed to require surgical correction for it to be an intersex condition? What then of those individuals whose genitals looked ‘normal,’ but were at odds with other components of their sex anatomy (such as their chromosomes, gonads or reproductive organs)? Did they have intersex conditions? Or what about those conditions that might give rise to genitalia deemed to require surgical correction, but who had ‘normal’ hormone exposure in utero and otherwise typical sex anatomy? Were they intersex conditions? And beyond all of this, what did it even mean to claim that one was intersex? Was there even such a thing as an ‘intersex’ identity and if there was, was it a queer identity? Did the ‘I’ really belong in LGBTQI2-S?

These many years later, not only do all of these questions remain, but a new, much larger question overshadows them: Should we even use the term intersex at all? Many, including the former Intersex Society of North America⁶¹ (now the Accord Alliance⁶²), would rather we not.

Like many other intersex activist groups that popped up around the world during the 1990s, ISNA drew its early energy and rhetoric from social and political movements for women’s rights, gay rights and civil rights as well as from queer and feminist academic challenges to biological determinism, sexism and medical authority. Many of these groups engaged in a two-pronged critique. On the one hand, they took on contemporary medical practice: holding protests at medical conferences as they called into question the necessity and timing of genital surgeries, the presumed naturalness of physical sex dimorphism; the heterosexism underlying treatment recommendations and outcome analyses; and defending the dignity of those with atypical sex anatomy. On the other hand, they

⁶¹ Intersex Society of North America. (2008). Our Mission. Retrieved from <http://www.isna.org/>

⁶² Accord Alliance. (2012). Welcome to Accord Alliance. Retrieved from <http://www.accordalliance.org/>

engaged in a larger social and political project, making visible the existence and experiences of intersex individuals through videos such as *Is it A Boy or a Girl?*⁶³ and *Hermaphrodites Speak!*⁶⁴

As with many activist organizations, ISNA's strategies changed with time. Many members became increasingly convinced that the best way to improve the lives of individuals with intersex conditions was through the creation of better medical models of treatment, something they felt was best achieved through collaboration with physicians rather than through a more confrontational activism. Also, they reasoned, it might be best to escape the negative stereotypes, the increasingly messy identity politics, and the association with queerness that had come to haunt the term intersex and shift focus to the concrete medical needs of individuals with these conditions.

Many affected individuals and their parents found the term intersex offensive, arguing that it sexualized individuals with these conditions, and falsely implied they have no clear gender identity, or have a queer identity that they do not claim for themselves. Besides, they said, it was misleading to assert there was such a thing as a intersex identity or community, for while there are many online communities of individuals with intersex, there are no brick and mortar communities of those with intersex conditions living together – and those who do belong to these virtual communities tend to come together fairly infrequently and primarily for meetings about political consciousness-raising.

In 2003 ISNA created the Disorder of Sex Development Consortium,⁶⁵ a medical advisory board chaired by feminist thinker and historian of science Alice Dreger to begin the work of advocating for the adoption of the diagnostic label “Disorder of Sex Development” (DSD) and collaborating with physicians to create a new patient-centered model of care. It also began the work of distancing itself from the term ‘intersex’ and its own more overtly political past. In 2006, due in large part to the work of individuals associated with the ISNA/ Accord Alliance, the Pediatric Endocrine Associations of the United States and Europe published their “Consensus Statement on Management of Intersex Disorders”⁶⁶ in the journal *Paediatrics* – a special article announcing both a new patient-centered treatment model for intersex conditions (one in which biology or biological factors would gain a new centrality in determining optimal sex assignment) and the adoption of the term ‘disorder of sex development.’ And in 2008, the Intersex Society of North America quietly dissolved and re-formed as the Accord Alliance,⁶⁷ a group which identifies its mission as working to “promote comprehensive and integrated approaches to care that enhance the health and well-being of people and families affected by DSD by fostering collaboration among all stakeholders,” which they identify as “patients, parents and clinicians.”

Reaction to the recent changes in the direction of ISNA/ Accord Alliance and the clinical treatment model for intersex conditions has been mixed, with much of the debate focused on the adoption of the label “disorder of sex development.” While this new terminology has pleased many physicians, patients, parents and even some academics, many are angered by the adoption of the pathologizing

⁶³ Intersex Society of North America. (2008). *Is it a Boy or a Girl?* (Discovery Channel). Retrieved from http://www.isna.org/videos/boy_or_girl

⁶⁴ Intersex Society of North America. (2008). *Hermaphrodites Speak!*. Retrieved from http://www.isna.org/videos/hermaphrodites_speak

⁶⁵ Accord Alliance. (2012). DSD Guidelines. Retrieved from <http://www.dsdguidelines.org/about/consortium>

⁶⁶ Lee, P.A., Houk, C.P, Ahmed, F.& Hughes, L.A. (2006). Consensus Statement of Management of Intersex Disorders. *Pediatrics* 118(2). Retrieved from <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/118/2/e488.full>

⁶⁷ Accord Alliance. (2012). Welcome to Accord Alliance. Retrieved from <http://www.accordalliance.org/>

language of ‘disorder.’ Some have argued for alternative diagnostic terms that carry a less stigmatizing, less correction-demanding tone, such as “variations of sex development” or “divergence of sex development.” Others simply refuse to give up the word intersex.

In the introduction to her 2009 edited collection, sociologist Morgan Holmes acknowledges the taboo she is breaking titling her collection *Critical Intersex*⁶⁸ in the era of DSD. She writes, “this collection asserts that we (whether we are scholars, intersexed persons, activists or some combination of these three) are not yet done with ‘intersex,’ even as we seek to turn a critical gaze on ‘intersex.’ The implicit imperative in the title of this collection is that it is too soon to accept the language of disorder wholesale and that, in fact, a critical value remains in the use, deployment, recognition and interrogation of intersex.” And if the plethora of online support and activist groups explicitly asserting their resistance to DSD are any indication, there are indeed many people who are not yet done with ‘intersex.’

Why are so many unwilling to give up the label intersex? For some, identifying as intersex means identifying as having had certain experiences as a result of having a body deemed non typical for a male or a female – experiences which, for better or worse, have influenced the way they see themselves and shaped their experience of their lives. For others, identifying as intersex is a political statement, signifying a critical position towards the presumption that intersex conditions are necessarily pathological and in need of ‘fixing.’ For others still, identifying as intersex is a way of laying claim to a queerness that has come to be associated with the term that DSD proponents would rather disavow. And while I do agree with proponents of the DSD nomenclature that we harm people when we impose upon them an identity they do not claim for themselves, I also think we harm them when we fail to recognize as legitimate or real the identities they do claim.

Furthermore, the fact that the move from intersex to DSD is partially driven by the desire to reassure others – in particular, parents – that those with intersex conditions are heteronormatively gendered should be cause for great concern. It is true that many children born with intersex conditions will be ‘normal’ boys and girls and grow up to be ‘normal’ men and women. But some will not. Some will identify as intersex, both in spite of and because of all the messy identity politics and queerness it entails. Some children born with intersex conditions will even come to identify as trans, as queer, as lesbian, as gay and so on, just as some of *all* children are wont to do. Should we really be trying to reassure anyone of the heterosexuality or the gender normativity of others – be they parents of children with intersex conditions, parents of children without intersex conditions or anyone else? If we really hope for things to “get better,”⁶⁹ perhaps we need to consider the value we give to being normatively gendered and heterosexual when we assert that it is something others want, need and deserve to be reassured about.

⁶⁸ Holmes, Morgan (Ed.). 2009. *Critical Intersex*. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company.

⁶⁹ It Gets Better Project. (2011). What is the It Gets Better Project?. Retrieved from <http://www.itgetsbetter.org/pages/about-it-gets-better-project/>

7

‘Stand Up’ for Exclusion?: Queer Pride, Ableism and Inequality

Danielle Peers and Lindsay Eales, University of Alberta

It was Queer Pride Week 2011 in Edmonton, as we began to write this piece. Our city’s billboards are wrapped with rainbow-colored posters of young scantily-clad men with bulging... muscles. Unfortunately, we have come to expect a significant dose of ableism, ageism, racism and fatphobia at Pride festivals across North America. In 2011, however, the Edmonton Pride Festival Society⁷⁰ made ableism official!

Edmonton Pride’s official slogan in 2011 was “STAND UP.”⁷¹ Although dismayed by the ableist⁷² language, we were hoping, at the very least, that this slogan signaled a move towards a more political Pride: A move away from the festival that had renamed itself after a bank two years ago and that had begun banning some political queer groups from marching (most notably in Toronto). But what Edmonton Pride is standing up for this year is *not* greater equity. The event listings tell the disappointing story: “Stand up... and boogie”; and “Stand up... and barbeque” – as if there was nothing of political value left for queers to ‘stand up’ for.

The Pride slogan, poster and website, however, demonstrate that there is still much work to be done. On the poster, “STAND UP”⁷³ is written in white monolithic letters below the *diversity*-rainbow-coloured silhouettes of six immaculately non-diverse bodies in progressive stages of getting up to stand. On one side of the poster are three square, thin, muscular silhouettes: one in ‘thinker’ pose; one crouching as though about to begin a sprint; and one standing with arms and legs wide apart, taking up space. On the other side are three smaller, super-thin-yet-curvy multi-colored figures: one on knees and bum sitting in a ‘schoolgirl’ pose (like the pornography pose, minus the braids and the kilt); one on knees with head thrown back to show off large, perky breasts; one standing with arms and legs pulled together to make space for the more masculine standing counterpart. The Edmonton Pride website bears the slogan and poster below a banner photograph which features scantily-clad, athletic looking white-skinned men wearing afro-like wigs. There is still so much work to be done.

Among the many race, gender and ability issues with these images of supposed queer diversity, is the noticeable lack of fat, gender-queer, wheeling, scootering, ageing, small-statured, cane-wielding, pre-pubescent and dog-guided members of our queer communities. The *lack* of any significantly diverse

⁷⁰ Edmonton Pride Festival. (2012). Home. Retrieved from <http://www.edmontonpride.ca/>

⁷¹ Edmonton Pride Festival. (2012). Home. Retrieved from <http://www.edmontonpride.ca/>

⁷² Fedcan Blog. (2011). Home. Retrieved from <http://blog.fedcan.ca/tag/ableism-and-disability/>

⁷³ Edmonton Pride Festival. (2012). Home. Retrieved from <http://www.edmontonpride.ca/>

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bodies in the *diversity* poster and website might not have struck many Pride-goers as strange however, since many of these bodies are structurally excluded from Queer⁷⁴ events, in general.

Every summer, for example, the Edmonton Pride Festival Society rents one of the most accessible⁷⁵ venues in Edmonton, and, through great expense and logistical prowess, manages to transform it into an almost entirely inaccessible space (despite years of being offered free or cheap alternatives for rendering the space more accessible). Year round, gay parties and events are held almost exclusively in bars or galleries that are up or down at least a flight of stairs. Most of these events don't allow minors, won't accommodate wheelchairs, have gender-segregated washrooms, and are not set up for those who see or hear in non-normative ways. With few 'standing up' against (or perhaps even taking note of) these exclusions, many community members end up having to *sit* out most 'queer' events.

Of course, mainstream gay movements are perhaps too easy targets. The pivotal question behind this blog entry extends much further than Edmonton or Pride. We ask: Are our academic, artistic and activist movements that claim to be equity-based any less ableist and any more accessible than the Edmonton Pride example herein?

In Robert McRuer's groundbreaking work, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*,⁷⁶ he argues that the exclusion, marginalization or complete erasure of disability is common to contemporary queer politics and to activist politics more generally. One of his most poignant examples is the 2004 World Social Forum⁷⁷ (WSF) in Mumbai, India, a global activist network that protested the World Economic Forum by collectively imagining alternatives to globalized capitalism. The WSF earned protests of its own, however, due to its lack of accessibility and the organizers' refusal to include a speaker on disability issues. The WSF's slogan was 'Another World Is Possible,' yet it remained somewhat impossible for WSF activists to imagine disability as having a place in this new world, let alone in the movement that might create it.

There is an eerie familiarity to this seeming impossibility of imagining accessibility and disability issues as vital components of social movements. Think about it. Have you recently attended any of the following?:

- Equity-based academic conferences or lectures organized without any physical, visual or audio accessibility forethought?
- 'Take back the night' or G8 marches planned on inaccessible routes?
- Film festivals in which wheelchair users are deemed fire hazards and are not allowed in the theatre, and where captions are turned off because normative audience members find them 'distracting'?

⁷⁴ Queer Studies. (2011, December 17). Retrieved December 29, 2011 from Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queer_studies

⁷⁵ Accessibility. (2012, January 2). Retrieved January 2, 2012 from Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Accessibility>

⁷⁶ McRuer, R. (2006). *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability*. New York: New York University Press.

⁷⁷ World Social Forum. (2011, December 30). Retrieved on January 1, 2012 from Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Social_Forum#2004_World_Social_Forum

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- Expensive queer parties or fundraisers held in spaces with gender-segregated washrooms, inaccessible entrances and no minors allowed?

More importantly, did you notice these structural exclusions at the time? People often don't notice these barriers because excluded bodies usually cannot enter these spaces to demonstrate their inaccessibility. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy and one that has very real consequences for the bodies and communities that are excluded, as well as for those of us who fail to address these systemic exclusions.

Odds are, however, that some of you *have* noticed some of these barriers at least some of the time. There are, after all, vibrant activist communities that work hard at identifying and creatively responding to the ways that they participate in the inequitable treatment and exclusion of others. Some projects structured around such an equity politics include: The Vancouver Queer Film Festival;⁷⁸ the Acsexability sex party folks in Toronto; and the Health, Embodiment and Visual Culture Conference⁷⁹ held in Hamilton. The proverbial wheel has already been invented; the wheel is constantly being re-created in exciting new ways. Unfortunately, too many equity-based events have yet to imagine that wheels, canes, and the like have a place in their communities.

As inundated as we are, this week, with the inequitable politics of Pride, Edmontonians are finally getting a taste of equity-oriented queer celebrations. The Exposure Queer Arts and Culture Festival⁸⁰ is making radical moves towards removing barriers to their festival and to Edmonton's queer scene in general. It started with their "All Bodies Pool Party": an outdoor, wheelchair accessible, pay-what-you-can, all-ages, all-gender affair. Finally, queer Edmontonians – like queers elsewhere – have a choice: "Stand Up!" for the ableism of Pride, or sit in on an accessible queer/crip celebration of swimming, mobilizing and imagining more inclusive images, activities, events and communities.

⁷⁸ Vancouver Queer Film Festival. (2008). Home. Retrieved from <http://www.queerfilmfestival.ca/>

⁷⁹ Health, Embodiment and Visual Culture: Engaging Publics and Pedagogies. (2010). Exhibition. Retrieved from <http://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/~english/HealthEmbodimentVisualCulture/Exhibition.html>

⁸⁰ Exposure. (n.d.). The 5th Annual Exposure. Retrieved from <http://www.exposurefestival.ca/>

8

Trans Rights in Mexico and Canada: Queering the Geopolitics of Privilege

Oralia Gómez-Ramírez, University of British Columbia

When I asked trans activists Angie Rueda Castillo and Irina Layevska what this piece should be about, they both encouraged me to account what is happening in the struggle for trans people's rights in Mexico, and how this may contrast and compare to the state of affairs in Canada.

In Mexico City, a local law⁸¹ was approved in 2008 allowing trans peoples to change their name and sex on birth certificates and other official documents. Despite its narrow provincial jurisdiction and current limited accessibility and affordability, this legal change has been viewed positively by members of the trans communities. The measure allows trans peoples to obtain birth certificates without marginal annotations indicating the sex and name legally assigned to them at birth, and does not require them to undergo genital surgery to obtain identification documents. Acutely aware of the status of trans-related legislations in other parts of the world, activists in Mexico have praised the law not only for addressing issues of social stigma, but also for imposing a medicalized framework, thus enabling recognition of a wider array of trans experiences.

In the field of critical intersectional studies of gender and sexuality, there is a general willingness to be self-critical and open to new ideas and transformation. At the same time, coming from and having carried out my doctoral fieldwork in one location in the global South, specifically in Mexico City, I notice the ways in which many concepts, categories, discourses, policies, strategies, and the like emerge in the global North, become influential and, subsequently, are circulated and taken up in the global South as desirable models of sensible, good or best practices. Needless to say, those flows of ideas are not unidirectional or unequivocal, although it is an intricate task to trace the genealogy of an idea or a concept and how it travels worldwide. Yet, it is hard to be oblivious to the fact that such circulations occur against a backdrop of uneven and hierarchical global geopolitical configurations wherein nation-states' wealth and power differentials matter.

It is commonplace to encounter media representations and everyday interpretations both within and outside Canada, which convey the notion that terms and practices of the global North are inherently better. Despite the widespread consensus among critical scholars that these ranking scales are historically and politically constructed, often the concepts and policies used in the global North echo around the world, while notions and strategies emanating from the global South do not share that fate or privilege.

Let me draw briefly on some of the findings of my doctoral research project on trans women's efforts to obtain rights in Mexico City to provide further example of these uneven travels. Among working class lower-class and economically disadvantaged male-to-female persons, many of whom are street-based sex workers, the terms *jota* and *vestida* are widely used to name each other and themselves. These naming practices emerge out of and reflect the historically specific labour, class, and gender configurations of Mexico City today. The socioeconomic contexts and lived experiences

⁸¹ Mexico City Oks trans name, ID changes. *Yahoo! Groups*. Retrieved from <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/transgendernews/message/31072>

that explain these particular naming practices are complex and deserve more attention than I can give here. Suffice it to say that context matters and these terms are employed differently to refer to what we, in the West, understand as ‘transgendered’ or ‘transsexual’ women. As well, a growing number of studies in the field have shown these terms have been in circulation for at least two decades, if not longer. More recently – prior to and particularly after the approval of the 2008 local legislation – terms like *transgénero* (transgender) and *mujer trans* (trans woman) began to be used.

The introduction of terms which have global currency has not however displaced the use of the domestic terminologies. But it has led to a symbolic struggle locally, because the globally circulating terms are valued higher while the geographically influenced terms are viewed as ‘backward’, incorrect, and derogatory. Their coexistence is certainly hierarchical. Were it not for the resilience of the local notions, one would be tempted to overlook the historicity of all of these concepts. More importantly, their conflicting simultaneity in Mexico City allows us to be critical about the ways in which these travelling concepts from the global North get constructed as intrinsically-superior, taken up as common sense, or seen as an always-there vocabulary due, in large part, to geopolitical privilege.

In Mexico and other locations across the global South, the vocabulary of ‘gay’ and ‘queer’ have been taken up by some activists for diverse reasons. What these words mean whenever they travel across borders is ever changing. In Mexico City, terms circulating at the local level (that could have potentially resulted in the rise of a movement for *jotas*⁸² or *vestidas*⁸² rights, instead of trans women’s rights) have not been politicized or reclaimed. Rather, it is the embracing of global terms and notions that have helped trans people articulate their demands and gain relative legitimacy in the socio-legal fields. I am not suggesting they have to steer clear of ‘foreign’ or ‘imposed’ concepts in their mobilizing efforts. Rather, I am encouraging us – scholars and activists based in the global North – to remain aware of the geopolitical and epistemic privileges that underlie these processes, and to find ways to help dismantle the disparities and inequalities of today’s world system, which is inevitably shaping the politics of gender- and sexuality-based social justice struggles worldwide.

The trans population is one of the most marginalized groups in Mexican society today. Structural and systemic vulnerabilities and pervasive discriminatory practices are expressed in higher rates of HIV/AIDS incidence, hate crimes, rates of incarceration, and police extortion, among other problems. Thus the challenges facing trans peoples in Mexico are multiple. On the legal terrain – one area in which the trans peoples seek to effect change – challenges include the need for legal literacy and lack of economic literacy and resources needed to benefit from local legislations. Another major challenge is political literacy, which is essential for transforming the prevailing system of partial citizenship. In the absence of a federal law protecting them, many trans people are undocumented in their own country of birth.

Why does this issue matter to a Canada-based audience such as the one reading this blog series?⁸² Why is it important to talk about what happens in Mexico or anywhere else in the global South? As I have maintained, what happens in the global North does matter to what goes on in global South – that is, to how gender- and sexuality-based struggles are framed, what issues are highlighted, what vocabularies are rendered politically viable, what strategies are employed. I suggest that we reflect on the ways in which Canada plays a key role in holding, allocating and administering asymmetrical socioeconomic and political privilege worldwide, and how this conferred privilege may be shaping, in not-altogether helpful ways, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, questioning, intersex, Two-spirited (and other) political and academic struggles taking place within and beyond the geographical confines of Canada.

⁸² Fedcan Blog. (2012). Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgendered/Queer/Intersex/Two-Spirited. Retrieved from <http://blog.fedcan.ca/tag/lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgendered-queer-intersex-two-spirited/>

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Having a broader geopolitical dialogue that gets translated into meaningful transnational alliances is needed now more than ever. We should keep an eye out for the ways in which the geopolitical privileges we enjoy that come from being based in the global North, including in Canada, structures what takes place in other latitudes. This proposition is certainly not novel, but as a woman of colour from the global South, I still see value in insisting upon this kind of mindfulness and critical engagement.

9

Homonationalist Discourse, Queer Organizing and the Media

Fatima Jaffer, University of British Columbia

Media stories build on tropes and themes familiar to readers. Such tropes and themes act as a shorthand or ‘common sense’ of what we as readers are assumed to believe or are likely to accept. I would argue that in Canada these tropes have been in play since at least Confederation, although they have varied in form over time and space. Historically these tropes – of European superiority versus the inferiority of the Other deemed savage,⁸³ backward or resistant to progress – were applied to Indigenous peoples. More recently on this continent, these tropes, particularly the notion of the barbarian⁸⁴ Other have been extended to racialized citizens, immigrants and newcomers. Here, I examine how the figure of the queer, racialized Canadian, continues to appear in national political and media discourses.

On 15 December, 2007 *The Vancouver Sun* carried a cover story⁸⁵ entitled: “Canada’s Changing Moral Landscape: Are immigrants to the country changing the face of what’s considered right or wrong?” The first paragraph reads: “‘I hate homosexuality,’ says Balwant Singh Gill, a prominent leader in BC’s large Sikh community. “Most Sikhs believe homosexuality is unnatural and you can’t produce kids through it. And secondarily, no major religion allows it.” That article was published five days after the December 10, 2007 action by two thousand protesters, most of them Punjabi Sikhs, to block the Canadian government’s deportation of Laibar Singh, a paralyzed refugee claimant from India. Coinciding with International Human Rights Day, the protesters had gathered at Vancouver International Airport and stopped his deportation by Canadian Border Services, which led mainstream media to lambast them for their “illegal”⁸⁶ and “violent” behavior.

The connection between these events form the crux of my story of how homonationalism, a phenomenon given name by Jasbir Puar⁸⁷ is playing out in Vancouver, a city touted in Canadian travel guides for its tolerance and diversity. By ‘homonationalism’ I refer to the nation-state’s selectively strategic incorporation of privileged queer bodies in the project of nationhood often in times of war, and this strategy’s worldwide surge post September 11, 2001. Various scholars and activists have shown how homonationalist discourses also flourish in times of heightened anti-immigrant sentiments. Puar tells us that homonationalism thrives on the perception of “immigrant

⁸³ MacLean, J. (1896). Canadian Savage Folk: The Native Tribes. *University of Toronto Internet Archive*. Retrieved from <http://www.archive.org/details/canadiansavagefo00macluoft>

⁸⁴ Jhappan, R. (2010, February 23). The new Canadian citizenship test: No ‘barbarians’ need apply. [Blog Entry]. Retrieved from <http://blog.fedcan.ca/2010/02/23/the-new-canadian-citizenship-test-no-barbarians-need-apply/>

⁸⁵ Canada’s Changing Moral Landscape. (2008, January 4). *The Vancouver Sun*. Retrieved from <http://www.canada.com/topics/lifestyle/relationships/story.html?pid=27833c9c-5946-4845-bf1c-2793ca33591c>

⁸⁶ Stop the deportation of Laibar Singh!. (2007, December 13). *No One Is Illegal-Montreal*. Retrieved from <http://nooneisillegal-montreal.blogspot.com/2007/12/stop-deportation-of-laibar-singh-news.html>

⁸⁷ Puar, J. (2007). *Territorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. (Durham: Duke University Press Books).

populations and communities of colour as more homophobic... [which helps fuel] anti-immigrant rhetoric, counterterrorist or antiwelfare discourse.”

Scott Morgensen extends Puar’s concept in “Settler Homonationalism”,⁸⁸ in which he takes up “the conditions under which U.S. queer projects produce a *settler* homonationalism,” and centres “the terrorizing methods that create queer subjects as *agents* of the violence of the settler state.” Queer movements for rights become less ‘queer’ as their discourse adopts normative settler ‘common sense,’ which marks the Other – Indigenous and non-white – as backward, unprogressive and frozen in time.

In the remainder of this piece I address the current discourse in ‘the West’ and in post-same-sex-marriage Canada, in particular, by examining the various racial and sexual logics that such media stories evoke. I am interested in the operations of power that help construct the Canadian national as tolerant or supportive of queer identity, versus the racialized outsider, who is constructed as Other and as irremediably homophobic. Arguably, homophobia is now projected onto non-western Others as reflective of their unprogressive, undeveloped, and backward ethos. In contrast, the West (or whiteness) comes across as liberated, progressive and gay-positive.

Balwant Singh Gill’s comment in *The Sun*, “I hate homosexuality,” inevitably provoked an outcry among Vancouver’s queers. As the facilitator of Trikone Vancouver,⁸⁹ an organization of queer South Asians, I expected media phone calls for our reaction. But only two came: one from *Punjabi TV News*, the other from Vancouver’s queer newspaper, *Xtra West*.⁹⁰ The mainstream media overwhelmingly carried the voices of queer community leaders who decried the South Asian community’s culpability for homophobia in Vancouver. The fact that Balwant Singh Gill was the only South Asian quoted in a story on immigrant values shows almost too simplistically how media frames communities of colour as homogenized and monolithic.

It was, as *The Sun* blithely put it, because “Gill, the spokesperson for 39 Sikh temples in British Columbia, appears to combine in one person many of the conservative and libertarian values that immigrants are bringing to and expressing in Canada.”⁹¹ Incidentally, the values referenced in the story had been defined as such by an Angus Reid poll that found immigrants hold ‘different’ values; for example, only 17 percent of immigrants – versus 19 percent of ‘real’ Canadians – hold middle-of-the-road views. What these middle-of-the-road values are is not clear. It’s noteworthy that the only other ‘immigrant’ quoted in this story was an engineer who came to Canada from Hong Kong. Bill Chu likewise apparently represented the voice of the Chinese community (41 percent of Vancouver’s population). Nowhere in the story do we learn that Gill was wrong and that Sikh texts do not allude to homosexuality at all, nor was there an effort made to interview South Asian queers. Further, Gill claimed his comment had been made in an interview with *The Sun* three years before, although this was publicly disputed by the reporter.

The move by the media to publish this story worked in the interests of a state openly angered at the failed deportation of Laibar Singh. By pitting (white) queers against immigrants of colour, the media

⁸⁸ Morgensen, S.L. (2010). Settler Homonationalism: Theorizing Settler Colonialism within Queer Modernities. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 16(1-2). Retrieved from <http://glq.dukejournals.org/content/16/1-2/105.abstract>

⁸⁹ Trikone Northwest. (n.d.). Home. Retrieved from <http://www.trikonenw.org/>

⁹⁰ Barsotti, N. (2008, January 2). Sikh leader’s anti-gay remarks ignite furor. *Xtra!*. Retrieved from http://www.xtra.ca/public/viewstory.aspx?AFF_TYPE=4&STORY_ID=4136&PUB_TEMPLATE_ID=2

⁹¹ Todd, D. (2007, December 15). Canada’s Changing Moral Landscape. *The Vancouver Sun*. Retrieved from <http://www2.canada.com/vancouvernews/news/story.html?id=f3983de2-9657-4650-84a3-ac0c46a1b867&p=1>

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constructed these two communities as separate and monolithic, failing to take into account not only intersections – one could be both queer and immigrant – but also the alliances that exist among and between the two communities. South Asian queers, such as the members of Trikone Vancouver, were placed in a double bind: we understood all too clearly the obvious perils of the racism versus homophobia trap set by The Sun and other media outlets.

There was one prominent exception to this coverage. *Punjabi TV News* proactively contacted Trikone Vancouver for a reaction. They made an effort to explore various aspects of the story, including the connection with the Laibar Singh case. They juxtaposed two queer positionalities: Alan Herbert, a former gay city councillor and I, representing Trikone Vancouver. Simply put, my position was to condemn the homophobic comment by Gill and to also condemn the racist tone of The Sun's article. I explained the article's impact on South Asian queers, and that by doing nothing to educate on or even acknowledge our existence as South Asian or Muslim queers, it not only fuels racism against us but homophobia too.

When I repeated these points in an interview with *Xtra West*, there was a backlash within the queer community. On 21 December, 2008, well-known members of Vancouver queer scene called a community meeting,⁹² at which I was berated for apparently trivializing Gill's comment and condoning homophobia. The perception that I had chosen 'race' over 'queer' meant I had not stood up for Canadian values and had not been queer in a way that was acceptable for a dominant (white) queer community. I was accused of turning my back on the goal of gay liberation. Such accusations emerge from either/or assumptions that pit 'race' and 'queerness' as distinct rather than intersecting identities. My attempt to complicate this binary logic was tantamount to a betrayal of my *country*, a country that posits itself as a 'progressive' forward-thinking, gay-positive nation. At risk of homogenizing the queer community, I must mention that not everyone voiced this position and Trikone Vancouver also had strong allies.

To wrap up the story, Gill apologized for his comments and Trikone Vancouver won a Community Hero award from *Xtra West* for our part in shifting the discourse. However, nine months later, a white gay man, Jordan Smith,⁹³ was assaulted by a South Asian man and Trikone Vancouver was back at square one. We condemned the assault on Smith, but also had to, again, 'defend' our communities from the homogenizing charge that we, as South Asians, were responsible.

I tell this story to illustrate how the media used anti-immigrant tropes to mobilise homonationalist discourse within the Vancouver queer community, but also, how what is framed as a queer liberation struggle for rights has in fact become a fight for national entitlement and rights to national belonging. Puar explains, "Gay marriage, for example, is not simply a demand for equality with heterosexual norms, but more importantly, a demand for the reinstatement of white privileges and rights – rights of property and inheritance in particular."⁹⁴ Gay and lesbian liberation movements have become a drive for privileges lost. As such, they can only benefit those who face 'oppression' on the basis of homophobia alone. The message of the media frame in this example was simple: the homo subject is under threat by immigrant Others.

The message I got from the queer community was also simple: Queers are offered the opportunity of acceptance and inclusion, and we too can 'belong' as queers of colour – if we conform to a

⁹² Vancouver-Group plans response to Sikh leader's comments. (2007, December 22). *Xtra!*. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kkCknx68kR4>

⁹³ Jaffer, F. (2008, October 23). Cultures of Homophobia. *Xtra!*. Retrieved from http://www.xtra.ca/public/Vancouver/Cultures_of_Homophobia-5727.aspx

⁹⁴ Puar, J. (2007). *Territorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. (Durham: Duke University Press Books).

queer identity and a view of queer liberation that leads to the accumulation of national capital. We too can gain rights (and safety from violence) if we join this project of nationhood that centralizes whiteness as national identity. At the heart of this conception of ‘Canadianness,’ however, is collusion in the project of ahistoricity. This collusion requires a forgetting of Canada as Indigenous land, and that Indigenous notions of Two-Spiritedness were in existence well before European colonization. The invitation to accumulate or ‘invest in whiteness’⁹⁵ in order to arrive at ‘belonging’ continues the violence of settler stratification of sexual and racial hierarchies on which the settler nation rests.

This idea of ‘Canadianness’ requires our participation in the erasure of this history just as it requires a deliberate forgetting of the project of colonization as grounded in the dispossession of Indigenous peoples or the fact that gay liberation and gay-positive attitudes are recent inventions in the West. It’s what we do each time we espouse an exclusive notion of Canadian values. It’s what we do each time we present ourselves as queer first, people of colour second, and see the two identities as separate and unequal, rather than as intersectional or interlocking, as Sirma Bilge⁹⁶ and Rinaldo Walcott⁹⁷ argue in this LGBTQI2-S⁹⁸ series.

It is critical that we, *individually* as queers, and collectively as queer researchers, academics and activists, re-examine our frameworks for viewing the world and the directions that our research and organizational objectives take. Central to this critical self-reflection project is the need to expose the racial and colonial imaginary that exist alongside Canadian values of diversity and tolerance, which we valorize and promote abroad despite glaring contradictions at home.

⁹⁵ Lipsitz, G. (2006). *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press).

⁹⁶ Bilge, S. (2011, October 18). Developing Intersectional Solidarities: A Plea for Queer Intersectionality. [Blog Entry]. Retrieved from <http://blog.fedcan.ca/2011/10/18/developing-intersectional-solidarities-a-plea-for-queer-intersectionality/>

⁹⁷ Walcott, R. (2011, October 27). Black queer and Black Trans-Imagine Imagination Imaginary Futures. [Blog Entry]. Retrieved from <http://blog.fedcan.ca/2011/10/27/black-queer-and-black-trans-%E2%80%93-imagine-imaginary-futures/>

⁹⁸ Fedcan Blog. (2009). Equity Matters series, Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgendered/Queer/Intersex/Two Spirited. Retrieved from <http://blog.fedcan.ca/tag/lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgendered-queer-intersex-two-spirited/>

PART II

RESISTING CLOSETS: hATE, pERSECUTION aND VIOLENCE

10

Coming Out: Re-engaging the Radical

Elise Chenier, Simon Fraser University

October 11th each year is National Coming Out Day.⁹⁹ First celebrated in 1988 to mark the one-year anniversary of the March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights, National Coming Out Day has grown into a major human rights campaign for lesbian, gay, and lately, transgender equality. The nation originally referred to was the United States of America, but like so much of Canadian culture and politics, National Coming Out Day has been taken up by LGBTIQ2 (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and 2-Spirited) activists in Canada as well.

Do we really need a National Coming Out Day? Isn't gay 'so over,' as a young adult character in Toronto queer playwright Brad Fraser's 2011 *True Love Lies*¹⁰⁰ declares? For many of us who came out ten or more years ago, the present seems like a pretty friendly place to live, particularly here in Canada where citizens and residents are legally protected from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms,¹⁰¹ and where similar enshrinement of rights based on gender identity¹⁰² may be brought into law in the imaginable future. Gay may be 'so over,' but the radical anti-shame vision advanced by early gay liberationists still has much to offer us, especially in these political times.

Many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) people living in the 1950s and 1960s knew that to live 'shamelessly' (read: openly) as a queer was a matter of pride and an act of profound courage. Those who refused to be cowed into staying home or hiding 'in the closet,' and who risked arrest, public exposure as a 'pervert,' and economic ruin, lay the groundwork for three subsequent decades of activism.

The call to come out of the closet was twice deployed to great effect by lesbian and gay activists. Inspired by the militancy of the Black Power movement and Vietnam War protests, as well as the June 1969 uprising against police brutality at the Stonewall Inn in New York City, gay liberationists declared "Gay is Good" and encouraged others to join them. Some were so utterly terrified of the consequences of coming out yet so determined to do so that they wore paper bags over their heads during marches, illustrating both how powerful and dangerous coming out was. This one simple act proved to be one of the gay liberation movement's most powerful and important tactics precisely because the oppression of homosexuals was enabled by the sexual shame attached to same-sex sex.

⁹⁹ Human Rights Campaign. (2012). National Coming Out Day. Retrieved from <http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/national-coming-out-day>

¹⁰⁰ Fraser, B. (2009). *True Love Lies*. Ontario: PlayWrights Guild of Canada.

¹⁰¹ Hurley, M.C. (2005). Sexual Orientation and Legal Rights: A Chronological Overview. Retrieved from <http://www.parl.gc.ca/Content/LOP/ResearchPublications/prb0413-e.htm>

¹⁰² Open Parliament. (2012). Vote #165 on February 9th, 2011. Retrieved from <http://openparliament.ca/bills/votes/40-3/165/>

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In the mid-1980s, ACT UP [AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power] redeployed this strategy with equal success. Founding members of this organized grass-roots response to the AIDS crisis coined the slogan Silence=Death¹⁰³ to indicate the consequences of choosing to remain closeted. The slogan was intended to encourage those still too timid to come out to do so, but also to shame closeted gays, especially those in positions of power, to come out and use their power and influence to help change homophobic public attitudes and policies which were manifest in the thousands of bodies of the dead and dying. Artist Keith Haring's bold and colourful images forever seared the Silence=Death¹⁰⁴ and National Coming Out Day campaigns¹⁰⁵ onto the American and Canadian cultural imagination.

Today we like to think that, as compared to the United States at least, Canada is a refuge for LGBTIQ₂ people. As previous contributors to this blog have eloquently shown however, gay is not yet 'over.' There exists a profound gap between the anti-homophobic message sent by the *Charter* and the reality of day-to-day life for LGBTIQ₂ people. That school is a dangerous place for queer youth is now well known. Less known is that elderly lesbian and gay people are not seeking out the care they need for fear of being forced back into the closet¹⁰⁶ by homophobic health care workers. New research out of Concordia University in Montreal reveals that refugee boards are using dated gender stereotypes to assess the authenticity of claims based on sexual orientation. Charter protection may send a positive social signal, but its impact does not always penetrate the places where we are born, grow up, go to school, live, work, play, and die.

Canadian scholars play an important role by generating research that can lead to increased social awareness and meaningful policy and legal change. Compared to our colleagues to the south, we enjoy a much better relationship with research granting agencies.¹⁰⁷ Still, LGBTIQ₂ research does not proceed unfettered. Departments often regard this type of research as too narrow, too political, or simply unscholarly, thus making permanent positions¹⁰⁸ that much more difficult to secure, yet institutional encouragement and support plays a critical role in facilitating research advancement. We in the academy still have much work to do when it comes to enabling young and emerging as well as established scholars whose research interests and social location situate them outside of what anthropologist Gayle Rubin calls the "charmed circle."

¹⁰³ Good Design. (2010, October 7). 12 Impactful AIDS Awareness Posters from Around the World. Retrieved from <http://www.good.is/post/12-impactful-aids-awareness-posters-from-around-the-world/page:2>

¹⁰⁴ Good Design. (2010, October 7). 12 Impactful AIDS Awareness Posters from Around the World. Retrieved from <http://www.good.is/post/12-impactful-aids-awareness-posters-from-around-the-world/page:2>

¹⁰⁵ National Coming Out Day Logo. (2008, December 14). Retrieved January 12, 2012 from Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Logo_ncod_lg.png

¹⁰⁶ Gen Silent. (n.d.). Gen Silent Synopsis. Retrieved from http://stumaddux.com/gen_silent_about.html

¹⁰⁷ Epstein, S. (2006). The New Attack on Sexuality Research: Morality and the Politics of Knowledge Production. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 3(1), 1-12. Doi: 10-1525/srsp.2006.3.1.01

¹⁰⁸ Stein, M. (2001). Committee on Lesbian and Gay History Survey on LGBTQ. Retrieved from <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2001/0105/0105aff1.cfm>

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In her path-breaking 1984 article “Thinking Sex,”¹⁰⁹ Rubin captured the radical liberationist vision when she charted (literally)¹¹⁰ those in the global west who, because of their sexual activities, are socially, politically, and economically charmed, and those who are disempowered and marginalized. In showing how sex is one vector of oppression within a larger system of oppression that “cuts across other modes of social inequality (such as race, class, gender and ability),” Rubin exposed how hierarchies of sexual value have more in common with ideologies of racism than with true ethics. “A democratic morality should judge sexual acts by the way partners treat one another, the level of mutual consideration, the presence or absence of coercion, and quantity and quality of the pleasures they provide,” she continued. “Whether sex acts are gay or straight, coupled, or in groups, naked or in underwear, commercial or free, with or without video, should not be ethical concerns.”¹¹¹

Groups like the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) in the United States, the organizer and promoter of National Coming Out Day, and Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere (EGALE) in Canada have been highly effective in advancing lesbian and gay equality but in so doing, they have discouraged linking the oppression of lesbians and gays with other vectors of oppression. Moreover, activists groups like as EGALE and HRC are winning homosexual equality by stripping gay people of their sexuality and presenting them (us) as the same as heterosexuals. In short, rather than struggle to unpack the charmed circle, their strategy is to fight to be let in.

As we prepare ourselves to teach, research, and organize in the context of a steadily advancing tide of American-style politics, politics that began with attacks on the Charter, same-sex marriage equality, and Insite,¹¹² and which are now enjoying expression in an omnibus crime bill, we would do well to return to the more expansive vision that inspired gay liberation politics and scholarship. When we think about enabling people to resist the rhetoric of shame and the felt experience of oppression, we need to include in our field of vision sex workers and SlutWalkers, drug users and the murdered and missing women of the downtown east side, the majority of whom are and were Indigenous. And we need to take on board (by which I mean, transform our theories and methods) our Indigenous colleagues’ argument that, to address the issue of the murdered and missing women, one cannot divorce it from the broader issue of legacies of colonialism from, for example, the male counter-experience of the star-light tour.¹¹³

To come out is not just to declare oneself as the ‘Other’; it is to simultaneously expose the inherent injustice of modes of thinking and acting that built the various closets we find ourselves living in. Coming out is for more than just gays, and we need movements and scholarship that recognize and support this critical insight.

¹⁰⁹ Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality. (2008, June 9). Retrieved January 12, 2012 from Keywords: http://keywords.fordhamitac.org/wiki2/index.php?title=Thinking_Sex:_Notes_for_a_Radical_Theory_of_the_Politics_of_Sexuality

¹¹⁰ The Charmed Circle. (2009). Retrieved from http://ayotunde4real.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/rubin_charmed_circle_841.gif

¹¹¹ Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality. (2008, June 9). Retrieved January 12, 2012 from Keywords: http://keywords.fordhamitac.org/wiki2/index.php?title=Thinking_Sex:_Notes_for_a_Radical_Theory_of_the_Politics_of_Sexuality

¹¹² Vancouver Coastal Health. (n.d.). Insite-Supervised Injection Site. Retrieved from <http://supervisedinjection.vch.ca/>

¹¹³ Maybechildhood. (2011, August 23). Where We Were Not, Part I: Feeling Reserved, Alexis’ Story. Video retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WYtDXpn49SU>

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If this seems like asking us to bite off more than any one person can chew, remember that if social movement politics has taught us anything, it is that we are never just one person, and that there is strength and wisdom in numbers. Widening our vision so that we can keep the many vectors of oppression that continue to generate shame – for example, the shame of sexual difference, the shame of racialization and colonialization, the shame of poverty – and that continue to make coming out so painful *and* so powerful, is one way we can contribute to creating and facilitating meaningful change.

11

Homophobia and beyond: Closets, Cloisters, and Other Corrective Measures

Richard Sullivan, University of British Columbia

The recent publicity about bullying to the point where young people were driven to their deaths got me thinking about how ‘anxious’ the perpetrators were. A phobia is an anxiety disorder and the term homophobia has now been bandied about for at least three decades, curiously without psychiatric validation as a diagnostic classification. I remember that the term ‘homophobia’ served a political purpose when it was first coined. It provided a counter-narrative to the prevailing paradigms within psychiatry and religion – the disciplines and traditions that had paid greatest attention to same sex relationships and within which prevailing constructions placed us within the folds of sin and mental illness.

A counter-narrative felt good but I also remember a vague annoyance at what seemed a rationalization for hateful behaviour. At the time I was a visible minority gay youth inasmuch as I had never been able to ‘pass’ and had early lost sight of much value in ascribing to the rules. I tread lightly around questions of ‘choice’ since my “No thank you” moment in observation of gender rules came early, though probably abetted by some awareness that I was not likely to be convincing in any effort to play by those rules. I don’t ever remember my tormenters looking anxious. They behaved with social impunity as if they were doing the work of correcting us – getting us back in line.

Some four decades on, I find myself an invisible minority, since all middle aged white men, and academics in particular, look pretty much the same. The corrective disciplines of propriety, age appropriateness and dignity have long since extinguished any distinctive style and as long as I don’t speak, gesture or dress suspiciously well, I can probably pass for straight.

But for those not yet faded into the woodwork of convention, I wonder if harassment is the price they pay in backlash against what has been gained. What do they have to say about the anxiety of their attackers? Is it time to consider other explanations for bad behaviour? And even accepting that there may be some instances of violence motivated by a clinical disorder in the realm of a phobia, do most instances of queer bashing need a rationalizing clinical construct when plain serviceable terms like ‘hateful’ and ‘stupid’ will do?

Corrective measures abound, some overtly hostile, some covertly persuasive. I suggest that it might be a more productive route to explore these corrective/coercive normative mechanisms in relation to the closet as an instrument of labour extraction, particularly caring labour or domestic labour. For those for whom conventionality was compromised by visibility or more subtle disinclination, closets were very literally cloisters of respectability. I suggest that cultural traditions with a strong emphasis on family duty and filial piety over individualism are most inclined to resist the impulses to freedom of their less conventional members.

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These same families have respectable alternatives to marriage and reproduction in the prototypical roles of spinster aunt and bachelor uncle – roles in service to the conventional family. This is not to suggest that all such persons were sexual minorities but the latter may owe a historic debt to tradition in providing sanctuary, albeit at a cost. Those disinclined to conventional marriage and family life could find some sanctuary from normative pressures in the form of roles that still provided service within the normative conventions of family and community life.

The religious service orders and the professions of social work, nursing and education also owe an historic debt to the disinclined – the single men and women whose vocations took them into the service of community at sites often perceived as inhospitable to their married peers. Disproportionate numbers of single people have figured in the histories of these institutions and professions. For some, a respectable solitude was traded for any impulse to freedom and solidarity with the sexual peers from whom they were separated by enforced secrecy. Social convention is the beneficiary.

Bullying then and now serves to enforce rules by which the resources of sexual minorities are extracted. As with many groups, enduring labour ghettos exist. Consider the number of stereotyped gay and lesbian ‘professions’ that are in the personal or public service fields, meeting the needs of the community including the needs for entertainment and aesthetic improvement.

Stereotypes themselves are exercised as corrective measures but they can also serve as a north star, a beacon to sanctuary. We are now in a period of exodus from labour ghettos. We are coming out all over and families and communities can be expected to defend their interests as continuing beneficiaries of our labours.

Pseudo-clinical rationalization in terms like homophobia does not serve to interrogate the interests served by subordination in all of its brutal and refined forms. If “It Gets Better”¹¹⁴ is to be more than a bumper sticker, our young must be protected. They must be supported in the ferocity they will need to sustain the pride that is also their rightful heritage. As James Baldwin put it:

“Passion is not friendly, it is arrogant, superbly contemptuous of all that is not itself, and as the very definition of passion implies the impulse to freedom, it has a might intimidating power. It contains a challenge. It contains an unspeakable hope.”

By way of shifting our gaze to the unacknowledged beneficiaries of our labour, I would like to use traditional religious reasoning to argue against assimilation and the reproduction of the traditional nuclear family by sexual minorities. Perhaps God’s plan includes setting roughly 10 percent of the population aside and exempting them from reproduction, hunting and grunting so that they could get on with the task of building civilization.¹¹⁵ As well, it is possible to further develop the discussion of queer labour ghettos and the cultural appropriation of ‘fag shui’ and other inclinations more commonly attributed to 10 percent of the population.

And having dispensed with the concept of homophobia outside of acute clinical circumstances, I would like to explore a number of equally rational reasons for disliking sexual minorities and perhaps propose some others like jealousy, resentment over the consolidation of male privilege in the white gay community, using internal networks to access resources just as other minority

¹¹⁴ It Gets Better. (2011). What is the It Gets Better Project. Retrieved from <http://www.itgetsbetter.org/pages/about-it-gets-better-project/>

¹¹⁵ Crimmins, C. (2005). *How the Homosexuals Saved Civilization*. New York: Tarcher.

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communities have done, and an annoying tendency toward conservatism and assimilation once rights are gained.

I would also like to advise traditional families on the practicality of raising a queer child as a hedge against the collapse of social security. With declining family size, it is merely efficient to raise a 'twofer' – to get yourself a tomboy daughter who can fix your plumbing and decorate your cake.

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Rethinking hate crimes: The hard work of creating social equity

Lucas Crawford and Robert Nichols, University of Alberta

May 10th was Alberta's inaugural *Hate Crimes Awareness Day*, an event that raised more questions than answers. Offered as an opportunity to 'celebrate' the successes of the past few decades, many in those communities supposedly most protected by such legislation – racialized minorities, Indigenous peoples and the LGBTQ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer] community, for instance – took this as an opportunity to challenge such legislation as a vehicle for promoting safe, just communities.

A recent Statistics Canada report¹¹⁶ on hate crimes shows that white people reportedly suffer more instances of chargeable hate crime than Aboriginal people. In the United States, white people are apparently the second-most likely demographic to experience race-related hate crimes. In New York City five years ago, four lesbians of colour were charged and convicted with "gang assault"¹¹⁷ (and are variously serving time) after defending themselves from a homophobic and assaultive man who threatened them with rape and grabbed for their bodies. He would later characterize the incident as a hate crime committed against him – for his heterosexuality.

By isolating incidents of such violence from their social and political context, the hate crime framework¹¹⁸ simultaneously obscures the background field of systemic oppression while relying upon it. The 'successful' use of such legislation often depends upon the careful discrimination of instances of specific, intentional hatred and more general, nearly all-pervasive discrimination and derision.

Rather than working to eliminate such discrimination, hate crimes actually require it as a norm against which the particular case can be established as unique, exceptional and a function of the intent of the perpetrator. This requires, in other words, a background of 'ordinary' violence, in which the articulation of violence through homophobic, transphobic, racist and misogynist language and actions are not 'especially' hate-motivated but merely trading on the currency of our day. This 'ordinary' violence is normalized and used as material to be sifted through in search of the supposed 'real' danger: the intentional, malicious, targeted homophobe or racist. But, of course, it is precisely this 'normal' state of affairs that enables such attacks in the first place, by making some bodies seem less worthy than others, some more 'attackable,' and by rendering some populations more vulnerable to premature death.

¹¹⁶ Crawford, L. & Ellison, C. (2010). [Canada] Opinion: Hate Crimes Demand Fresh Approaches, Harsher Sentences Don't Work (The Edmonton Journal). Retrieved <http://www.everyq.com/blogs/entry/-Canada-Opinion-Hate-crimes-demand-fresh-approaches-harsher-sentences-don-t-work-The-Edmonton-Journal->

¹¹⁷ Henry, I. (2007, June 21). Lesbians Sentenced for Self-Defense. *Workers World*. Retrieved from <http://www.workers.org/2007/us/nj4-0628/>

¹¹⁸ Janhevich, D.E. (2001). Hate Crime in Canada: An Overview of Issues and Data Sources. Retrieved from <http://publications.gc.ca/collections/Collection-R/Statcan/85-551-XIE/0009985-551-XIE.pdf>

Needless to say, then, hate crime legislation has broken its promises.¹¹⁹ In Canada, hate crime law simply lengthens offender sentences. This legislation marks an uneasy political marriage: the right's 'tough on crime' stance gussied up as an ostensibly left-leaning concern with marginalized groups. In the wake of the now-farcical Alberta Hate Crimes Awareness Day, it's little wonder that some are asking: why have we put our faith in the justice system to do the hard work of creating social equity and meaningful accountability for violence?

Thankfully, many people have not. In Canada and abroad, hopeful community activists from a variety of social justice and academic communities have been creating alternatives to the hate crime laws championed by large, well-funded, and often predominantly white gay lobby groups. Citing the lack of evidence that stricter punitive measures are successful to any degree in 'reforming' anyone, groups such as the Sylvia Rivera Law Project,¹²⁰ Queers for Economic Justice,¹²¹ and the Audre Lorde Project¹²² have vehemently opposed these laws. Numerous members of the LGBTQ community in Alberta are vocally joining these innovative efforts to rethink accountability and justice – outside prisons.

There are many reasons to look beyond prisons for justice. As we saw above, hate crime laws make no distinction between assailants from majority groups who specifically target marginalized people and those who defend themselves daily from discrimination. Moreover, there's no evidence to suggest hate crime legislation is either a deterrent or a useful measure. Quite the contrary: there is evidence suggesting that longer prison sentences increase rates of recidivism. It is a soothing myth that this legislation protects anyone: as the Sylvia Rivera Law Project puts it, "It is hard to imagine that someone moved to brutally attack a trans[gender] person would pause to consider that they might get a longer sentence."¹²³

Even if harsher sentences were effective, they rely too heavily on sentencing as a tool to 'disincentivize' violence. As a consequence, supporters of hate crimes legislation may end up reproducing the hateful logic of vengeance they purportedly seek to question: to combat 'message crimes,' these laws advocate 'message sentences' in which individuals are made scapegoats for a complex social world that legalizes and condones so much prejudice and bigotry. Don't we have more innovative ways to communicate than this indirect 'message' cycle of punishment and harm?

In Edmonton, we've already witnessed positive work made possible by inventive definitions of justice. Most notably, the family of Robert Stanley (the 75-year old bus driver killed in 2002 by a boulder pushed from an overpass on Whitemud Freeway) adopted a restorative justice¹²⁴ approach to the sentencing of one youth. At the family's request, he was not imprisoned, but instead given alternative sentences.

¹¹⁹ Wells, K. (2010, May 12). Hate Crimes Legislation Needs to be Strengthened. [Blog Entry]. Retrieved from <http://anti-racistcanada.blogspot.com/2010/05/hate-crimes-legislation-needs-to-be.html>

¹²⁰ Sylvia Rivera Law Project. (n.d.). Home. Retrieved from <http://srlp.org/>

¹²¹ Queers for Economic Justice. (2009). Home. Retrieved from <http://q4ej.org/>

¹²² The Audre Lorde Project. (n.d.). About ALP. <http://alp.org/about>

¹²³ Sylvia Rivera Law Project. (n.d.). About. Retrieved from <http://srlp.org/about>

¹²⁴ Restorative Justice Online. (2012). Tutorial: Introduction to Restorative Justice. Retrieved from <http://www.restorativejustice.org/university-classroom/01introduction/tutorial-introduction-to-restorative-justice/tutorial-introduction-to-restorative-justice>

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A number of Edmonton groups undertake similar work, including a range of Aboriginal organizations, as well as the innovative Youth Restorative Action Project,¹²⁵ a committee comprised solely of youth (including former young offenders) who consult with individual young offenders to help determine sentencing. Although restorative justice isn't always feasible (its use in violence-against-women contexts has been critiqued), it shows that there are models of justice that refuse increased imprisonment and pursue more meaningful ideas about safety.

Finally, we have been forced to ask: When we hoard disproportionate resources to campaign for harsher punishments, who benefits? Resources are better devoted to supporting marginalized communities – for whom unequal social conditions put individuals at higher risk of entering the criminal justice system. Right now 60 percent of the prairies' federal inmates are Aboriginal people,¹²⁶ and LGBTQ people – particularly transsexuals of colour – are victimized by the criminal justice system in great number.

Hate crime advocates promote a lazy entrenchment of further inequality through retaliation sentencing, while others choose hope, change, and support. The events of the past week show that we can look for justice beyond mere prisons, even as we continue the long social justice struggle against hate and violence.

¹²⁵ The Youth Restorative Action Project. (n.d.). News & Announcements. Retrieved from <http://yrap.org/>

¹²⁶ Canadian Centre for Justice. (2001). Aboriginal Peoples in Canada. Retrieved from <http://dsp-psd.pwgsc.gc.ca/Collection/Statcan/85F0033M/85F0033MIE2001001.pdf>

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Linking Structural and Interpersonal Violence in LGBTQ Lives

Janice Ristock, University of Manitoba

December 6th annually marks the national day of remembrance¹²⁷ and action on violence against women. It is the anniversary of the 1989 l'École Polytechnique de Montréal massacre where fourteen women were singled out and murdered by Marc Lépine, a man who blamed women and feminists for his inability to get into an engineering program.

I remember that December day in 1989 very well as I listened to CBC Radio describe the unfolding events. The question of *why* this had happened was at the forefront – was it a mad man; was it a sign of lack of gun control legislation; could it be that this was part of a larger pattern of male violence against women? I was teaching Women's Studies at Trent University at the time and we had been planning a trip to the Simone de Beauvoir Institute in Montreal in early January. We hadn't imagined that our trip would include a visit to the site where we would bear witness to the outpouring of shock and grief as displayed in the hallways and on the walls of l'École Polytechnique in the area where the killings took place. I'll never forget the experience and I don't think my students will ever forget it either.

The debates surrounding how to understand the violence that occurred on December 6th also struck a particular chord with me because I had just started to research the issue of partner violence in lesbian/queer women's relationships (work that I have since continued for over twenty years). In engaging in this research I was concerned that I might contribute to the anti-feminist backlash that suggested that women were just as violent as men and/or that violence in queer relationships was simply further evidence of the 'sick' nature of our desires. Thus, I have been committed to framing partner violence as an issue facing communities and to unpacking and examining the spaces and places in which violence occurs in order to keep our gaze on the differing historical, social, political and cultural contexts of violence and thereby connecting the dots between structural violence and interpersonal violence.

My book *No More Secrets: Violence in lesbian relationships*¹²⁸ was based on interviews that I conducted with 102 women who had experienced violence in their intimate relationships with other women. In the book I brought forward a number of overlapping contexts that women spoke of as giving shape and meaning to their experiences of violence. For example, some women experienced contexts of dislocation where they had moved from another country to Canada, felt great isolation and vulnerability and they felt this all contributed to their experience of partner abuse. Others spoke to me about a lifetime of violence, often growing up in poverty and experiencing violence within their homes, their neighborhoods and later in their relationships. Others spoke of the impact of

¹²⁷ Status of Women Canada. (2012). National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. Retrieved from <http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/dates/vaw-vff/index-eng.html>

¹²⁸ Ristock, J.L. (2002). *No More Secrets: Violence in Lesbian Relationships*. New York: Routledge.

colonization and the legacy of residential schools¹²⁹ and the ways in which violence had been normalized in their lives. None of the women that I interviewed were offering excuses for the violence they had experienced; rather they could speak clearly about the intersections between structural violence and interpersonal violence and they understood first-hand the ways in which racism, sexism and heteronormality were part of an interlocking framework of power, privilege and oppression that shaped their lives.

I vividly remember interviewing one woman who spoke to me about a cycle of violence, of being abused as a child, experiencing racism daily as an Aboriginal woman living in Alberta, using drugs and alcohol, working in the sex trade, being abused by johns, being abused by her female partner, and then entering another relationship where she was abusive towards her female partner. She said “As I look back, my mom was physically abusive to me and my brother, I was sexually abused by my grandfather and that was huge for me...plus I’m from Alberta and there is a lot of racism towards Natives. People running people over and not caring. What I seen is what I thought was acceptable.” She spoke without offering excuses, identifying herself as an abuser although her account reflects a context of violence in which the neat categories of victim and abuser no longer seem to hold. Her story also exposes the limits of focusing too narrowly on domestic violence. She experienced a lifetime of violence supported by larger social structures that create and sustain inequalities and disadvantages.

Racism, sexism, and homophobia intersect to shape the context in which sexual abuse, child abuse, stranger violence, and partner violence are initiated and continue. Her story, like those of many of the women that I interviewed, challenges the binary categories (perpetrator /victim, good/bad, male/female) that have been relied upon in the domestic violence movement and that end up asserting one grand narrative of relationship violence that keeps the experiences of marginalized women hidden and that most often ignores violence in LGBTQ relationships.

My recent research with Art Zoccolone, the Executive Director of Two-Spirited Peoples of the First Nations in Toronto explored the trajectories of mobility and migration of Two-Spirit¹³⁰ people and the impact on identity, health and well-being. While violence was not the focus it became clear that state violence including forced mobility (experiences of residential schools, foster care, child welfare systems) along with racism in LGBTQ communities and homophobia on many First Nation reserve communities could not be overlooked. Nor could the fact that more than half the people that we interviewed experienced violence in their intimate relationships. The separation that is often still made between public and private violence clearly does not reflect most lived realities.

As Andrea Smith so rightly asserts in *Conquest: Sexual violence and American Indian genocide*¹³¹, when speaking about domestic violence in Aboriginal communities: “our strategies to combat violence within communities (sexual/domestic violence) must be informed by approaches that also combat violence against communities, including state violence – police brutality, prisons, militarism, racism, colonialism, and economic exploitation.”

¹²⁹ A Lost Heritage: Canada’s Residential Schools. (2009, September 29). *CBC Digital Archives*. Retrieved from <http://archives.cbc.ca/society/education/topics/692/>

¹³⁰ 2 Spirits. (n.d.). Home. Retrieved from <http://www.2spirits.com/>

¹³¹ Smith, A. (2005). *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*. Cambridge: South End Press.

Catherine Taylor and I recently wrote a chapter in my new edited book *Intimate Partner Violence in LGBTQ Lives*¹³² about the need for white researchers to see themselves as allies and to take an anti-oppressive ethics of solidarity when engaging in research on partner violence that addresses LGBTQ and racialized communities. We wrote:

“It therefore remains imperative that we keep our efforts at responding to relationship violence aligned with the broader struggles against oppressive discourses that sustain and rationalize state violence in its many forms. In advocating for an emphasis on social transformation, we are at the same time arguing for continued attention to the specifics of IPV [intimate partner violence] in people’s lives. In the case of indigenous LGBTQ people experiencing violence, we are persuaded that attentiveness to specific contexts of violence coupled with conscientization leads logically to the conclusion that researchers who see our work as opposing personal violence need to actively oppose state violence through our research and in our public lives. As allies, we need to continue to think critically, consciously and reflexively about how to engage in transformative work that centers the experiences of marginalized people, recognizes the implication of state violence in personal violence, and integrates both these principles into our research, service, and community actions.”

Every December 6th, let us remember the 14 women who were killed, and let us think about the large numbers of women affected by gender and racial violence including the many missing and murdered Aboriginal women. Let us also see the connections to other acts of hate and violence – high rates of violence against members of the trans community, homophobic bullying, institutional violence, colonization – and let us all commit to action and to being allies in order to end structural violence, state violence and interpersonal violence.

¹³² Ristock, J. (Ed.). (2011). *Intimate Partner Violence in LGBTQ Lives*. New York: Routledge.

14

The L-Word: It's Not Getting Better For Lonely Young Lesbians

Melissa Carroll, McMaster University

On Friday, 4 October, 2010 the lifeless bodies¹³³ of 21 year-old Jeanine Blanchette and her 17 year-old girlfriend Chantal Dube were found in a wooded area behind a social services building in Orangeville, Ontario. Immediately deemed a double-suicide by police, the lesbian couple's disappearance and their eventual deaths drew little attention from the local or national media and even sparser attention from the Orangeville Police Department. In fact the authorities assured the families that the girls had simply run off together and that their disappearance was an attention-seeking attempt at feminine manipulation. After all, girls just do this – they run away. By the time the police decided to begin the search it was too late. Jeanine Blanchette's cousin, not the police, found the two girls lying together, dead already, nestled in a blanket of trees.

Other than the negligence of the OPP, what I find especially problematic with this story is that when the girls were eventually found their deaths (although understood to be undeniably tragic) were described by the media¹³⁴ as losses that were inevitable. Foreshadowable because of the girls' presumed lonely unhappiness. Rather than contextualizing the lives they'd lived together as a young couple the lacklustre coverage of their suicides weighed in on the lonely affective dispositions of Blanchette and Dube, effectively creating a narrative that narrowly focused on the girls' shifty emotional states. It is this odd (non)reaction to these young adults' deaths that speaks to what I understand to be a western fear of both young lesbianism and negative emotions.

In 2011, an age of presumed tolerance that portends a particular acceptance of diversity (if only a compulsory one), culturally we have taken a turn towards regulating our fear of hyper-emotion (sentiments that are considered excessively depressive and, therefore, unproductive) by obsessing over gleeful, positive emotions. Happiness is most certainly at the forefront. Consequently, unhappiness and loneliness have gotten misappropriated and stapled onto young lesbians while their difficult feelings are being reconfigured as symptoms of more manageable mental illnesses and wayward sicknesses. The suicidal lesbian body, therefore, becomes the new body to dismiss – a place to house the already ramped happy-anxiety that is fast becoming the benchmark of western sentiment.

In response, I seek to make a political space for 'the unhappy lesbian misfit' by exploring the following: how have lesbians become perceived as singular threats whose feelings are dangerous to society's collective joy? What is at stake politically and culturally by the lonely sentiments that get stuck to lesbians?

¹³³ Riese. (October 4, 2010). Missing Lesbian Couple Found: Jeanine Blanchette, 21, and Chantal Dube, 17, Suicide Likely Cause of Death. [Blog Entry]. Retrieved from <http://www.autostraddle.com/lesbian-double-suicide-4567/>

¹³⁴ Halliday, C. (2010, October 2). Family Found Bodies of Missing Women in Orangeville. *Orangeville.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.orangeville.com/article/881798--family-found-bodies-of-missing-women-in-orangeville>

In a disturbingly stoic post by Canadian media mogul Perez Hilton¹³⁵ he surmises that the reason Blanchette and Dube took their own lives is simple: they were brutally depressed and mentally ill. He states: “it sounds like both these young women suffered quite a bit from depression, and it breaks our heart that despite their best efforts, they couldn’t find the strength within themselves or each other to hold on.” Hilton’s presumptions surrounding the girls’ deaths privileges ‘our’ public ‘heart’ and collective strength while dismissing Dube and Blanchette as a hyper-feminine “them” who were too weak and too melodramatic to fight for survival. In choosing to spectacularize the two girls with two particular close-up photos – each depicting the young women in eerily solemn (in the case of Dube), or hyper-emotional (in the case of Blanchette) affective moments – the girls are presented as though they are actually on trial for being emotive. In not surviving, they failed; Hilton’s near happiness in his personal assessment is distressing.

I also see a troubling and confusing gender bias surrounding the social reaction to queer teen suicide. Not only are lesbians being used as unhappy scapegoats in this current war on rogue emotions, but while lesbian youth are dismissed for being suicidal, gay male youth are being martyred. Focusing attentions around why and how young gay women commit suicide, rather than on changing the ways in which society views their sexuality, social reactions to lesbian suicide passively condemn and shame without introspection. And yet, western society is more than eager to revere and make heroes out of gay, male youth who die by suicide, heralding them as brave victims of homophobia.

For instance, here in Canada in 2007, 13 year-old Shaquille Wisdom¹³⁶ took his own life after being endlessly bullied by classmates at his school in Ajax, Ontario. However, the social reaction to Wisdom’s death was scathingly different from public reactions to the Dube and Blanchette suicides. Described by the media as a murderous example of external gay bashing, Wisdom’s death initiated a strong social response throughout Canada as people rallied against what they saw as the growing pandemic of social and cultural homophobia,¹³⁷ a rally still ongoing. The idea that a young man would be driven to take his own life at the beginning of his potential left a Canadian public heart-broken, and his death prompted a public outcry for Canadian education reform against homophobia in schools. Moreover, Wisdom’s death became entrenched in the larger conversation surrounding the increased suicidal ideation of queer youth throughout Canada and the United States in much the

¹³⁵ PerezHilton. (2010, October 5). Two Young Lesbians Commit Suicide in Canada. *PerezHilton.com*. Retrieved from http://perezhilton.com/2010-10-05-two_lesbians_jeanine_blanchette_and_chantal_dube_commit_suicide#respond

¹³⁶ Rau, Krishna. (2008, January 31). Gay teen’s suicide brings some changes. *Xtra!*. Retrieved from http://www.xtra.ca/public/Toronto/Gay_teens_suicide_brings_some_changes-4260.aspx

¹³⁷ Lakritz, Naomi. (2008, February 24). When Children Die because They’re Bullied as Gay. *Times Colonist*. Retrieved from <http://www2.canada.com/victoriatimescolonist/news/comment/story.html?id=7b05f33a-7b8b-477b-af23-42965920b1a0>

same ways that Jamie Hubley's¹³⁸ recent death has prompted people like Rick Mercer¹³⁹ and Bob Rae¹⁴⁰ to start talking about what we can do to combat homophobia once and for all.

I'm not at all suggesting these deaths were not atrocities and horrendous examples of the disgusting power of homophobia. However, I can't help but wonder here why, for Wisdom and for Hubley, did the media coverage speak tragedy and loss, attributing the death of these boys to the violent hatred of others, while Dube and Blanchette's deaths were construed as the unhappy inevitability of their personal flaws? In other words, why do we believe external homophobia attacks gay-male teens, while lesbian teens are believed to be the conduits of their own demise?

Dan Savage's *It Gets Better*¹⁴¹ (IGB) project highlights what I see as a specific example of a cultural forum that evidences a widespread lack of political information, care, and sentiment for young female queers, especially those deemed unhappy. Beginning as an online site where queer and LGBTQ adults could post their supportive video messages to queer youth who might be struggling with bullying and homophobia, Savage's IGB created a safe space in order to speak out against suicidal ideations. What quickly becomes clear when exploring this site, however, is that while this campaign professes to speak to all LGBTQ youth, young lesbians are being paradoxically hailed by Savage's project but are never actually the intended audience. Separating the boys from the girls and, more strategically, the rational, successful gay boy from the hyper-emotional, lost gay girl, what emerges is a narrative about lesbianism that suggests its frivolousness.

What I also see within this and other cultural scripts is the continued feminization of unhappiness which points to the ways in which lesbian desire, especially the intimacies between lesbian youth, is rendered both invisible and affectively ugly – sentiments that are not becoming of a 'good girl'. Shockingly, gay male youth are affectively configured as emblems of a stolen happiness whereas lesbian youth are misconstrued as those who might steal happiness and infect it with loneliness. As such, lonely, unhappy girls are neither expected to survive their unhappiness nor thought deserved of survival.

Even in the queer community there seems to be a lack of awareness about lesbian youth, as well as a growing lack of desire to critique the privileging of happiness. Available support networks specifically targeting young lonely lesbians are sparse and often homonormative. While online initiatives similar to the *It Gets Better* project such as Autostraddle's "23 lesbians, 10 animals, 2 children, 1 message"¹⁴² attempt to compensate for the privileging of white, middle class, gay men in the social media these narratives also create and beckon 'happy' lesbian identities to them – dog-loving, middle-class, monogamous and devout lovers who revel in domestic bliss, social networking, and corporatization. Narrativizations that promise a return to some lost happiness are in abundance

¹³⁸ Pearson, M. (2010, October 17). 15-year-old Jamie Hubley's lonely cry for acceptance. *Ottawa Citizen*. Retrieved from <http://www.ottawacitizen.com/life/year+Jamie+Hubley+lonely+acceptance/5559352/story.html>

¹³⁹ RMR: Rick's Rant-Teen Suicide. (2011, October 25). *Rick Mercer Report*. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wh1jNAZHKIw>

¹⁴⁰ Harper, T. (2011, October 31). Feds Could Use Majority to Highlight Problems of Bullying and Homophobia in Canadian Schools. *The Hill Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.hilltimes.com/inside-politics/2011/10/31/feds-could-use-majority-to-highlight-problem-of-bullying-and-homophobia-in/28610>

¹⁴¹ It Gets Better Project. (2011). Home. Retrieved from <http://www.itgetsbetter.org/>

¹⁴² The Team. (2010, October 15). It Gets Better: 23 Lesbians, 10 Animals, 2 Children, 1 Message. [Blog Entry]. Retrieved from <http://www.autostraddle.com/it-gets-better-because-all-these-lesbians-say-so-62919/>

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on this site and they are so without any critical thought going into what this happiness is, to whom it is available, or where it resides.

I propose here that what we queer activists and feminists need is an understanding of an unhappiness with happiness, a lonely unhappiness that does not necessitate a sadness with oneself; rather a pleasurable loneliness which addresses the sadness we have with a western politic that uses happiness to oppress others. What is important to remember here is that lonely feelings call into question our stark obsession with western happiness and our dependency on political policies that choose which affects are beneficial to nationalist discourses and which are threatening to this ideal. I argue here for a loneliness that is neither recuperated as happy, nor a loneliness that validates negativity. Neither of these binaries are fluid enough for this lonely emotion. Instead, I put forth that this beautifully ugly emotion must work to reimagine happiness, a challenge necessary to a reclamation of political lesbian agency.

It is because of its misfittedness that loneliness can be understood as a present, ordinary, everyday affect that lets us know social change is necessary and continual, emotions are powerful, and ethical connections require work, care, and compassion, not empty smiles. In this way it might just be the lonely young lesbian who is strong enough to stir things up, muddying our comfortable waters. Her unhappiness is not something that makes her expendable, and her loneliness within this particular moment can be made political. She can become the agent of radical change. After all, lesbianism's power lies in its ability to constantly re-envision itself, never falling prey to a happy stability. We can't forget that.

15

Seeking Refuge from Homophobic and Transphobic Persecution

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Currently no fewer than 76 countries criminalize same-sex sexual acts or gender variability. Many of these statutes can be traced to colonial imposition, specifically, the British penal code section 377. Direct criminalization and morality laws create the means for abuse of power by police and others in authority. Surveillance and threat is dispersed along networks of family, school and community. Homophobic and transphobic violence often occurs out of the public eye, and unlike war or larger conflicts, people experience this violence in relative isolation. In some cases, religious teachings and psychiatric diagnosis are used to shame and pathologize people who live transgressive sexualities or genders. Stigmatization as evil or mentally ill further isolates people.

These brief accounts below were shared by QLGBT refugees now living in Canada, as part of our research project “Un/Settling.” These accounts highlight some of the complexities of persecution based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

A young woman from Nigeria was told to marry a man who was twenty years her elder. She confided in her sister that she was attracted to women and could not marry this man. The sister told her parents. The young woman was kept locked up and beaten regularly by her father for over a month. Rumours spread around her town. Her church publicly denounced her. When she was allowed out, she was assaulted by a gang of young men and neighbours threw rocks at her.

A trans woman from Mexico was picked up by police while walking home in the afternoon. They threatened to charge her with prostitution if she did not perform sexual acts and pay them a bribe. Officers were regularly waiting outside her apartment, following and harassing her.

Gay men who have fled Sri Lanka report being picked up from gay cruising areas by police. They were detained and assaulted by police, and forced to pay a bribe for their release. The police returned to their homes monthly to extort more money, threatening to out them or beat them if they did not pay.

Our research suggests the global terrain of protection and persecution for QLGBT people is in flux and often paradoxical. As Louis George Tin has described in the *Dictionary of Homophobia*,¹⁴³ Brazil hosts the largest Pride Parade in the world with over 3 million people celebrating. Yet Brazil also has the world’s highest reported rate of homophobic and transphobic murders. While South Africa recognizes same-sex marriage, human rights organizations there report ten cases a week of ‘corrective rape’ targeting lesbians, most never investigated by police. QLGBT organizers in Poland have been targets of violence, with impunity or complicity from authorities, despite the human rights protections promised by European Union membership. We have heard Bogota described by one man as a great place to be gay but, by another person who spent ten years on the run within

¹⁴³ Tin, L.G. (Ed.). (2008). *The Dictionary of Homophobia: A Global History of Gay & Lesbian Experience*. (Redburn, M., Trans.). British Columbia: Arsenal Pulp Press.

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Colombia trying to escape death threats, as a terrifying city to be gay. The first man was protected by his affluence, the second vulnerable because he was poor, and from an area controlled by drug cartels. Legal human rights protection does not translate into on-the-ground safety or access to state protection. Within the same country of origin, people's vulnerability or safety varies considerably based on social class, race, religion, ability to 'pass,' and social networks.

Queer Lesbian Gay Bi and Trans refugees that we know left their home countries because they were in danger, and many did not know that the risks they faced constituted persecution. Often it was only after they left their countries by any means possible that they learned that they could seek refugee protection. Asymmetrical im/mobilities – created by intersectional mobility exclusions based on racism, global north/south disparities, gender, and social class – enable and constrain who is able to leave, how people migrate, and options for permanent status.

In their migration, QLGBT asylum seekers encounter immigration and border systems that enable and restrict mobility based on the priorities of global capitalism, neocolonialism, and post-9/11 notions of security. Canada, along with other Western countries, is using increasingly stringent measures to screen out potential asylum seekers. According to Oxfam's report, *No Price Too High: The Cost of Australia's Approach to Asylum Seekers*,¹⁴⁴ Australia has spent over a billion dollars to detain and process asylum seekers offshore; a half-million dollars per refugee. Legislation before Canadian Parliament now would result in detention of potential refugees, including children, for a full year. Canada Research Chair Catherine Dauvergne argues in *Making People Illegal: What Globalization Means for Migration and Law*¹⁴⁵ that the punitive impact of measures like these function to make asylum itself illegal.

Undertaking an asylum application entails accessing and working within a refugee system that was not designed with lesbian gay bi trans or queer refugees in mind. In the early 1990s, the Geneva Convention criteria for refugee protection stated that, "membership in a particular social group" was interpreted in Canada and by the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) to include those who face persecution based on their sexuality or gender identity. Yet, much work remains to be done to ensure that this protection is meaningful.

If a potential refugee makes it to a UNHCR office or one of the 21 countries that extend protection to QLGBT refugees, they must prove an often hidden and stigmatized identity, and their fear of persecution. QLGBT refugees have left countries where they have been under surveillance, arrested, extorted and, for some, imprisoned or tortured, because of their sexuality or gender identity. Survival has required vigilance, secrecy and conformity. The survival tactics do not necessarily disappear on departure. We know one man who spent 27 days in detention after making his way from Iran, through China, Indonesia and Japan, before working up the nerve to tell his duty counsel he was gay. Shame, fear and the impacts of trauma on memory interfere with people being able to make their case.

Refugee decision makers find sexual orientation and gender identity cases some of the hardest decisions to make. Law professor Nicole Laviolette argues that no other kind of claim requires people to provide such intimate testimony about such deeply stigmatized parts of their lives.

¹⁴⁴ Bem, K., Field, N., Maclellan, N., Meyer, S. & Morris, T. (2007). *A Price too High: The Cost of Australia's Approach to Asylum Seekers*. Retrieved from <http://resources.oxfam.org.au/filestore/originals/OAus-PriceTooHighAsylumSeekers-0807.pdf>

¹⁴⁵ Dauvergne, C. (2008). *Making People Illegal: What Globalization Means for Migration and Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Without formal guidelines for adjudicators to follow, decision makers rely on their own background knowledge – often based in culturally encapsulated understandings of sexualities and genders – to assess the credibility of an applicant’s identity claim. QLGBT refugees are evaluated against expected narratives of refugee flight and Western narratives of LGBT identity that do not necessarily apply. Fair decisions are hampered by the lack of reliable information about on-the-ground conditions for QLGBT people.

Refugee protection is not yet meaningfully accessible for queer or trans people facing persecution. Simultaneously, the right to asylum is in jeopardy, internationally and in Canada, for all asylum seekers. QLGBT refugees are struggling to gain access to a protection system that is under resourced and under erosion. Bringing about refugee protection for QLGBT people facing persecution, preventing further erosion of the refugee protection system that exists, and envisioning just approaches to asylum will require creative and committed political, policy, social service, community building, cultural, and scholarly work.

The social justice risks are as significant as the potentials – as are spelt out in the research of scholars such as Jasbir Puar, Sara Ahmed, Vivien Namaste, and Vancouver activist/scholar Fatima Jaffer. Raising the problem of sexuality or gender based persecution internationally risks othering cultures, faiths, or countries as monolithically and irredeemably homophobic. Moreover, we are mindful that presenting the need for QLGBT refugee settlement in Canada can entrench colonial narratives of rescue and binaries of developed vs. backwards or civilized vs. barbaric. Writing, speaking and organizing around QLGBT refugee protection invites us into echoing homonationalist discourses that equate the West with progress and tolerance of QLGBT citizens with modernity. This homonationalism can ally dangerously with Islamophobia or xenophobia. As Fatima Jaffer explained at the July 2011 Salaam conference held in Vancouver, after 9/11 “I was being seen as not being queer and patriotic, not being Canadian in the way that it’s being framed by the queer community.”¹⁴⁶

Post-Colonial Queer/Trans scholarship, antiracist organizing among QLGBT communities, QLGBT migrant organizing, and Queer and Trans intersectionality¹⁴⁷ all play critical roles in interrupting these problematic discourses and their repercussions. Bringing postcolonial, antiracist, Trans and Queer perspectives into dialogue will enhance the community organizing, research, law and policy efforts to create meaningful protection for QLGBT refugees. Collaborations among community organizations working with QLGBT refugees and researchers are contributing to this important dialogue – Rainbow Refugee in Vancouver, AGIR in Montreal, and a number of groups in Toronto are part of this effort. As well, bringing the knowledge constructed through these collaborations into dialogue with policymakers, lawyers, service providers, human rights organizations, and the wider public is a critical step in the social justice agenda for QLGBT refugees.

Recently the two of us met with officers of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), to iron out specifics of how Queer/LGBT community organizations can participate in sponsoring refugees facing homophobic or transphobic persecution. Among the many details we pointed out were the problems with application forms asking for *sex (male /female)* and *marital status*. We also raised the issue that, while waiting for resettlement, in often precarious conditions, QLGBT refugees continue

¹⁴⁶ Hainsworth, J. (2011, July 29). Homosexuality and Islam not Opposing Forces. *Xtra!*. Retrieved from http://www.xtra.ca/public/Vancouver/Homosexuality_and_Islam_not_opposing_forces-10561.aspx

¹⁴⁷ Bilge, S. (2011, October 18). Developing Intersectional Solidarities: Plea for Queer Intersectionality. [Blog entry]. Retrieved from <http://blog.fedcan.ca/2011/10/18/developing-intersectional-solidarities-a-plea-for-queer-intersectionality/>

to face homophobic or transphobic violence. In particular, we drew attention to the interminably long and dangerous waits faced by Ugandans, Nigerians, and other Africans who apply for refugee protection in Nairobi, Kenya. As the Canadian Council for Refugees documents,¹⁴⁸ the target for the Canadian processing centre in Nairobi remains 1000 people per year, despite a caseload¹⁴⁹ of over 7000 people who have willing sponsors in Canada.

Advocating for migration rights for same-sex partners (LEGIT.ca)¹⁵⁰ and refugee protection for QLGBT asylum seekers in Canada (rainbowrefugee.ca)¹⁵¹ has taught us a few things about negotiating our way around boxes that confine and, through systems, exclude. Working towards human rights protection for those persecuted for the sexualities or gender identities raises complex intersectional social justice issues that call for alliance building, interdisciplinary scholarship, dialogue, and critical reflexivity in our advocacy and research.

¹⁴⁸ Canadian Council for Refugees. (n.d.). Nairobi: Long Delays-Sign the Statement, contact your MP and raise awareness. Retrieved from <http://ccrweb.ca/en/nairobi-action>

¹⁴⁹ Canadian Council for Refugees. (n.d.). Nairobi: Long Delays-Sign the Statement, contact your MP and raise awareness. Retrieved from <http://ccrweb.ca/en/nairobi-action>

¹⁵⁰ LEGIT. (2011). Home. Retrieved from <http://www.legit.ca/>

¹⁵¹ Rainbow Refuge Canada. (2011). About Rainbow Refugee. Retrieved from <http://www.rainbowrefugee.ca/>

16

LGBT Struggles for Human Dignity and Equal Rights in Uganda

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The influence of the Christian Right on LGBT rights continues to spread beyond the United States. It is productive to examine the nature and impact of this influence¹⁵² on the African continent. As a Ugandan lesbian who grew up in an evangelical Christian household, I also think it is useful to examine the role and activities of external actors like the Christian Right in the struggles of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people in Uganda. United States evangelicals are one of the challenges faced by African LGBT movements as they struggle for human dignity and social justice.

Both anti-gay activists and LGBT activists across Africa are fighting on two fronts: a domestic and a foreign battle. For American evangelicals such as Scott Lively,¹⁵³ Africa is a battle ground to export his brand of anti-gay theology, even as it is being challenged in his own country. For African politicians and clergy heightened attacks on gay people have become an opportunity to gain votes. For African LGBT activists it has required us to adopt a Eurocentric advocacy toolkit which, ironically, is spawning a backlash against us in our own countries. And, on the other hand, for LGBT people in Uganda the anti-gay advocacy¹⁵⁴ of the Christian Right is fuelling overt violence and even death.

In March 2009, Scott Lively as well as Don Schmierer of Exodus Internationals, and Caleb Lee Brundidge of *International Healing Foundation*, traveled to Uganda to speak at a seminar called *Exposing the Homosexual Agenda*.¹⁵⁵ Remember, Uganda is a country where homosexuality is *already* illegal. Videos of Lively at the seminar capture him telling his Ugandan audience – a mix of police officers, members of Parliament, students, parents, pastors and their congregations – that homosexuals were responsible for the Nazi holocaust and they recruit children into homosexuality. “Nobody has been able to stop [homosexuals] so far,” he agitates. “I’m hoping Uganda can!”

¹⁵² Gettleman, J. (2010, January 3). America’s Role Seen in Uganda Anti-Gay Push. *New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/04/world/africa/04uganda.html?_r=2

¹⁵³ Scott Lively. (2010, July 29). Retrieved March 14, 2012 from the Conservapedia: http://www.conservapedia.com/Scott_Lively

¹⁵⁴ Moylan, B. (2010, January 4). Huge in Africa: The American Evangelicals Goad Uganda to Kill Gays. *Gawker*. Retrieved from <http://gawker.com/5439886/>

¹⁵⁵ Burroway, J. (2010, January 6). BTB Videos: Scott Lively Delivers His “Nuclear Bomb” To Uganda. *Box Turtle Bulletin*. Retrieved from <http://www.boxturtlebulletin.com/2010/01/06/19081>

The Christian Right's influence in Ugandan politics does not appear out of a vacuum. Christian evangelical missions to Africa date back hundreds of years to European slavery and colonization.¹⁵⁶ Here I look at the evolution of contemporary Christian evangelism and the continuing legacy of interventionism in Africa, which brought Lively to Uganda.

On 1 January 1980, American Presbyterian minister Francis Schaeffer became the first evangelical preacher to stir political activism among Christian evangelicals when he delivered a speech, *A Christian Manifesto*,¹⁵⁷ at the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, Illinois. A strong advocate *against* the separation of church and state, Schaeffer's teachings on 'true Christian living' and opposing humanism spawned a sexual revolution. He's widely cited as the person who birthed anti-abortion movements among evangelicals. Perhaps less known is the role Schaeffer's philosophy has played in a global anti-gay movement that has added a new dimension to discourse on sex and sexuality among African Christian-majority societies.

When Christian fundamentalists were debating federally funded abortion clinics and the abolition of mandatory prayer in public schools, Schaeffer's concern was also the propulsion of a humanistic strain in public education. His interventions followed the common trajectory of the Christian Right's protection-of-our-children rhetoric. Schaeffer advocated what he called "true Christian living." In a nutshell, he preached that humanist secularism was the dominant threat to human existence and had only been made possible by the silence of Christians. Further – and this is where Uganda enters the picture – Schaeffer advocated "reaching the lost both at home and abroad." The mission of saving "the lost" must not stop at American borders, he told his followers; the mission is a universal one.

While Uganda has seen the growth of an evangelical movement since the mid-1970s, Schaeffer's *Manifesto* added a new dimension to postcolonial African struggles, including navigating Eurocentric thoughts and evangelical beliefs on sex, sexuality, and marriage. Marriage according to many evangelical preachers is to be understood as an institution of human service to God. Linked to this conception is a model of 'the family' based on a hierarchical and individualistic paradigm, one runs counter to the values of traditional African conceptions of family grounded on communal life.

The export of evangelical beliefs from the United States to Africa included the condemnation of same-sex relationships because "they are not in line with God's purpose for procreation." The latter belief is shared by evangelical tradition and many Africans, but for different reasons. Ugandans espouse a 'sex for procreation' view as a way of continuing family lineage: one cannot become an ancestor without offspring. On a community level, a person who dies without a child is believed to become an 'alien spirit.' In contrast, evangelicals advocate procreation because they believe a non-child bearing sexual relationship is contrary to God's intent for marriage.

The fear associated with barren 'alien spirits' stigmatized all childless people, whether the childlessness was caused by barrenness or heterosexuals or homosexuals who choose not to have

¹⁵⁶ Davidson, B. (2008). The Bible and the Gun. (Episode 5). *Africa Series*. Video retrieved from <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-84165638468056829>

¹⁵⁷ Schaeffer, F. A. (1982). *A Christian Manifesto*. Retrieved from <http://www.peopleforlife.org/francis.html>

children. Same-sex relationships in Africa predate colonial times, but it is only now that LGBTs are claiming their independence from cultural ties which requires them to have children or to remain silent. This cultural disruption partly informs why homosexuality or its so-called ‘promotion’¹⁵⁸ is perceived as un-African.

Homosexuality is not alien to Africa. Rather, what is alien to Africa is the discourse and human rights terminology being used by more visible African LGBT movements. The LGBT movement in Uganda has adopted an agenda that defines LGBT rights as human rights precisely to counter an American-inspired movement against us. The visibility of LGBT activism partly informs the success of the anti-gay movement – but also *vice versa*.

In 2010, a year after the anti-gay seminar in which Lively and Caleb Lee Brundidge lectured Ugandans on the ‘gay agenda,’ American evangelist and founder of The Call Ministries, Lou Engel, held a prayer crusade in Uganda where he called on the nation to repent for “the sin of homosexuality.” Engel echoed Schaeffer’s of anxieties about humanism’s “takeover of public schools” and “loss of religious freedom.”

In his *Manifesto*, Schaeffer had also advocated “compassion for those caught in the problem [homosexuality].” Schaeffer’s “compassion” for homosexuals was echoed in Lively’s introduction at the conference in Kampala. And that same rhetoric of compassion for homosexuals has spawned ‘gay-change therapy’ clinics in Ugandan churches, such as the one run by anti-gay campaigner Martin Ssempe,¹⁵⁹ who claims he is helping homosexuals become straight.

In predominantly Christian countries like Uganda, the church, in collaboration with the state, is less concerned with the abolition of prayer in public schools than with the “promotion of homosexuality in schools.” The seed of the idea that Lively had planted earlier – that the threat to children comes from particular secular sections of the population – had caught politicians in Africa like a cold. Uganda Member of Parliament David Bahati and President Yoweri Museveni¹⁶⁰ have both expressed fears about a ‘secret plot’ of Ugandan homosexuals and their American allies to promote homosexuality in schools. At youth conferences presided over by Uganda’s First Lady, Janet Museveni,¹⁶¹ she addressed the dangers of the secular world and urged youth to disavow the “curse of homosexuality” and to embrace “spiritual growth.”

¹⁵⁸ Uganda’s Museveni against ‘promotion of homosexuality.’ (2012, February 23). *BBC HARDtalk*. Video retrieved from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/hardtalk/9698847.stm>

¹⁵⁹ Nathan, M. (2011, April 18). Uganda- Watch Martin Ssempe Explain Homosexuality as TWO Calls for Investigation. *LezGetReal*. Retrieved from <http://lezgetreal.com/2011/04/uganda-watch-martin-ssempe-explain-homosexuality-as-two-calls-for-investigation/>

¹⁶⁰ Kasozi, E. & Ahimbisibwe, P. (2010, June 4). Uganda: Opposed to Homosexuality- Museveni. *All Africa*. Retrieved from <http://allafrica.com/stories/201006040263.html>

¹⁶¹ Mugisa, A. & Bwambale, T. (2010, August 10). Janet warns on tribalism, reckless sex. *New Vision*. Retrieved from <http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/12/728312>

Christian evangelicals also advocate that the state is God's ministry. Successful leadership thus depends on the involvement of the church in policy making so that governments do not abrogate the authority of God. As a predominantly religious country, Ugandan political leaders use churches and mosques as their campaigning grounds. As well, part of their political platforms has included the promise of restoring the nation's waning moral sanity. The fight against homosexuality has given them new material to ensure their election or re-election, as well as to justify Uganda's turn to militarization, as in the case of ongoing raids on LGBT organizations and activists.

Kapya Kaoma, the author of *Globalizing of the Culture Wars: U.S. Conservatives, African Churches, and Homophobia*,¹⁶² has written that conservative American Christians are building "Christian colonies" in Africa. He examines recent developments in Africa where the introduction of anti-gay bills can be linked directly to the presence and advocacy of United States evangelicals in those African countries. What is happening to LGBT people in Uganda corroborates Kaoma's analysis of the relationship of the Christian Right to the persecution of LGBT Ugandans.

Some critics of the Christian Right argue that these neocolonialist tendencies are not entirely destructive, as some United States evangelicals also fund health and education projects on the Africa continent. But this globalization of the gospel, I would argue, does not always effect positive social change. In fact, in Uganda, it has spawned sexual violence. Two years after Lively introduced the idea that homosexuals are a threat to peace and stability in Uganda, an anti-gay bill was tabled in Parliament by Minister of Parliament David Bahati.¹⁶³ On January 26, 2011 David Kato,¹⁶⁴ one of the founders of Uganda's LGBT movement, was murdered after a local newspaper had featured his face with the headline "Hang Them! They Are Coming after Our Children."¹⁶⁵ Since Kato's death, persecution of LGBT persons in Uganda continues to escalate. And this persecution does not stop at Ugandan borders. Campaigns to introduce similar anti-gay bills are springing up in several other African countries.

The anti-gay religiosity in Africa has also provided an opportunity for African LGBT movements to make significant social justice strides in a short time. I believe such movements need to be bottom-up approaches that emphasize proactive strategies to address the immediate threats against us. This bottom-up approach must learn from other liberation struggles in Africa. African feminists, for example, have built a gender justice movement based on their histories, struggles and lived experiences as African women. They understand that their liberation depends on them shaping their own destinies, which includes recognizing education as one of the most powerful weapons against

¹⁶² Kaoma, K. (2009). *Globalizing Culture Wars: U.S. Conservatives, African Churches & Homophobia*. Somerville, MA: Political Science Associates. Retrieved from <http://www.publiceye.org/publications/globalizing-the-culture-wars/pdf/africa-full-report.pdf>

¹⁶³ Uganda anti-gay bill likely to drop death penalty. (2011, April 26). *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/apr/26/uganda-anti-gay-bill-death-penalty>

¹⁶⁴ Uganda gay rights activist David Kato killed. (2011, January 27). *BBC News Africa*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12295718>

¹⁶⁵ Rice, X. (2010, October 21). Uganda paper calls for gay people to be hanged. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/oct/21/ugandan-paper-gay-people-hanged>

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oppression. Africa has been able to produce many feminist scholars, theologians, writers, and women leaders because liberation movements were mindful that, as Stephen Bantu Biko¹⁶⁶ said, “The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.”

In order to counter the forces against our liberation, African LGBT movements need to ground our narratives of liberation in African-centered experiences. We need to speak out against oppression wherever and however it manifests itself. If African LGBT activists remain silent when donors threaten to cut aid to anti-gay African countries, our silence will only confirm the mantra that homosexuality is imposed on Africa by the West.

Our future as African LGBT movements also depends on our Western allies showing solidarity by following our lead. In the struggle for human dignity and rights, Africans voices must lead the way. We need our own local movements of LGBT thinkers – academically trained and politically savvy activists – whose voices can be carried into the institutions that currently oppress us. We also need the positive stories of resistance by our social movements to be recognized and celebrated.

The emergence of African pro-LGBT movements for social justice in countries like Kenya, Malawi, and Uganda, and of African human rights activists creating safe spaces and positive change in extremely hostile environments, is a *success* story. We need our allies in Western LGBT movements standing with us, and helping us to resist the oppressive impact of African and western religious movements that advocate denying us our human dignity, rights and full citizenship.

¹⁶⁶ Biko, S. First liberate the mind. (2008). South Africa. Info. Retrieved from <http://www.southafrica.info/about/history/steve-biko.htm>

17

LGBTIQP Young People, Public Spaces and Policing in Australia

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Some police still do victimise lesbian and gay men, as the 2006 Amnesty International report *Stonewalled*¹⁶⁷ clearly documents. Generally however, the police are more likely to be seen as supporting diversity rather than demonising it. In Australia, as in the United Kingdom and Canada, the police have implemented police liaison programs to build relationships with LGBTI [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, intersex] communities. Police from different parts of Australia now march in the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras in a uniformed display of support. Reflecting on this contemporary context, it would appear we have come a long way since Gary Comstock's ground-breaking work – *Violence Against Lesbians and Gay Men*¹⁶⁸ – in the 1990s highlighting how lesbians and gay men were being deliberately targeted and victimised by police.

I think a lot about this history of repression and persecution every time I walk from the train to work and make my way past groups of 'out-n-proud' young people wearing rainbows and holding hands in Brisbane city. They are what I call 'regulars' as I see them at least once a week in my travels and, as Malinda S. Smith puts it in "Queering In/Equality,"¹⁶⁹ these young people are not only 'out,' they are hyper-visible. They attract attention from passers-by because they are young, they are loud, they are colourful, and they are affectionate. When I interviewed 35 LGBTIQP [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer, intersex, pansexual]¹⁷⁰ young people in Brisbane, it became increasingly clear that it was these very characteristics – young, loud, colourful, openly affectionate – that appeared to draw the attention of police in public spaces.

The stories of young people provide a different picture of police relations with the LGBTIQP community in Australia. The stories they share are not the premeditated hate-filled violence documented in Comstock's research. In my research, hate violence from police was the exception rather than the norm in young peoples' accounts, a refreshing change from past research on these issues. That said, some of their stories revealed that the harassment, if not the hate and the violence, have not disappeared entirely and instead they may have shifted and reshaped in to new forms. Similar to the subtle forms of harassment elaborated in Brian Burtch and Rebecca Haskells' *Get That*

¹⁶⁷ Amnesty International. (2006, March 23). USA: Stonewalled-Still Demanding Respect. Police Abuses Against Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transgender People in the USA. Retrieved from <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR51/001/2006/en>

¹⁶⁸ Comstock, G.D. (1991). *Violence Against Lesbians and Gay Men*. (New York: Columbia University Press).

¹⁶⁹ Smith, M. (2010, October 15). Queering In/Equality: LGBT and Two-Spirited Youth 'It Gets Better.' [Blog Entry]. Retrieved from <http://blog.fedcan.ca/2010/10/15/queering-inequality-lgbt-and-two-spirited-youth-%E2%80%98it-gets-better%E2%80%99/>

¹⁷⁰ UC Davis Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Resource Center. (2012). LGBTQIA Glossary. Retrieved from <http://lgbtcenter.ucdavis.edu/lgbt-education/lgbtqia-glossary>

Freak.¹⁷¹ Young people in Australia talked about how police stops and actions sent clear messages to them: LGBTIQP were not wanted in public spaces. Their narratives revealed how the intersection of age and sexuality shaped public spaces. LGBTIQP youth were sent the message that public spaces were gendered, that is, heterosexual and heterogendered, and those who fell outside the normative boundaries did not ‘fit in’ and were excluded.

Over the years of doing research with young people about their interactions with the police in public spaces many of them recounted experiences of being moved on, fined, arrested, and having their details checked. Young people talked about how they felt violated by these frequent police stops and searches. For young people generally these outcomes came from a range of conduct such as hanging out with other young people, drinking in public, being seen as a public nuisance, using offensive language, homelessness, cigarette smoking, begging, criminal justice breaches, and resisting arrest.

In my study a key difference between stories of young people generally and the stories of LGBTIQP young people specifically was ‘looking queer’ such as, for example, wearing rainbow coloured or tight fitting clothing, boys looking ‘girly’ (wearing make-up or having long hair), and girls looking ‘butch’ (wearing leathers and mohawks). Looking queer in public spaces drew the attention of police. One young gay male shared how he and his friends were dressed in rainbows for Pride Day. Although the police stopped and questioned them about drugs they ignored another group of young people who were dressed ‘normal.’

A young lesbian talked about how the attitude of police changed to being “quite negative” when they realised her concern for another girl’s safety was because they were partners. For another young gay male who was dressed in drag, it was clear, in his words, that his choice of attire made police just want “to get away from me.” Police also used gendered language to make it clear to young people that a “girly looking boy,” for example, was a ‘slut.’ The interviews suggested the police sanctioned the informal targeting of young people either because they were LGBTIQP or for “looking queer.” Police moved such LGBTIQP youth out of public spaces, treated them more brusquely and, as the youth perceived it, gave them weird looks.

These sanctions were even more pronounced when affection was displayed towards a same sex partner in public spaces. For example, young people in my study recounted many instances where if a young male was sitting on another young male’s lap, police would be “pulling it up pretty fast.” Typically these instances involved informal intervention by police where they would separate the young people and tell them ‘public affection’ was “not allowed in Queen Street.” Some young people were even fined under public nuisance laws for ‘making out’ with their partners in the street, in train stations, and in shopping centres. Formal or informal, these sanctions made it very clear to LGBTIQP young people that same sex affection was outlawed in public spaces.

While this is far removed from the hate violence of the past, I would suggest these police actions are no less harmful. In fact, if we are to understand hate in the way it is articulated by Nathan Hall in *Hate Crimes*,¹⁷² then we need to recognise that it is also about messages. There is little doubt that police actions with LGBTIQP young people in Brisbane sent specific messages to these young people about the social acceptability of their presence in public spaces. What this all suggests, then, is that simultaneously persecuting and protecting people who are sexually and gender diverse is

¹⁷¹ Burtch, B. (2011, September 29). Education Matters: Confronting Homophobia and Transphobia in Schools. [Blog Entry]. Retrieved from <http://blog.fedcan.ca/2011/09/29/education-matters-confronting-homophobia-and-transphobia-in-schools/#more-1890>

¹⁷² Hall, N. (2003). *Hate Crime*. (Cullompton, Devon, UK: Willan).

paradoxical and in flux, as Sharalyn Jordan¹⁷³ elaborates in her discussion of homophobic and transphobic persecution.

The stories told by the young people I interviewed reflect these paradoxes, tensions and fluctuations. The messages that police were giving to sexually and gender diverse young people were both subtle and yet loud and clear; they were not wanted in public spaces. The interviews also made apparent an unspoken conflict between LGBTIQP young people and police, a conflict Lesley Moran and Beverley Skeggs¹⁷⁴ discussed in *Sexuality and the Politics of Violence and Safety* in terms of heteronormativity, those who are able to be visible in public spaces and those who, in the eyes of the law, are seen as having no right to occupy such public spaces.

Progress has been made in relationships between the police and sexual and gender diverse communities. Yet, it seems, we still have some ways to go in order to improve the experiences of the most visible and vulnerable members of LGBTIQP communities. And, if we reflect on the numbers of young people who commit suicide, as Gerald Walton¹⁷⁵ does, then clearly we have some ways to go not just to improve relations with the police but also within the broader public.

Finally, the world's first comparative study into the criminal and educational sanctions meted out to heterosexual and nonheterosexual young people was conducted by Himmelstein and Bruckner.¹⁷⁶ That study found that nonheterosexual young people were far more likely to be subjected to sanctions. Given the fact that LGBTIQP young people are disproportionately impacted by formal criminal and educational sanctions as well as informal sanctions and messages from the police, then educators and policymakers alike must consider how to improve this situation. These issues require further examination to prevent LGBTIQP young people from being caught up in youth justice systems worldwide. As a start, the LGBTIQP young people I interviewed suggested a two-fold approach: first, they suggested the need for better training for police about sexual and gender diversity; and, second, they suggested education for LGBTIQP young people on how to engage with the police.

¹⁷³ Jordan, S. (2011, November 17). Asylum Rights and Seeking Refuge from homophobic and transphobic persecution. [Blog Entry]. Retrieved from <http://blog.fedcan.ca/2011/11/17/asylum-rights-and-seeking-refuge-from-homophobic-and-transphobic-persecution/#more-2072>

¹⁷⁴ Moran L., Skeggs, B., Tyrer, P. & Karen Corteen. (2004). *Sexuality and the Politics of Violence and Safety* (New York: Routledge).

¹⁷⁵ Walton, G. (2011, November 30). LGBT Lessons (Not) learned: Dominant gender ideologies as basis for transphobic and homophobic violence. [Blog Entry]. Retrieved from <http://blog.fedcan.ca/2011/11/30/lgbt-lessons-not-learned-dominant-gender-ideology-as-a-basis-for-transphobic-and-homophobic-violence/#more-2095>

¹⁷⁶ Himmelstein, K. E. & Brückner. (2010). Criminal-Justice and School Sanctions Against Nonheterosexual Youth: A National Longitudinal Study. *Official Journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics*. DOI: 10.1542/peds.2009-2306

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LGBTQ Lessons (Not) learned: Dominant Gender Ideology as a Basis for Transphobic and Homophobic Violence

Gerald Walton, Lakehead University

In September 2011, the *Institute for Canadian Values* ran an advertisement¹⁷⁷ in the *National Post* asking that children not be ‘exposed’ to discussions in school about LGBTQ issues. Children’s identities as boys and girls, the Institute reasoned, would be “corrupted.” The Institute presumptuously speaks for all Canadians’ values, but the ad says something significant about the investment we collectively have made in gender. Put bluntly, gender is an ideological force, meaning that the practices by which people indicate to others that they are boys or men, or girls or women, is socially significant and highly regulated. Rather than being fixed and static, gender norms and expectations are dynamic and powerfully shaped through processes of normalization, indoctrination, regulation, and, at times, resistance.

As a concept, gender is hard to pin down but predictable patterns in how gender tends to play out in society can nevertheless be identified. Gender is not simply about two discrete categories of ‘boys’ and ‘men’ (that are presumed to accompany maleness), and ‘girls’ and ‘women’ (that are presumed to accompany femaleness) and the supposed differences between girls and boys, and women and men. Significantly, gender is also about learning and relearning the codes, norms, and expectations of what it means to be a boy, man, girl, or woman, in accordance with cultural, ethnic, and historically specific contexts, and how such codes are reinforced and regulated. Gender, then, provides a framework by which ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ are created.

Children and youth learn the lessons of gender from the day they are born. For most babies, gendering begins with the normative provision of pink blankets for females and blue ones for males. Such gendering continues in most families and is reinforced in schools as children and youth interact with each other and with teachers and administrators. Gender insiders and outsiders are constructed in accordance with those who fall within the scope of ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ gender presentations and those who do not. It is the former group, the gender typical, who is socially privileged on the basis of being gender normative. The latter group, on the other hand, is routinely dismissed as inferior, stigmatized through fear and shaming, and targeted with violence of exclusion if not verbal and physical assault on the basis of being gender atypical.

It is not the case that humans can be so easily dichotomized between insiders and outsiders; many of us are simultaneously insiders and outsiders in different ways and at different times. In general, however, gender outsiders – as atypical – clearly indicate that when people stretch the boundaries of normative gender presentations and expectations, negative reactions from others, ranging from teasing and bullying to verbal and physical violence, are *predictable* consequences. Transgender activist

¹⁷⁷ Salerno, R. (2011, September 29). National Post Apologizes for Running Transphobic Ad. *Xtra!* Retrieved from http://www.xtra.ca/public/National/National_Post_apologizes_for_running_transphobic_ad-10837.aspx

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and scholar Kate Bornstein¹⁷⁸ refers to “gender outlaws”¹⁷⁹ to indicate that there are indeed rules of gender presentation (clothing, physical and vocal mannerisms, interests, occupations and so on) that adversely affect those who are not gender typical. As gender theorist Judith Butler¹⁸⁰ famously points out, norms become norms only through repeated practices that collectively and over time create social convention, foster continual scrutiny, and, when warranted, incite correction. Gender “performativity”¹⁸¹ is that which has become normative and thus not readily noticed by the “performers.” In other words, most people barely even notice the ways that they present their gender every day.

Norms and expectations of gender presentation can also be linked to norms and expectations of sexuality. Sexual orientation is often attributed to individuals on the basis of gender presentation because of widespread assumptions about sexual orientation on the basis of mannerisms, clothing, and ways of moving and talking. Among children, for instance, masculine girls may get taunted with ‘dyke’ regardless of being a lesbian or not, and feminine boys may get called ‘queer’ or ‘fag’ regardless of actual sexual orientation. More cogently, such taunting is likely to target boys and girls who defy their prescribed and normative gender role, namely, masculinity for boys and femininity for girls. Viviane Namaste¹⁸² offers the term ‘genderbashing’¹⁸³ to describe what actually happens during so-called ‘gaybashings’ which tend to target gender transgressors rather than actual gay men and lesbians.

The rules of gender are highly evident in the reactions of others towards students who break them. The term ‘sissy’¹⁸⁴ is a usual verbal weapon that targets gender atypical boys. Such boys are perceived as threatening to other boys, that somehow they will infect them with (what are perceived as) their feminine afflictions. To maintain masculinity of other boys, sissies must be rejected or expunged through bullying, ostracism, and violence. In 2008, such panic took a deadly turn when 15 year-old Lawrence King¹⁸⁵ was shot to death in Oxnard, California by a male peer because Lawrence King liked feminine jewellery, clothing, and makeup. The King case, as well as other less extreme but daily practices of genderbashing, signifies to all other boys what could happen to them if they do not live up to the social expectations of what it means to act like a ‘real’ boy. In short, violence towards those deemed sissies maintains gender boundaries and highlights how normalcy is constructed and regulated.

¹⁷⁸ Bornstein, K. (n.d.). It Gets Better [Blog Entry]. Retrieved from <http://katebornstein.typepad.com/>

¹⁷⁹ Bornstein, K. (1994). *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us*. New York: Routledge.

¹⁸⁰ The European Graduate School. (2010). Judith Butler-Biography. Retrieved from <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/judith-butler/biography/>

¹⁸¹ Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.

¹⁸² Concordia University Arts and Science. (2012). Dr. Viviane Namaste. Retrieved from <http://artsandscience.concordia.ca/research/researchchairs/concordiaresearchchairs/drivivianenamaste/>

¹⁸³ Stryker, S. & Whittle, S. (Eds.). (2006). *The Transgender Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge.

¹⁸⁴ Bergling, T. (2002). *Sissyphobia: Gay Men & Effeminate Behaviour*. Binghamton: Haworth Press.

¹⁸⁵ Cathcart, R. (2008, February 23). Boy’s Killing, Labeled a Hate Crime, Stuns a Town. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/23/us/23oxnard.html?adxnnl=1&adxnnlx=1321884101-PIwrhGNQw44ujCG9hQpQhQ>

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By comparison to sissies, tomboys¹⁸⁶ are generally seen as socially acceptable but only until puberty after which most tomboys, according to Harriet Bradley¹⁸⁷, are expected to act and look like gender normative girls. For many parents, gender non-conforming behaviour and interests of their children raise the fear that they will grow up to be gay or lesbian. Medically, gender non-normative people, including children, are sometimes diagnosed with Gender Identity Disorder¹⁸⁸ (GID), more commonly referred to as gender dysphoria¹⁸⁹ which is a diagnostic category of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*¹⁹⁰ (DSM). Such 'dysphoria' is used to describe people who experience a high and consistent degree of anxiety and unhappiness about their gender identity.

Despite strong social sanction for gender non-conformity, supported by such medicalization, being a sissy or tomboy does not have to be viewed as a condition in need of treatment. Perhaps the 'problem' is not gender atypicality at all, but the dominant gender schema¹⁹¹ by which some people are included and considered 'normal' and others are excluded and considered gendered 'freaks.' Thus, being a feminine boy is widely equated with being weak, which is anathema to normalized ideas about masculinity,¹⁹² boyhood, and manhood. Masculine girls tend to incite fears in others that she is or will be a mannish lesbian. Such fears are social prejudices, not just individual ones.

In 2010, Dan Savage and Terry Miller¹⁹³ launched the *It Gets Better*¹⁹⁴ campaign in response to media attention on several suicides of young gay men¹⁹⁵ and those perceived as gay. From what began as one video¹⁹⁶ that offered to message to gender and sexuality minority youth that life does get better after high school, the *It Gets Better* channel on youtube.com has amassed over twenty-two thousand videos, including one from United States President Barack Obama.¹⁹⁷ The campaign was

¹⁸⁶ Craig, T. & LaCroix, J. (2011). Tomboy as Protective Identity. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 15 (4). Retrieved from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10894160.2011.532030>

¹⁸⁷ Bradley, H. (2007). *Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

¹⁸⁸ Gender Identity Disorder. (2010, February 18). Retrieved on January 1, 2012 from PubMed Health <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0002495/>

¹⁸⁹ Canadian Psychological Association. (2012). Gender Dysphoria in Adolescents and Adults. Retrieved from <http://www.cpa.ca/psychologyfactsheets/genderdysphoria/>

¹⁹⁰ AllPsych Online. (2003). Psychiatric Disorders. Retrieved from <http://allpsych.com/disorders/dsm.html>

¹⁹¹ Devor, A.H. (1996). How Many Sexes? How Many Genders? When Two are not Enough. Retrieved from <http://web.uvic.ca/~ahdevor/HowMany/HowMany.html>

¹⁹² Martino, W. & Frank, B. (2006). The Tyranny of Surveillance: Male Teachers and the Policing of Masculinities in a Single Sex School. *Gender and Education*, 18 (1), 17-33.

¹⁹³ Dan Savage. (January 1, 2012). Retrieved January 1, 2012 from Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dan_Savage

¹⁹⁴ It Gets Better Project. (2011). Home. Retrieved from <http://www.itgetsbetter.org/>

¹⁹⁵ An Important Message-From Ellem DeGeneres. (2010, September 30). Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-hVWQnjjM>

¹⁹⁶ Itgetsbetterproject. (2010, September 21). It Gets Better: Dan and Terry. *It Gets Better Project*. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7IcVyvg2Qlo>

¹⁹⁷ The White House Washington. (2010, October 21). President Obama: It Gets Better. *The White House Washington*. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=geyAFbSDPVk>

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widely celebrated. Critics, however, pointed out that gender atypical children and youth, as well as those who are lesbian or gay, should not have to wait¹⁹⁸ for their situations to ‘get better.’ For instance, in response to the 300 suicides of youth in Canada in 2011,¹⁹⁹ Rick Mercer²⁰⁰ emphatically challenged all LGBTQ adults in one of his weekly *Rick’s Rants* to come out and be visible so that LGBTQ youth have role models and can see through such modelling, and thus not only will their situations improve over time, but they can be better now.

Facilitating school safety requires curriculum and policy that is inclusive of gender atypical children and youth. National surveys from GLSEN²⁰¹ in the United States and Egale²⁰² in Canada indicate that gender atypical youth are more likely to be the target of harassment and bullying than their gender typical counterparts.

Some targeted youth demonstrate resilience and resistance in the face of unsafe learning environments. However, it should not be left up to students alone to protect themselves or enact social change in schools. Violence against gender difference should be named in policy²⁰³ because homophobia proliferates among children and youth – and sometimes among administrators and teachers. Doing so is not only morally and ethically necessary, but also legally astute to foster cultures in schools that support the actual diversity of students. Increasingly, victims of bullying and their parents are taking teachers and administrators to court²⁰⁴ for lack of effective policies and practices on creating safe learning environments for LGBTQ youth and those so perceived.

Depicting curriculum and policies in schools that address violence against gender atypicality as “corrupting children,” as the Institute for Canadian Values did through *The National Post*, is not only a bigotry disguised as ‘values’ that operates among religious fundamentalists. Such fears are also evident less obviously in daily experiences of children and youth who are constantly in emotional and physical danger in schools through no fault of their own. It behoves educators and parents to consider gender not as a simplistic duality but as a complex set of social arrangements that creates divisions between insider and outsider, often expressed through forms of violence such as bullying and genderbashing. To insist upon maintaining the dominant gender ideology means to not really care about safety in schools after all, despite claims to the contrary.

¹⁹⁸ Wells, K. (2010, October 25). Beyond Homophobia: We need to Make it Better. [Blog Entry]. Retrieved from <http://blog.fedcan.ca/2010/10/25/beyond-homophobia-we-need-to-make-it-better/>

¹⁹⁹ Rick Mercer Report. Rick’s Rant-Teen Suicide. (2011, October 25). *Rick Mercer Report*. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wh1jNAZHkIw>

²⁰⁰ Rick Mercer. (2011). RickMercer.com. Retrieved from <http://www.rickmercer.com/>

²⁰¹ Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network. (2012). 2009 National School Climate Survey: Nearly 9 out of 10 LGBT Student Experience Harassment in School. Retrieved from <http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/library/record/2624.html>

²⁰² Egale Canada. (2011). Youth Speak Up about Homophobia and Transphobia. Retrieved from <http://www.egale.ca/?item=1401>

²⁰³ Walton, G. (2010). The Problem Trap: Implications of Policy Archaeology Methodology for Anti-Bullying Policies. *Journal of Education Studies*, 25(2). Retrieved from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02680930903428630>

²⁰⁴ Findlay, S. (2011, September 14). Bullying Victims are Taking Schools to Court. *MacLeans.ca*. Retrieved from <http://www2.macleans.ca/2011/09/14/taking-schools-to-court/>

PART III

building resilience: anti-bullying campaigns and inclusive education

19

Beyond Homophobia: We Need to Make it Better

Kris Wells, University of Alberta

Within the past several weeks, seven young men in the United States and two young women in Canada have tragically committed suicide due to homophobic bullying, harassment, and societal prejudice. Research indicates that suicide is the number one cause of death amongst gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth in North America. However, it is not the number one cause of death for heterosexual youth. What explains the difference?

Important risk factors for adolescent suicide include experiences of substance abuse, feelings of hopelessness, sexual abuse, a history of family dysfunction, and the recent or attempted suicide of a close friend or family member. In addition to these more general risk factors, sexual-minority youth also face additional distinctive risk factors such as a lack of family acceptance, age at which they come out, gender atypicality, and bullying or conflict because of their perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. On average, sexual minority youth are two to three times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers.

Researchers suggest that this startling discrepancy may also be rooted in sexual minority youth's experiences at school. For example, Egale Canada's²⁰⁵ recent national safe schools climate survey, which involved more than 3500 youth, found that 70 per cent reported hearing expressions such as "that's so gay" everyday in their schools. In addition, 47 per cent of students heard, on a daily basis, derogatory remarks such as 'faggot' and 'dyke'. If homophobic epithets are amongst the most commonly used derogatory language heard in schools today, why are they the least responded to by teachers? As this survey and recent traumatic events indicate, schools are dangerous spaces for those students who are or are perceived to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

Despite progressive and inclusive changes to law and legislation (i.e. same-sex marriage in Canada), and increasing positive representations of sexual minorities on television (i.e. *Will & Grace*,²⁰⁶ *Glee*²⁰⁷) and in the media (i.e. *TransAmerica*,²⁰⁸ *Boys Don't Cry*²⁰⁹), schools still remain strongholds for hate and homophobic bullying. Some educators have described our nation's schools as the last bastion of tolerated hatred towards sexual minority youth and youth with same-sex parented families. The reality is that many youth go to school each day in fear.

²⁰⁵ Eagle. (2011). Safe Schools Campaign. Retrieved from <http://www.egale.ca/index.asp?item=1176>

²⁰⁶ *Will & Grace*. (2012, January 22). Retrieved February 24, 2012 from Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Will_&_Grace

²⁰⁷ *Glee* (TV Series). (2012, February 25). Retrieved February 25, 2012 from Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glee_%28TV_series%29

²⁰⁸ Transfofa. (2006, August 20). TransAmerica. [Trailer]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4a7HXgYou-8>

²⁰⁹ Klance1. (2006, October 16). Boys Don't Cry Trailer. [Trailer]. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aOarssjWHhI>

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American columnist Dan Savage, in response to what has been described as an epidemic of anti-gay bullying, recently launched the *It Gets Better*²¹⁰ social media campaign to speak directly to youth who may be struggling with their actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, and corresponding experiences of bullying, violence, and self-harm. This campaign has become a viral sensation with hundreds of youth, adults, parents, and celebrities uploading often inspiring and, at times, heartbreaking video testimonials about their experiences with homophobic²¹¹ and transphobic²¹² bullying. While the *It Gets Better* campaign and its message of “just wait till you get out of high school,” is laudable, youth deserve more than adults telling them that they should simply just try to survive their hostile hallways. All adults – and teachers in particular – need to take the responsibility to help these youth move from simply trying to survive to a place where they can grow and thrive.

It doesn't get better on its own. As responsible educators, parents, and community members, we need to actively work to make it better. This is the message of the Gay-Straight Alliance Network's *Make it Better*²¹³ campaign, which focuses on stories and strategies to help youth to transform their hostile school environments, rather than having to transcend them. In Canada, programs like Camp fYrefly,²¹⁴ which is Canada's largest leadership retreat for sexual minority and gender variant youth, work to help youth develop the personal resiliency and leadership skills necessary for them to become agents for positive social change in their schools, families, and communities.

These kinds of innovative, asset-creating programs teach youth that important adults in their lives do care about and love them. Fundamentally, all youth need to be supported to grow into resiliency and successfully transition into adulthood. Sexual-minority youth shouldn't have to change who they are to find support and acceptance. These youth need to be reminded that they are normal and beautiful just the way they are. It's the school-sanctioned culture of homophobia, heterosexism, and transphobia that needs to change.

Some critical ways in which we can actively work to foster this much-needed educational change and make it better for sexual minority youth include:

First, we need to create positive representations – Sexual minority youth need to see themselves, and their history, reflected in the curriculum, resources, and images in their classrooms. Silence equals erasure.

Second, we need to improve family and parental acceptance – Family is the number one resiliency factor in the lives of all youth. Unfortunately, for many sexual minority youth their family is also their biggest source of discrimination.

Third, we need to foster positive peer and school relationships – A sense of belonging and attachment are critical to personal and academic success. Anti-homophobia and anti-transphobia teacher training and LGBT inclusive school policies are critical factors in addressing homophobic language, bullying, and discrimination. Inclusive policies indicate that diversity is welcome and embraced as an important part of the school community.

²¹⁰ It Gets Better. (2012). It Gets Better Project. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/itgetsbetterproject>

²¹¹ Homophobiaday.org. (2012). Home. Retrieved from <http://www.homophobiaday.org/>

²¹² Human Rights Office Queens University. (n.d.). Trans Accessibility Project: Transphobia and Discrimination. Retrieved from <http://www.queensu.ca/humanrights/tap/3discrimination.htm>

²¹³ Make It Better Project. (2012). Make It Better. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/makeitbetterproject>

²¹⁴ Camp fYrefly. (2012). Campsfyrefly. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/campfYrefly>

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Fourth, supportive networks are needed – Creating and sustaining gay-straight student alliances (GSAs) in schools and supporting LGBT community-based youth groups help to foster a sense of connection and work to reduce feelings of isolation, alienation, and despair. New research indicates that GSAs can help all students who identify outside of the mainstream to find a measure of acceptance in their school environments. GSAs often represent the one legitimized safe space in schools where it's okay to be different, regardless of what that difference might be.

Fifth, there is a need for comprehensive sexual health education – All students need access to age-appropriate and non-judgmental information to be able to make informed decisions about the issues that impact their lives. Teaching about comprehensive sexual health is not about special rights or sexual rights, but human rights.

Used collectively, these and other strategies can help to support youth to develop a resilient mindset in which their self- and social-esteem is enhanced. With these supports in place, youth will undoubtedly realize that they don't have to wait for things to get better; they can be encouraged to reach out and find support to help make things better now.

We can't afford to wait until another young life is tragically lost to bullying or suicide. If we are to build a truly responsible and respectful Canadian society, then we all must stand up and denounce the conditions of oppression whenever we see or hear them, and, in turn, announce new possibilities for the creation of a more just, humane, and ethical world.

We can't wait for this world to happen on its own; we need to make it happen right now, and we need to start in our schools.

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Education Matters: Confronting Homophobia and Transphobia in Schools

Brian Burtch, Simon Fraser University

Our awareness of homophobia and transphobia in high schools has been heightened by a growing body of research and media commentary that is beginning to take seriously the dynamics of exclusion and resistance experienced by LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, Two-Spirited, and questioning) students. As Rebecca Haskell and I wrote in our book, *Get That Freak*, “Sometimes the lessons are brutal, involving bullying that is so persistent and hateful that young people take their own lives, whether they have been targeted for their sexual orientation, gender identity or any other number of reasons.”²¹⁵ For us, it is important that homophobia and transphobia are not dismissed as incidental but rather are seen as part-and-parcel of school contexts where LGBTQ people have always been, although not always well-represented in curricula and where resources, such as teacher-allies and gay-straight alliances, may not be available to some students.

We are not alone in this concern. Various *Equity Matters* postings on the Fedcan Blog by Malinda S. Smith,²¹⁶ Kris Wells,²¹⁷ Rebecca Haskell²¹⁸ and me have provided ample evidence of ways in which homophobia and transphobia affect youth, including cyberbullying, suicide attempts, physical attacks, even murder. For example, a report authored by Catherine Taylor and Tracey Peter, *Every Class in Every School*,²¹⁹ presented results from a survey of over 3000 Canadian teens. Briefly, the researchers found that 70 percent of students who participated in the survey heard derogatory expressions such as “that’s so gay” on a daily basis, and just over 20 percent of LGBTQ students declared that they had been “physically harassed or assaulted” because of their sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation.

This kind of vital research confirms that schools, for many students, can be a site where a wide range of shunning, threatening and even violent behaviours take place, often on a daily basis. At the

²¹⁵ Burtch, B. & Haskell, R. (2010). *Get that Freak: Homophobia and Transphobia in High School*. Halifax: Fernwood.

²¹⁶ Smith, M.a S. (2010, October 15). Queering In/Equality: LGBT and Two-Spirited Youth ‘It Gets Better.’ [Blog Entry]. Retrieved from <http://blog.fedcan.ca/2010/10/15/queering-inequality-lgbt-and-two-spirited-youth-%E2%80%9998it-gets-better%E2%80%9999/>

²¹⁷ Wells, K. (2010, October 25). Beyond Homophobia: We Need to Make it Better. [Blog Entry]. Retrieved from <http://blog.fedcan.ca/2010/10/25/beyond-homophobia-we-need-to-make-it-better/>

²¹⁸ Haskell, R. (2010, November 9). Making School Better for LGBT: Homophobia and Transphobia lessons. [Blog Entry]. Retrieved from <http://blog.fedcan.ca/2010/11/09/making-schools-better-for-lgbt-homophobia-and-transphobia-lessons/>

²¹⁹ The University of Winnipeg News. (2011, May 12). Homophobia Creates Hostile for Canadian Students. Retrieved from <http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/index/uw-news-action/story.572/title.homophobia-creates-hostile-world-for-canadian-students>

same time, there is also evidence of more positive changes in media representations of LGBTQ people and some ongoing efforts to address HTP (homophobic and transphobic) bullying in school settings. There are efforts to establish safer school policies, including specifically anti-homophobia policies, and researchers such as Taylor and Peter in their report have outlined several recommendations for addressing HTP issues, including professional development for teachers, more inclusive curricula, and incorporating “anti-homophobia, anti-biphobia, and anti-transphobia and intersectionality measures.”

I wanted to reflect on a few examples of how HTP behavior can be confronted in Canadian schools. While I have the floor, I also wanted to consider the larger picture, to appreciate some examples from Canada and other countries of efforts to establish in schools and universities greater inclusiveness in terms of sexual orientation.

By way of background, Rebecca Haskell and I continue to work together on her research based on interviews with recent high school graduates. In our book, *Get That Freak: Homophobia and Transphobia in Schools*,²²⁰ we documented many instances of students coping with HTP bullying and exclusion in school settings. We also highlighted ways in which students and their allies worked to establish what we in our concluding remarks termed “A Better Place.” Some findings from the book are provided in our initial November 2010 *Equity Matters* blog posting, “Making schools better for LGBT: Homophobia and Transphobia lessons.”²²¹

The interest in this area of research is growing. Other venues have been welcoming: Rebecca was present for a conversation and book launch of *Get That Freak* this past June in Toronto. Under the auspices of the Department of Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies (GSWS) at Simon Fraser University, I travelled to Nelson, B.C. in February to give a public talk on homophobia and transphobia in schools, followed by a talk to students at L.V. Rogers Secondary School in Nelson. I was alerted to the music video “It gets better” by Rebecca Drysdale. This video is posted under the “It Gets Better” heading on YouTube.²²² Issues of safety and recognition in schools have also been championed by many organizations in Canada, including ‘Out in Schools,’²²³ which works on several fronts to combat homophobia, including listing resources for queer youth.

Along with work on schools, I think it is important to consider the larger picture. There has been a rich legacy of LGBTQ work on many fronts in Canada. To begin with, Canada recognizes same-sex marriage. I have shown documentaries by Canadian filmmaker David Adkin (“Out: Stories of Gay and Lesbian Youth”²²⁴ and “Jim Loves Jack: The James Egan Story”²²⁵) in my university classes, for instance.

²²⁰ Burtch, B. & Haskell, R. (2010). *Get that Freak: Homophobia and Transphobia in High School*. Halifax: Fernwood.

²²¹ Burtch, B. & Haskell, R. (2010). Making Schools Better for LGBT [Blog]. Retrieved from <http://blog.fedcan.ca/2010/11/09/making-schools-better-for-lgbt-homophobia-and-transphobia-lessons/?lang=fr>

²²² Beckdry. (2011, January 4). It Gets Better-a Music Video by Rebecca Drysdale. Podcast retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cTQNwMxqM3E>

²²³ Out in Schools. (n.d.). Youth Resources. Retrieved from http://www.outinschools.com/content/Youth_Resources/4

²²⁴ National Film Board of Canada. (2010). Out: Stories of Lesbian Gay Youth. Retrieved from <http://www.onf-nfb.gc.ca/eng/collection/film/?id=30499>

²²⁵ Yahoo Movies. (2012). Jill Loves Jack: The James Egan Story (1996). Retrieved from <http://movies.yahoo.com/movie/1809402235/info>

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At the risk of leaving out many other fine works, publications by Michel Dorais with Simon L. Lajeunesse's *Dead Boys Can't Dance: Sexual Orientation, Masculinity and Suicide*,²²⁶ Douglas Victor Janoff's accounts of gaybashing and other violence in *Pink Blood: Homophobic Violence in Canada*²²⁷), and Gary Kinsman and Patrizia Gentile's detailed account of national security, *The Canadian War on Queers*²²⁸ – are part of this Canadian legacy of highlighting how LGBTQ people are treated and how the struggle for equity is ongoing.

The need for strong research has also been promoted by initiatives such as SVR (sexuality, vulnerability, resistance)²²⁹ at the Université du Québec à Montréal. Here in Vancouver, the 'We Demand' conference was held in late August 2011, showcasing activist and academic (not that the two are necessarily separate) work over the past four decades. Activist work continues with print and online productions such as *XTRA!*, including updates on homophobic bullying and anti-homophobia policies in schools.

Clearly, the work continues. Again, locally in British Columbia, events leading up to the passage of an anti-homophobia policy by the Burnaby School Board this June confirmed the sharp divisions that can surface, with some favouring the policy and others seeing it as regressive. The continuing controversy over attempts to ban what are variously termed gay clubs or gay-straight alliances in Catholic Schools in Ontario, and the recent efforts by Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty to reinforce equity considerations have also garnered news headlines and countless online postings by those opposed to and in favour of LGBTQ-themed clubs and curricula in schools.

Other issues surfaced when I chaired a panel on LGBTQ issues at the British Society of Criminology annual conference in Newcastle, England in early July. I met Angela Dwyer²³⁰ from Australia and became familiar with her work documenting police dealings with LGBTQ youth in Brisbane and issues of risk for these youth. At the BSC conference, during the presentation of work by Rebecca and myself, I posed the question that Rebecca and I have often been asked – “are things getting better?” One person in the audience responded that things are definitely getting better in some important ways. One example he gave was the repeal of section 28 of the Local Government Act of 1988 in the United Kingdom and the continuing efforts²³¹ to break the taboo on discussing the wider spectrum of sexuality in school curricula and classrooms.

We can also see the continued efforts of groups such as Stonewall UK in fighting for protection of and recognition of LGBTQ people and work on homophobic bullying of students in Ireland

²²⁶ Dorais, M. (2004). *Dead Boys Can't Dance: Sexual Orientation, Masculinity, and Suicide*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

²²⁷ Janoff, D.V. (2005). *Pink Blood: Homophobic Violence in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

²²⁸ Kinsman, G. & Gentile, P. (2010). *The Canadian War on Queers*. British Columbia: University of British Columbia Press.

²²⁹ Sexual and Gender Diversity: Vulnerability Resilience. (n.d.). What's New. Retrieved from <http://www.svr.uqam.ca/EN/actualites.asp>

²³⁰ Dwyer, A. (2011). Damaged goods: riskiness and LGBT young peoples' interactions with police. Retrieved from <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/38877/2/38877.pdf>

²³¹ Gillian, A. (2003, November 17). Section 28 gone... but no forgotten. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2003/nov/17/uk.gayrights>

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(example, James O’Higgins-Norman’s book, *Homophobic Bullying in Irish Secondary Education*).²³² We look to other places where people are speaking up, including the very recent example of Krystl Assan protesting what she called “the last acceptable discrimination” in Bermuda.²³³ She has confronted stereotyping of LGBT people and argued for an extension of Bermuda’s Human Rights Act to include sexual orientation.

We need to pay greater attention to protection – and especially lack of protection – for LGBTQ youth in schools. What we aim for is to be part of a conversation about gender variance, sexuality, and strategies for making schools more welcoming and safer places for all students. The outlook is not entirely bleak. Consider the following comments from Catherine Taylor in the context of the possibility of common cause in the classroom: “It really surprised me that 58 percent of straight students report feeling upset when they hear homophobic comments. What that tells me is there is a great deal of *untapped solidarity* in students, and that the public school culture can change.”

With growing awareness, greater resources, ongoing research and, not least of all, this continuing conversation about sexuality and resistance, we may be at a turning point where traditional, oppressive practices are called into question and where people are called into account if they do not address bullying and other mistreatment of LGBTQ students.

²³² O’Higgins-Norman, J. (2008). *Homophobic Bullying in Irish Secondary*. Dublin: Munsel & Co.

²³³ ‘Homophobia Last Acceptable Discrimination.’ [Blog Entry]. (2011, May 28). Retrieved from <http://bernews.com/2011/05/homophobia-last-acceptable-discrimination/>

21

Anti-homophobia education beyond bullying

Hélène Frohard-Dourlent, University of British Columbia

If there was any doubt that getting through high school is still difficult for queer and trans youth in Canada, Jamie Hubley's decision to end his life²³⁴ in October 2011 in Ottawa is a painful reminder of that fact. Hubley's suicide prompts us to reflect on the work that still needs to be done to make Canadian schools safe learning environments for all youth. This is hardly news to educators, activists and researchers who work with queer and trans youth. Many previous contributors to the original LGBTQI2-S series – including Malinda S. Smith,²³⁵ Rebecca Haskell,²³⁶ Kris Wells,²³⁷ and Brian Burtch²³⁸ – have commented on the prevalence and significance of experiences of homophobia in the lives of queer and trans youth in North America.

These contributions also remind us that schools, unfortunately, remain a privileged site for the expression of homophobic and transphobic violence. Quick snapshot of the situation in Canada: The recent report published by Egale Canada under the direction of University of Winnipeg's Catherine Taylor, *Every Class and Every School*,²³⁹ revealed that less than 5 percent of queer and trans youth never hear insulting comments about sexual orientation; that trans youth are almost three times as likely (and queer students more than twice as likely) to be verbally harassed about their gender expression than heterosexual youth; and two thirds of queer and trans students (as well as the same percentage of youth with queer and trans parents) feel unsafe at school.

The picture, however, is not all negative. In many places, educators, activists and scholars have worked hard to promote anti-homophobia education and bring positive change to school cultures. There are incredible community organizations doing work in schools, such as TEACH in Toronto,

²³⁴ Fagan, N. (2011). Gay Ottawa Teen Takes Own Life. *Xtra!*. Retrieved from http://www.xtra.ca/public/Ottawa/Gay_teen_takes_own_life-10909.aspx

²³⁵ Smith, M. (2010, October 15). Queering In/Equality: LGBT and Two-Spirited Youth 'It Gets Better.' [Blog Entry]. Retrieved from <http://blog.fedcan.ca/2010/10/15/queering-inequality-lgbt-and-two-spirited-youth-%E2%80%98it-gets-better%E2%80%99/>

²³⁶ Haskell, R. (2010, November 9). Making Schools Better for LGBT: Homophobia and Transphobia Lessons. [Blog Entry]. Retrieved from: <http://blog.fedcan.ca/2010/11/09/making-schools-better-for-lgbt-homophobia-and-transphobia-lessons/>

²³⁷ Wells, K. (2010, October 25). Beyond Homophobia: We Need to Make it Better. [Blog Entry]. Retrieved from: <http://blog.fedcan.ca/2010/10/25/beyond-homophobia-we-need-to-make-it-better/>

²³⁸ Burtch, B. (2011, September 29). Education Matters: Confronting Homophobia and Transphobia in Schools. [Blog Entry]. Retrieved from <http://blog.fedcan.ca/2011/09/29/education-matters-confronting-homophobia-and-transphobia-in-schools/>

²³⁹ Taylor, C. & Peter, T., with McMinn, T.L., Elliott, T., Beldom, S., Ferry, A., Gross, Z., Paquin, S., & Schachter, K. (2011). *Every class in every school: The first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools. Final report*. Toronto, ON: Egale Canada Human Rights Trust.

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or Gab Youth and Out in Schools in Vancouver. And there are amazing individual teachers who make these issues a priority in their classroom. Teachers' Federations have also stepped up, for example in British Columbia²⁴⁰ and Alberta,²⁴¹ to take a stand against homophobic violence and provide workshops on the topic to their members. Most books on the topic, such as Elizabeth Meyer's *Gender, bullying, and harassment*,²⁴² as well as this *Beyond the Queer Alphabet* e-book, all put forth many powerful suggestions for what educators and school administrators can do to help create safer school climates.

But despite the fact that many activists and scholars advocate a complex, systemic approach to the issue of homophobic and transphobic violence in schools, the lens of anti-bullying is often favoured on the ground as well as in the media. It is important to consider the implications of this focus on bullying for our anti-homophobia initiatives, and the limitations that it brings, especially when it comes to issues of gender identity and gender expression.

The increasing concern and awareness of the phenomenon of bullying has been, in a way, a great ally in the push for anti-homophobia education. There are countless campaigns and conferences that are actively generating knowledge on the topic in North America, such as Stop Bullying,²⁴³ Bullying Canada,²⁴⁴ The Many Faces of Bullying,²⁴⁵ and the International Bullying Prevention Association.²⁴⁶ This fairly recent anxiety surrounding bullying has often allowed anti-homophobia activists to legitimize their efforts in schools, whose doors were previously closed due to dubious accusations that anti-homophobia education is a form of proselytization and that it sexualizes schools. For educators who have been fighting these discourses for years, the notion of anti-bullying can be a powerful argument in favour of doing anti-homophobia work. Some people may fight efforts to educate youth about sexual (and, to a lesser extent, gender) diversity, but who would fight against attempts to reduce (homophobic) bullying?

In many ways, this strategy has been effective in making the voice of anti-homophobia education heard, and we should celebrate the possibilities that have been opened up in some school districts, classrooms and Teacher Education programs as a result. It is crucial not to underestimate or diminish the impact of these efforts to make the topic of sexual diversity visible in schools, especially for youth who may feel alone and isolated. However, I believe it is also essential that we be

²⁴⁰ BC Teachers' Federation. (2011). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) issues in schools. Retrieved from <http://bctf.ca/SocialJustice.aspx?id=6106>

²⁴¹ The Alberta Teachers' Association. (2011). Building Inclusive Schools-Focus on Racism, Sexism or Homophobia. Retrieved from <http://www.teachers.ab.ca/For%20Members/Programs%20and%20Services/Workshops%20Courses%20and%20Presentations/Workshops%20Seminars%20Courses/Respect%20for%20Diversity/Pages/Building%20Inclusive%20Schools.aspx>

²⁴² Meyer, E.J. (2009). *Gender, Bullying, and Harassment: Strategies to End Sexism and Homophobia in Schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.

²⁴³ StopBullying.gov. (n.d.). Home. Retrieved from <http://www.stopbullying.gov/>

²⁴⁴ BullyingCanada. (n.d.). Home. Retrieved from <http://www.bullyingcanada.ca/index.php>

²⁴⁵ The Many Faces of Bullying North American Conference. (n.d.). Home. Retrieved from <http://www.facesofbullying.com/index.html>

²⁴⁶ International Bullying Prevention Association. (n.d.). Home. Retrieved from <http://www.stopbullyingworld.org/>

self-reflexive and critical of how the dominance of anti-bullying narratives has both enabled and constrained 'anti-homophobia' work.

The term 'anti-homophobia' itself is problematic. Like the notion of anti-bullying, it reflects a focus on individual violent attitudes and behaviours. When (homophobic) bullying happens, the culprit is seen as one (or maybe several) individuals. Whether we are doing preventative or punitive work, we shape our response accordingly: We target it to individuals, whether that means children, parents, or educators.

Efforts to fight against homophobic bullying tend to focus on educating students out of their possible individual prejudice and/or misconception. As Gerald Walton, among others, has argued, this individualistic approach fails to connect homophobic bullying to its roots in social messages about sexuality, sexual orientation, and gender. When we try to identify, lambast or blame 'bullies,' we are so focused on the wrong done by specific individuals that we forget the fact that bullies are not aberrations in our culture. Rather, such bullying is a harsh reflection of how queer, trans and genderqueer people are perceived in our society.

Homophobic bullies could not exist if they had not picked up from society that gayness is 'unnatural,' that same-sex couples are less legitimate than opposite-sex couples, or that binary genders are foundational to the order of the world. There is a fundamental bias in the idea that it makes sense to teach children about heterosexuality before homosexuality,²⁴⁷ or that young children would be 'confused' if confronted with images of same-sex couples. Children and youth pick up on such biases. When we teach students that puberty leads to (heterosexual) reproduction,²⁴⁸ when we only choose stories or exercises that feature opposite-sex partners, when we make jokes about boys liking girls in class or assume that our students are only straight, when we get upset over boys wearing dresses – every time that we do such things we send subtle but powerful messages to youth and adults that what is 'normal' is one (masculine) man and one (feminine) woman.

These behaviours are not, by our common understanding of the words, examples of homophobic bullying. People who say or do these kinds of things (and I do not exclude myself here) rarely would describe themselves as homophobic, and they would be extremely upset to be labeled as such. Yet all of these attitudes participate in creating a climate, in our schools and beyond, where homophobic bullying becomes not only possible, but often logical. Rather than ask the question, why would teenagers bully each other over pink shirts, we need to ask the question: Given the environment in which they live and learn, why wouldn't they?

I am not arguing that we find new scapegoats for the problems that queer and trans youth face in Canadian schools. Rather, I am suggesting that we need to be more attentive to the subtle ways that heteronormative discourses circulate in schools in ways that empower homophobic verbal and physical harassment. More than anything else, I am also arguing that we need to make the question of gender(s) central to our efforts to create positive school cultures. Homophobic bullying and heteronormative mechanisms are sustained by a gender binary system. It is not just about including transphobia in our work, it is about exploring how transphobia and homophobia are made intelligible because of the presumptions about gender expression and gender identity.

²⁴⁷ Blaze Carlson, K. (2011, October 8). What should your kids be learning about sex in school?. *National Post*. Retrieved from <http://news.nationalpost.com/2011/10/08/what-should-your-kids-be-learning-about-sex-in-school/>

²⁴⁸ Diorio, J. & Munro, J. (2003). What Does Puberty Mean to Adolescents? Teaching and learning about bodily development. *Sex Education*, 3(2), 119-131.

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Our recommendations to educators and schools, as well as our own research and work in classrooms, need to reflect these connections. We need to be more vocal about the significance and impact that the gender binary plays, subtly, in stories of ‘homophobic’ as well as transphobic bullying. I think Elizabeth Meyer’s suggestion that we use the concept “gendered harassment”²⁴⁹ is a powerful first step towards rethinking what makes our schools unsafe for queer and trans students.

I want to end this entry by discussing a specific case, Pink Shirt Day²⁵⁰ in Canada. It is an example of how efforts to address homophobic bullying can be conflated with anti-bullying efforts that don’t acknowledge the role that gender plays in the equation. Pink Shirt Day is a campaign that invites students to wear pink to school on a particular day in order to send a message that bullying is not acceptable. Although the event started as a grassroots student effort in response to an instance of gendered harassment in a Nova Scotia high school, Pink Shirt Day has become a national campaign whose origin story²⁵¹ does not mention homophobia.

The question of *why* a male student would be harassed for wearing a pink shirt²⁵² is completely erased on the Pink Shirt Day campaign’s official website. When news stories do mention the gendered (‘homophobic’) nature of the harassment, they usually fail to underline the implicit conflation of sexual orientation and gender expression that justifies calling a boy ‘gay’ for wearing a color that is perceived as feminine (pink). Notably, in an 8 October 2011 *National Post* article,²⁵³ a British professor of sociology argued that a child coming home in a pink shirt may be troubling if a parent has a moral discomfort with homosexuality. The assumption that there is a straightforward connection between effeminacy and homosexuality goes unquestioned.

Whether the connection between sexual orientation and gender presentation is erased as in the Pink Shirt Day campaign or made hypervisible as in *The National Post* article, such examples underline the problem of conflation. In both instances, the role of gender policing is ignored, and in the context of anti-bullying, this approach works to make further invisible the gendered roots of homophobic violence in schools.

By focusing on individual displays of ‘homophobia,’ we let bullies become an excuse not to look at our own schools and at our own practices, and not to question how we, as educators, administrators, parents, and scholars, may have helped to create an environment where these acts of bullying become intelligible. And while this focus has often rallied people around gay youth, the issues faced by trans youth are often forgotten, marginalized, or conflated with ‘homophobia.’

If we hope not to wake again to the news of the suicide of one more queer or trans youth, we need a broader perspective, one that focuses on how heteronormative mechanisms function pervasively in our schools and classrooms. This work requires that we unpack our beliefs and assumptions about

²⁴⁹ Meyer, E. (2009, August 9). Gender and Schooling: Ending bullying and harassment, and promoting sexual diversity in school. [Blog Entry]. Retrieved <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/gender-and-schooling/200908/why-anti-bullying-programs-fail-make-school-safer>

²⁵⁰ Pink Shirt Day. (2012). Home. Retrieved from <http://www.pinkshirtday.ca/>

²⁵¹ Pink Shirt Day. (2012). About us. Retrieved from <http://www.pinkshirtday.ca/>

²⁵² Bullied student tickled pink by schoolmates’ T-shirt campaign. (2007, September 19). *CBCNews*. Retrieved from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/story/2007/09/18/pink-tshirts-students.html>

²⁵³ Blaze Carlson, K. (2011, October 8). What should your kids be learning about sex in school? *National Post*. Retrieved from <http://news.nationalpost.com/2011/10/08/what-should-your-kids-be-learning-about-sex-in-school/>

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gender in ways that may be uncomfortable, but are nonetheless necessary. Anti-bullying has gotten us this far. If we want to continue improving school cultures to make them welcoming for all students, we need this shift from homophobia to heteronormativity and from homophobia to gendered harassment.

22

Twenty Years Later for LGBTQ Youth: How Far Have We Come?

Gloria Filax, Athabasca University

My doctoral work focused on LGBTQ youth during the 1990s in Alberta, which was unique in Canada for the state-sanctioned resistance to protect the basic rights of citizens who were LGBTQ.²⁵⁴ Even while the source and particulars of oppression in Alberta were unique, the effects on LGBTQ youth and adults were similar throughout Canada. Alberta had its own homegrown sources of queer phobia and heterosexism but these were alive and active in the rest of Canada as well.

Experiences for queer youth in the 1990s included shunning, bullying, name-calling, spitting, shoving, shaming, silencing, physical violence, alienation, isolation, whisper campaigns, and theft of personal items. When no recourse was available, queer youth disappeared from the chilly climates of schools either by dropping out, home-schooling, or enrolling in new schools. Self-blame was reinforced through support networks. Vulnerable queer youth were often trapped in homes, schools, and communities that encouraged self-blame instead of focusing on the real problem: community and school indifference and queer phobia. In the worst circumstances of virtually no support networks or resources, queer youth committed suicide.

A range of people including peers, family members, and school professionals were the perpetrators of oppressive actions against LGBTQ youth in Alberta and elsewhere in Canada in the 1990s. My research revealed that even when school professionals were not actively queer phobic they were heterosexist, assuming that there were no queer youth ‘in my school’ (interview with a principal of a large, urban high school in Edmonton). Indifference and apathy were the rule. The message too often was that queer youth should not ‘flaunt’ their sexuality or they were accused of ‘asking for’ whatever form harassment took, especially if they were out or if their personal appearance was gender non-conforming. The best queer, in most schools, was the queer no one knew was in their midst or, better yet, the reformed queer who admitted to being confused about sexual and gender identity and was now on the straight and narrow path of redemption embodied in a two-gender, two-sexes, one sexual orientation path.

Twenty years ago the most shocking aspect of my research was that queer phobic and heterosexist oppression directed at youth and children and their families was an open secret: Most knew that these young people were being targeted.

There are many important ways to counter apathy, indifference, and active hate in schools and the communities within which schools are embedded. Important to many of the LGBTQ youth I interviewed was the fact that if and when they came out, they came ‘out of context’. They came out into a culture of silence on anything to do with LGBTQ. As well, LGBTQ culture/s seemed to have no history, no famous folks, and no role models; labels that were only then being recuperated from their slanderous origins in the school or community; and there was a profound silence on cross cultural gender and sexual counter-normative practices.

²⁵⁴ Filax, Gloria. (2007). *Queer Youth in the Province of “Severely Normal.”* British Columbia: UBC Press.

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Many school policies and practices are now in place across Alberta and the rest of Canada to counter queer phobia and heterosexism. Yet the cross-Canada study with 3,000-plus LGTBQ youth sponsored by Egale Canada and recently conducted by University of Winnipeg's Catherine Taylor²⁵⁵ and others reveals that things are not yet satisfactory in schools across Canada. Queer youth continue to face daily the knowledge that living as a non-conforming gendered or sexual subject has mixed consequences.

It is with this kind of research in mind that I offer the following group of headlines from the 11 October 2011 Egale Canada Daily News Clippings.²⁵⁶ These media clippings reflect the type of representations and the world in which LGTBQ youth live.

“UK civil union is not marriage: feds”²⁵⁷ (*Xtra.ca*): Egale Canada is pleading with the federal government to think again. “Civil unions in the UK are recognized, for all intents and purposes, as equivalent to marriage and the same should hold in Canada,” says Helen Kennedy, executive director of Egale Canada.

“Edmonton teen convicted in homophobic attack will serve sentence at home”²⁵⁸ (*Vancouver Sun*) by Ryan Cormier: A teenaged boy convicted in a homophobic attack on a woman when he was 14 will serve a six-month sentence at home. The youth cannot be identified under the Youth Criminal Justice.

“Ferreira blames defeat on homophobia”²⁵⁹ (*Xtra.ca*): Paul Ferreira blames a campaign of homophobic sabotage for his narrow defeat in the Ontario election of 6 October 2011. “There was an attempt to drive a homophobic wedge through this riding,” he explains after speaking to supporters at the Ambiance.

“Unfairly judged: gay lawyers say judiciary still plagued by homophobia”²⁶⁰ (*The Guardian*): Until 1991, unmarried men and women – including gay and lesbian lawyers – were excluded²⁶¹ from entering the judiciary.²⁶² Unsurprisingly, homophobia, or at least a strong perception of it, still

²⁵⁵ Taylor, C. & Peter, T., with McMinn, T.L., Elliott, T., Beldom, S., Ferry, A., Gross, Z., Paquin, S., & Schachter, K. (2011). *Every class in every school: The first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools. Final report*. Toronto, ON: Egale Canada Human Rights Trust.

²⁵⁶ Eagle. (2011). Safe Schools Campaign. Retrieved from <http://www.egale.ca/index.asp?item=1176>

²⁵⁷ Smith, D. (2011, October 6). Uk civil union is not marriage: feds. *Xtra!* Retrieved from http://www.xtra.ca/public/National/UK_civil_union_is_not_marriage_feds-10873.aspx

²⁵⁸ Cormier, R. (2011, October 6). Edmonton teen convicted in homophobic attack will serve sentence at home. *The Vancouver Sun*. Retrieved from <http://www.vancouversun.com/news/Edmonton+teen+convicted+homophobic+attack+will+serve+sentence+home/5515153/story.html>

²⁵⁹ Houston, A. (2011, October 7). Ferreira blames defeat on homophobia. *Xtra!*. Retrieved from http://www.xtra.ca/public/Toronto/Ferreira_blames_defeat_on_homophobia-10880.aspx

²⁶⁰ Alridge, A. (2011, October 6). Unfairly judged: gay lawyers say judiciary still plagued by homophobia. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/law/2011/oct/06/gay-lawyers-judiciary-homophobia?newsfeed=true>

²⁶¹ Hirsch, A. (2010, July 4). Judicial culture still deters gay and lesbian lawyers, say researchers. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/law/2010/jul/04/gay-and-lesbian-judges-underrepresented>

²⁶² Judiciary. (2012). *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/law/judiciary>

lingers. According to recent research by the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender legal group Interlaw, 70 percent²⁶³ of LGBT lawyers believe there is prejudice within the selection process for judicial office.

“Ecuadorian Clinics Torture LGBT to ‘Cure’ Them”²⁶⁴ (*Care2.com*): According to the network of local LGBT organizations, clinics have also locked up gay men, transgenders and cross-dressers but on a smaller scale, “probably because they manage to leave the family earlier than girls,” says Velasquez.

“Westboro Baptist Church to picket funeral of Steve Jobs”²⁶⁵ (*RT*):

From there, followers are guaranteed to get all the latest news on Steve Jobs’ passing and other crucial intel, including this gem from earlier in the week: “October is Fag Month. Yes, that’s what a nation of proud sinners needs – a Fag Month.”

“Serbia has bowed to homophobia”²⁶⁶ (*The Guardian*):

Just two days before the event, interior minister Ivica Dacic suddenly announced that the Pride Parade had been banned,²⁶⁷ along with a number of counter-demonstrations. “Because of these rallies – above all the anti-parade protests – we could expect enormous damage to public order and peace,” he explained.

“Video: US student tells of ‘gay cure’ torture at hands of father”²⁶⁸: An American student has described how he was tortured for a month by his father in an effort to turn him heterosexual. Samuel Brinton, a student at Kansas State University, said his Southern Baptist missionary father beat him, burned him and shocked him with electric currents.

“Gay rights activists report another murder in Johannesburg.”²⁶⁹ Gay rights campaigners in South Africa say a fifth gay murder in Johannesburg suggests there may be a homophobic killer at large. In the last year, there have been four cases in which gay men were found dead in similar circumstances – bound and strangled in their homes with no sign of a break-in.

A key recommendation arising from my research and that of other LGBTQ scholars in regards to schooling was the need for an inclusive curriculum. In marked contrast to the above survey of

²⁶³ Manning, L. (2011, July 7). Report highlight LGBT fears of prejudice in judicial appointments. *Lawyer 2B*. Retrieved from <http://12b.thelawyer.com/report-highlights-lgbt-fears-of-prejudice-in-judicial-appointments/1008528.article>

²⁶⁴ Canning, P. (2011, October 6). Ecuadorian Clinics Torture LGBT to Cure them. *Care2*. Retrieved from <http://www.care2.com/causes/ecuadorian-clinics-torture-lgbt-to-cure-them.html>

²⁶⁵ Westboro Baptist Church to picket funeral of Steve Jobs. (2011, October 6). *RT*. Retrieved from <http://rt.com/usa/news/westboro-funeral-jobs-phelps-247/>

²⁶⁶ Walid, D. (2011, October 7). Serbia has bowed to homophobia. *Guardian.co.uk*. Retrieved from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/oct/07/serbia-homophobia-gay-pride-parade?newsfeed=true>

²⁶⁷ Serbia bans gay pride parade citing violence fears. (2011, September 30). *BBC News Europe*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-15134182>

²⁶⁸ Geen, J. (2011, October 7). Video: US student tells of ‘gay cure’ torture at hands of father. *Pink News*. Retrieved from <http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2011/10/07/video-us-student-tells-of-gay-cure-torture-at-hands-of-father/>

²⁶⁹ Geen, Jessica. (2011, October 6). Gay rights activists report another murder in Johannesburg. *Pink News*. Retrieved from <http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2011/10/06/gay-rights-activists-report-another-murder-in-johannesburg/>

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media representations of LGBTQ people, an inclusive curriculum in the context of an inclusive community, and especially an inclusive media, would see the production and distribution of a wide range of representations of LGBTQ people.

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Desiring and Doing Equity: The Triangle Program for LGBTIQ2S Youth

Doreen Fumia, Ryerson University

I would like to add to the *Equity Matters*²⁷⁰ discussions about queer equity in public education with some thoughts that have surfaced from an ethnographic study I recently conducted. The study is based on the Toronto District School Board's (TDSB) *Triangle Program*, Canada's only publicly funded secondary school classroom for LGBTIQ2S youth from grades 9 to 12. It documents some of the experiences and changes that have taken place over the last 16 years since Triangle opened its doors in 1995. There is much that can be learned about (queer) equity in education from the history and present day operation of Triangle. The student numbers have increased, they are younger, and trans and, increasingly, queer students of colour and Two-spirited students demand instruction more inclusive of their identities, histories and experiences.

An examination of commitments or lack thereof to queer youth points to more than the need for caring education environments. Examining such commitments is also informative of the ways in which decision makers think about citizenship, rights and the future of our nation. That is, the ways in which structured interactions take place in the context of educational institutions is indicative of who we can even *imagine* as belonging or not belonging to our communities.

Triangle Program is a site where both successes and failures of equity in education can be observed. It has been a site for hundreds of LGBTIQ2S students to make their way back to secondary school, take control of what they want to do after high school and for many, to become leaders in their communities. In line with Gloria Filax's research findings in *Queer Youth in the Province of the 'Severely Normal'*,²⁷¹ students often arrive at Triangle Program because school administrators' understanding of how to help queer students tends to focus on them as 'problems.' Once understood as a problem, an attempt is made to relocate a student to a different school.

One former Triangle Program student who identified as pansexual was asked twice if was an option. Initially the student turned down the offer because the gifted academic program in which the student was enrolled was preferred. The second time the student accepted because washrooms, among other issues, were becoming an issue, making the student more and more depressed to the point of missing classes on regular basis.

“So I went with my mom and I fell in love with [Triangle] because I was like, oh my god, I can be myself and they have single bathrooms! I don't have to worry about people beating me up. And that's how I ended up going to the Triangle program. But yeah, I'm really happy that I went and when I chose to go there I kind of thought that I was never

²⁷⁰ Fedcan Blog. (2012). Archive for 'Equity Matters.' Retrieved from <http://blog.fedcan.ca/category/equity-matters/>

²⁷¹ Filax, G. (2006). *Queer Youth in the Province of the "Severely Normal."* Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.

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gonna graduate and never gonna go anywhere with my life, so it's kind of a big deal that I did and actually got a lot more opportunities because ... I wouldn't have ... if I had stayed at a random mainstream school.”

The student describes what made it possible to return to school and ultimately to graduate with scholarship funding for higher education: gender neutral washrooms and an environment where there were no beatings. Surely, this is not an unreasonable wish list for a mainstream school setting.

This excerpt from my ethnographic study could be interpreted to mean that Triangle is successful and so too is the TDSB school system because it provides a different social and learning environment for some queer students. However, in many ways Triangle exists as a consequence and a witness to the failure and inaction of the Canadian school system and school administrators. In *Race to Equity: Disrupting Educational Inequality*,²⁷² Tim McCaskell addresses the disjuncture between celebrating a program such as Triangle and lamenting the very limits of this program. He observes that Triangle is small in scope and rather than being classified as a school, became a program in an existing alternative school (Oasis Alternative Secondary School). Because it is small in scope, McCaskell argues, “it would never fundamentally change what was happening to gay students ... in mainstream schools.”

The fact that Toronto has a school program for a small number of ‘at-risk’ queer youth or, for that matter, Africentric-focused schools for Black students stems from the hard work that education activists do to ensure inclusive schools. These efforts do not easily translate into easy ‘wins.’ Rather, they give rise, more often than not, to singular solutions that do not actually shift underpinning systemic queer phobias or racism. We might end up with programs where problems can be re-located, but the mainstream racist, heterosexist, and phobic systems remain intact.

So what does (queer) equity activism accomplish? Malinda S. Smith references the important work of Sara Ahmed in her *Equity Matters* post on, “The language of equity and diversity in the academy.”²⁷³ I, too, find Ahmed’s work compelling, particularly her 2007 article, “‘You end up doing the document rather than doing the doing’: Diversity, race equality and the politics of documentation.”²⁷⁴ This work is particularly apt when examining the gap between commitments to equity, diversity and inclusion and the practice of it.

In this article, Ahmed states that equity work is appealing to educational institutions as long as it conforms to the ideal image an institution has of itself. The equity policies that we spend hours developing stand as a *representation* of what it means for schools and universities to be caring, equitable and diverse, without even having to act on – engage in the doing of – the recommendations embedded in them. Too often, what well-written, even well-intended reports and policies *do* is help individual institutions to gain some equity credibility. And, arguably, the Triangle Program does just that for the Toronto District School Board (TDSB).

²⁷² McCaskell, T. (2005). *Race to Equity: Disrupting Educational Inequity*. Ontario: Between the Lines.

²⁷³ Smith, M. (2011, January 19). The Language of Equity and Diversity in the Academy. [Blog Entry]. Retrieved from <http://blog.fedcan.ca/2011/01/19/the-language-of-equity-and-diversity-in-the-academy/>

²⁷⁴ Ahmed, S. (2007). ‘You end up doing the document rather than doing the doing’: Diversity, race equality and the politics of documentation. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30 (4), 590-609.

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This is not to say that policy recommendations are worthless. However, it is to say that too often what is acted on is controlled and managed by the prevailing economic and marketable priorities rather than by a consideration of the systemic inequities that might accentuate what an educational institution is *not* doing and needs to do. Such revelations of inequities are suppressed because in a marketing conscious academic environment they may make institutions look bad and because they require more accountability for results. Further, as Rosemary Deem and Jennifer Ozga argue in their work on “Women Managing for Diversity in a Post Modern World,” organizing around discourses of individualized equity ‘problems,’ identifies ‘difference’ but “does not necessarily evoke commitment to action or redistributive justice.”

While equity activists strive for systemic change, there is a slippery terrain to be negotiated. Without actually having to admit to racism, queer phobias or ableism or, indeed, to change much of anything or commit to actions or redistributive justice, we are left to celebrate ourselves as being more inclusive based on the *potential* for change. The written policies and reports themselves seem to *represent* a commitment to equity and diversity rather than to any form of social justice or social change.

The school board in Toronto did respond to equity activists when it allowed for the creation of the Triangle Program. These acts are important, but we must question what they enable, produce, and constrain. As McCaskell noted, as a small program, Triangle was never intended to fundamentally change the way that homo, bi, queer and trans phobias are structured into public education. And it is this point that reveals clearly how equity work, and in this instance Triangle, is located on a slippery terrain, caught between the rhetoric of the *desire* for equity and actually *doing* equity.

Concomitant with the gap between the desire for and the doing of equity is how Triangle functions as a school program. One of the strong findings of the ethnographic study is that the school program would not exist without community support, and from outside the school system. This questions the commitment of the TDSB to go beyond a desire for equity. Triangle is located off TDSB property in the basement of the queer-positive Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto (MCCT). Despite the potential conflicts that cohabiting with a religious organization might create, these have not only been avoided but the partnership has allowed Triangle the freedom to operate separate from some of the constraints of mainstream schooling.

Triangle has flourished because MCCT has worked with the queer community to provide ongoing support and stability. McCaskell muses:

...having some place around that these kids could be taken care of, um, meant a lot less grief to a lot of other people, right? And as well it was a remarkably good deal for the Board because ... the Board paid for the teachers and some admin support but it didn't have to pay for the site. The site was operated by MCCT so you know [there] wasn't heating and caretaking and maintaining a building that is a sizeable cost in running a school.

Fundraising efforts have meant that school supplies, furniture, school trips, guest speakers, scholarship money, lunch programs and a massive renovation effort that provides the Triangle Program with three separate classroom spaces, all have come from the community. Each of these campaigns has been labour intensive and none can be assumed as given from year to year. During my research one TDSB Trustee brazenly admits that the Board underfunds the Triangle Program.

A final aspect that emerged from the ethnographic study that I would like to touch on is the effect of the *It Gets Better*²⁷⁵ campaign. Contrary to popular belief, the IGB campaign was not beneficial for Triangle Program students because they are not students who fit the 'ideal' queer subject of victimhood. They are students who find a place at Triangle where they 'fit' and where they do not have to wait until they graduate until things gets better. In fact, in the Fall of 2010, when the campaign hit the cyber waves, it was a particularly difficult term for the Triangle students who felt oppressed by the dominant messages that a 'better' life was a respectable, bourgeois life (assimilating white heterosexuality). The students were angry that there were no commitments or messages that supported queer youth in the present. In fact, the number of self-harm incidents increased that Fall term and the teachers were convinced that it was the result of the students' interpretation of the IGB message: one of hopelessness for youth living their lives in the present.

Other than the lucky few who gain access to safe(r), more inclusive schools, like Triangle, where they can find sustained support for their beautiful queer selves, students continue to be confronted with the fact that they must wait until they leave school in order for their life to get better. What a sad condemnation of our public school system. The celebration of the *It Gets Better*²⁷⁶ campaign, important as it may be for some queer youth, is the result of our collective failure to effectively move beyond individualizing equity problems and to actively commit to systemic change. And it is shameful for politicians to play off the IGB campaign, as typically happens when yet another youth commits suicide as a result of what the system likes to call bullying. Such utterances serve as quintessential examples of taking the rhetoric of the desire for equity as a replacement for doing equity.

²⁷⁵ It Gets Better Project. (2012). Home. Retrieved from <http://www.itgetsbetter.org/>

²⁷⁶ It Gets Better Project. (2012). Home. Retrieved from <http://www.itgetsbetter.org/>

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Conversion Therapy Fantasies and Religious Opposition to LGBTQ-inclusive Education

Catherine Taylor, University of Winnipeg

Each year on the 10 December we mark International Human Rights Day.²⁷⁷ I share the frustration of many students, parents, and educators that in our nation, we tend to stand timidly by while LGBTQ young people are being hurt in hostile school cultures, out of a reluctance to choose sides between religious rights to disapprove of homosexuality and gender variance on one hand, and the rights of all Canadians to a safe and respectful education, on the other hand. The issue is often framed in public discourse as a stalemate between the Charter right of freedom of conscience and religion, and the Charter rights of life, liberty, and security of the person. This representation of the situation is erroneous. I see nothing in LGBTQ-inclusive education that threatens anyone's freedom to maintain LGBTQ-phobic beliefs if their conscience or religion requires it: Rather, I see much in LGBTQ-phobic school cultures that threatens the life, liberty, and security of many people – sexual and gender minority children and youth, children and youth with sexual and gender minority parents, and conventionally gendered heterosexual children youth who are sometimes targeted as well.

A claim frequently made by religious conservatives to justify maintaining LGBTQ-phobic school cultures is that LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum a (which they typically call 'pro-homosexual curriculum') can influence students to become gay or to stay gay when they could, with the right guidance, become heterosexual. For example, parents opposing Louis Riel School Division's new policy are quoted in a November 2011 article in *The Winnipeg Free Press* as saying,

“They [the policies] were all geared toward the promotion of the homosexual or gay lifestyle. My question is, would you also want to present the resources for those people who seek counseling to remove themselves from that lifestyle? True education would give both, and let the student decide.”²⁷⁸

Yet there is no evidence whatsoever that sexual orientation can be changed through curriculum or 'counseling.' If education worked this way, almost everyone would be heterosexual. What is true is that exposure to LGBTQ-inclusive education may influence some LGBTQ students to stop pretending to be heterosexual and/or conventionally gendered (the old 'being/doing' distinction), which is an entirely different question.

²⁷⁷ Human Rights Day. (2011). Home. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/en/events/humanrightsday/2011/>

²⁷⁸ Godbout, A. (2011, November 9). Parents speak out on sexuality policy. *Canstar*. Retrieved from <http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/our-communities/lance/Parents-speak-out-on-sexuality-policy-133471938.html>

Lay people might be confused about this, but the Vatican is not. In his lengthy 1986 “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons,”²⁷⁹ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (then Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith or ‘enforcer’ of Church law, now Pope) requires that people with the “homosexual condition” be counseled to resist their “urges.” At no point does he suggest that sexual orientation itself could be changed by such efforts. Ratzinger acknowledges that homosexuality is inborn, at least in some people, but nevertheless constitutes an inclination to ‘evil’ acts, and gay people are admonished to exercise self-control and strive for salvation through devotion to God. Within this system of rationality, it can make sense to maintain school cultures that encourage gay students to be ashamed of being gay and to pretend to be heterosexual.

Claims of enabling gay people to change their sexual orientation through conversion therapy usually turn out to be claims of enabling gay people to resist their homosexual desires and “remove themselves from the lifestyle,” which is a much more limited ambition. There have been many media reports refuting the success of so-called ‘conversion therapies’ in making homosexual people heterosexual, and the American Psychological Association (APA) renounced the practice as not only potentially damaging but bad science in its 2009 report, *Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation*:

“The American Psychological Association Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation conducted a systematic review of the peer-reviewed journal literature on sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE) and concluded that efforts to change sexual orientation are unlikely to be successful and involve some risk of harm, contrary to the claims of SOCE practitioners and advocates. . . . [T]he task force concluded that the population that undergoes SOCE tends to have strongly conservative religious views that lead them to seek to change their sexual orientation. Thus, the appropriate application of affirmative interventions for those who seek SOCE involves therapist acceptance, support, and understanding of clients and the facilitation of clients’ active coping, social support, and identity exploration and development, without imposing a specific sexual orientation identity outcome.”²⁸⁰

That last phrase, ‘sexual orientation identity’ is an interesting one. What APA found was that a minority of people experienced short-term (six-month) reductions in same-sex attractions. Very few people experienced long-term ‘reductions.. A minority experienced short-term increases in opposite-sex attractions, but these were primarily people who had experienced opposite-sex attractions before conversion therapy. However, some people did experience an increased sense of entitlement to *identify* as heterosexual after SOCE, *even though their sexual attractions remained homosexual*.

This outcome, conceptualized as ‘heterosexual orientation identity’ in a number of studies, involves an individual working through SOCE to resignify the category ‘heterosexual’ from ‘attracted to the opposite sex’ to “supporting heterosexual values and resisting same-sex attractions.” The work is motivated by a strong need to see oneself as heterosexual in order to avoid dissonance with a

²⁷⁹ Ratzinger, Joseph. (1986). Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexuals Persons. In *The Vatican Official Website*. Retrieved from http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19861001_homosexual-persons_en.html

²⁸⁰ American Psychological Association Task Force. (2009). Report of the Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/resources/therapeutic-response.pdf>

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cherished belief structure, usually religious, that condemns homosexuality. In recent years with the dramatic changes in attitudes to LGBTQ people in most parts of society, people entering SOCE are predominantly strongly religious White men who believe that their sexual orientation is irreconcilable with their religious beliefs.

Some parents however seem genuinely to believe that sexual orientation itself can be changed, and that the school system's time-honoured combination of tolerating homophobia and enforcing heterosexism will help their gay children become happy heterosexuals. It will not. So-called conversion therapies ranging from prayer, compassionate counseling and ex-gay support groups to aversion training involving electroshock, maggots and pornography, have all failed to turn homosexual people into heterosexual people. Likewise the completely heterosexual curricula to which students have been exposed throughout Canadian history have been unsuccessful in making gay students heterosexual. Parents should be aware that such measures, whether they are faith-based, home-based, or school-based, will at best serve only to reconcile their gay child to a lifetime of feeling ashamed of their 'condition' and pretending to be heterosexual.

As Canadians we have seen an analogous example of conversion therapies applied to 'race' and ethnicity in the residential school system, where children were taught to be ashamed of being Aboriginal and to identify with Britishness. If parents have received the message that conversion therapies can actually kill the homosexual in their child, they should be aware that there is no scientifically rigorous evidence to support this claim. Perhaps religious conservatives would be prepared to rethink their support for conversion therapy and curricular silence if they only would accept that the most likely outcome of these efforts is not a heterosexual child but an unhappy one.

There always will be some parents who opt for conversion therapy from fear that should their gay or lesbian child *not* pretend to be heterosexual, a lonely life at the margins of society and terrible discrimination will be their fate. While that fear may have been well-founded in earlier Canadian history, and may still be valid in some aggressively LGBTQ-phobic pockets of Canadian society, it is by no means *generally* true of Canada today. Polls, including one by Angus Reid in September 2009,²⁸¹ show that Canadians are generally not homophobic. They understand that being gay or lesbian or transgender is what one is, not a choice one makes, like being Ukrainian or Ojibway or female. Canadian law has been overhauled to remove discriminatory measures, and employers routinely offer same-sex pension, health, and other benefits.

Our school systems remain frozen in time largely because officials fear complaints from socially conservative parents, and thus, wave after wave of LGBTQ youth endure fear, anxiety, depression, isolation, and bodily harm caused by homophobic harassment and exclusion. Occasionally the inevitable outcomes of this recipe for disaster makes the news, and people across the country briefly rally in protest against yet another LGBTQ youth suicide, aghast at the cruelty of children who bullied²⁸² him.

²⁸¹ Angus Reid Public Opinion (2009). Canada more Open to Same-Sex Marriage than U.S., UK. Retrieved from http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/37148/canada_more_open_to_same_sex_marriage_than_us_uk/

²⁸² Fedcan Blog. (2012). Archive for 'Bullying.' Retrieved from <http://blog.fedcan.ca/?s=bullying>

There are signs of hope: Courageous students and teachers and school officials are working hard to bring school culture into the 21st century. The National Climate Survey²⁸³ found that 58 percent of heterosexual students report that they are distressed to some degree when they hear homophobic language. We know that LGBTQ students are stepping up to demand that educators be more proactive on this issue; that 58 per cent suggests that heterosexual students, too, would welcome some help from the adult world in this regard. And in some parts of Canada, adults are responding. Many school divisions and several Ministries of Education are speaking out on the issue of LGBTQ-phobic bullying, and some seem to recognize that harassment will not stop in the hallways until LGBTQ people are treated respectfully in curricula.

Teachers' associations, some of which have been working on LGBTQ education for years, have also stepped up their efforts. Manitoba Teachers' Society²⁸⁴ is partnering with my Social Science and Humanities Research Council-funded research team on a project designed to unearth the wealth of expertise and experience in LGBTQ-inclusive education that exists in teachers across the country who have worked on these issues for years in isolation or in small clusters, with little institutional support, sometimes within socially conservative faith communities that have actively opposed these efforts. As long as we fantasize that harassment policies are enough and that LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum is not needed, students will continue to learn what our silence teaches them: that human rights do not apply to LGBTQ people, and that there is no requirement to treat them respectfully if you'd rather not.

For religious conservatives, the crux of the issue seems to be their mistaken belief that a heterosexist curriculum coupled with conversion therapy can transform gay children into heterosexuals. I am grateful to the APA for clarifying that it cannot. But the clash between socially conservative religious rights and LGBTQ rights continues to play out at the cost of needless misery for LGBTQ students. I hope that researchers in a range of disciplines will turn their attention to opposing religious conservative campaigns against the life, liberty, and security of LGBTQ children and youth. In their very useful analysis of Canadian jurisprudence concerning "Religion-based Claims for Impinging on Queer Citizenship," Bruce MacDonald and Donn Short argue that, "[a] person ought not to be permitted to make his or her inclusion dependent on the exclusion of another."²⁸⁵

²⁸³ Taylor, C. & Peter, T., with McMinn, T.L., Elliott, T., Beldom, S., Ferry, A., Gross, Z., Paquin, S., & Schachter, K. (2011). *Every class in every school: The first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools. Final report*. Toronto, ON: Egale Canada Human Rights Trust.

²⁸⁴ The Manitoba Teacher's Society. (2012). Home. Retrieved from <http://www.mbteach.org/>

²⁸⁵ MacDougall, B. (2010). Religion-Based Claims for Impinging on Queer Citizenship. *Dalhousie Law Journal*, 32 (2). Retrieved from http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1939235

Post-Secondary Education and Queer Student Engagement in Canada

Rachael Sullivan, University of British Columbia

At the recent ‘We Demand: History/Sex/Activism in Canada’²⁸⁶ conference, I was struck by the centrality of post-secondary education, and specifically university and college campuses, in the recollections of prominent queer activists. The contributors to the conference’s opening plenary included Ron Dutton of BC Gay and Lesbian Archives; Barbara Findlay, a prominent Vancouver lawyer; Janine Fuller, manager of Little Sister’s Bookstore; Amy Gottlieb, a Toronto-based educator and photographer; and Gary Kinsman, a professor at Laurentian University. In each account, these activists connected their early involvement in a wide range of social movements in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s – the peace movement, women’s liberation movement, student activism, gay and lesbian liberation – to a college or university campus. It was clear from their testimonies that these spaces had provided a crucial site where they could engage in radical thinking and activism, as well as explore issues of identity, sexuality, and desire.

I wonder if post-secondary education can still play an important role in the exploration of queer desires, political identification(s), and activist possibilities. Some people feel that colleges and universities have lost their central role in cultivating radical politics. At the end of the conference, a volunteer, Ivan Drury, noted:²⁸⁷ “We’re at a crisis where political radicals among students are probably at a historic low right now ... Professors are largely more radical than their students. It should really be the other way around.” Drury’s dismay lies in the perceived apathy of students to ‘get involved’ in political and social justice activism on campus. The current perception is that students accept the status-quo without considering how they might want to and can change their university into one that is more inclusive and aware of LGBTQI2-S issues. In fact, LGBTQI2-S students could become some of our greatest leaders, if they are given the right tools, skills, and opportunities.

Today, a post-secondary education is recognized as important for personal development, as well as for future employment and career opportunities. Without encouragement and the opportunity to reflect on how the university and its resources could better meet the needs of LGBTQI2-S students, it is easy for students (myself included) to get caught up in the construction of post-secondary education as a means to an end for employment and income security. We need a critical reflection that engages with how universities and colleges can (again) be sites for citizenship and political engagement, rather than sites solely for academic training and accreditation. Consequently, I want to consider the role that post-secondary education and campuses play in LGBTQI2-S students’ lives and the potential that these sites might serve in the (re)making of radical queer students and citizens.

Perhaps the crisis described by Drury is reflective of the ways in which LGBTQI2-S needs have changed over time. Today, many universities and colleges provide resources for LGBTQI2-S students, including, amongst others, educational resources, visibility campaigns, administrative

²⁸⁶ We Demand. (2011). History/Sex/Activism in Canada. Retrieved from <http://ocs.sfu.ca/history/index.php/wedemand/2011>

²⁸⁷ Di Mera, M. (2011, August 31). Sex Activism in Canada. *Xtra!*. Retrieved from http://www.xtra.ca/public/Vancouver/Sex_activism_in_Canada-10688.aspx

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offices, and student groups that focus on issues of gender and sexual diversity. In many ways these resources have become the hallmark of hard won fights based on the concerns raised by queer students, staff, and faculty, predominantly students over the last 40 years. The aim has been to make university and college campuses 'safe' and more welcoming through equity and accessibility policies. While it is important to recognize that these policies have had a positive impact, how do they translate to the actual lived experiences of LGBTQI2-S? When we talk about making campuses 'safe,' whose safety are we considering, and within which spaces?

My doctoral research tackles some of these questions by exploring how queer students understand and engage with a Canadian university campus – in this case the University of British Columbia (UBC) – as a 'safe' space. Through these interviews I found that all of the students interviewed identified at least one place on campus that they felt was queer welcoming or friendly, many of which were student services and administrative spaces. This suggests that these UBC administrative and student services units have done a good job of establishing a welcoming environment for queer students by educating their staff and making sexual and gender diversity issues visible in these spaces. And, yet, half of the participants identified spaces that they would avoid on campus, which included some residential and social spaces. This strongly suggests that there is still work to be done on campus.

Understandably, students might be reluctant to raise questions or concerns when they and university administrators can point to the resources that are already provided. Perhaps the question that needs to be asked is this: Are the current resources meeting the needs of all LGBTQI2-S students at UBC or across Canadian post-secondary institutions in general? In my interviews I asked students what they would like to see changed across campus. Many had little to say, often stating that they had not had a chance to think about it. Perhaps it is because they had not been asked; to a certain extent, they may have been taught to be grateful for the resources that *are* available, rather than being taught to ask questions about the limits of their campus. In this sense I believe, radical activism, and more specifically radical queer activism, starts with learning to ask questions. Post-secondary education is a time and *a place* for developing critical thinking skills which are important for political engagement and activism.

Although equity and access policies have altered university and college campuses, it has also created an expectation of inclusion for marginal students, staff and faculty. But I want more than safe spaces and inclusion. I would like to believe that university and college campuses have the potential to become (again) the training ground for radical queers, where LGBTQI2-S students can engage with radical ideas about what queer experiences and lives could look like both on and off campus, rather than lives uncritically shaped by conventions and conformity. There is still work to be done. For instance, homophobic and transphobic hostility remains a threat both on and off campus and the imposition of gendered and sexualized violence is a reality that students face across Canadian campuses. While there are no easy answers to these issues, I believe that universities and colleges can provide students, especially LGBTQI2-S students, with the tools for awareness and radical engagement.

To extend our understanding of the complexity of LGBTQI2-S issues, we might consider questions that still need to be asked, including how are the needs of queers of colour, queers with disabilities, trans, intersex, and Two-Spirit students being identified and met by the university? Are issues of intersectionality being raised? And how do we deal with the complicated realities of LGBTQI2-S lives both on and off campus? Students need to be encouraged to think about these questions, and to pose their own. In fact, students need to learn how to connect issues of sexual and gender diversity to other issues of marginalization, and then be able to translate their critical questioning

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and activist skills to their lived realities, while also understanding how change can actually be achieved. This is the potential and possibility that post-secondary education and campuses offer our LGBTQI2-S youth.

It is my hope and goal to help students become (re)politicized through engaging with the questions above, perhaps not solely for themselves, but also for those whose relationship to power and opportunity is even more tenuous. For me, this means providing the opportunity and space for LGBTQI2-S students and their allies to be critical of the institution, while also generating new possibilities, creative solutions, and changing policies and resources on campuses.

It was only a generation ago that students were fighting for the right to organize, have a space on campus, and have issues of sexuality and gender included in the curriculum. In many cases, these provisions now exist across Canadian post-secondary institutions and, yet, there is still room for improvement. At this moment in time I fear we, as members of university and college communities, risk complacency because there has been so much improvement in terms of access and equity. The time for assimilation is over; not encouraging LGBTQI2-S students to ask hard questions of their college or university will do nothing to reverse the decline in queer student engagement and activism.

We need to think critically and carefully about how university and colleges can provide a rich opportunity for LGBTQI2-S student engagement. The crisis outlined by Drury, and the lack of radical queer students, is too important to be dismissed by both queer scholar and activists.

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How (not) to do Queer Studies in the classroom: Teaching to think beyond tolerance

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In the fall of 2010, I was invited by the Association for Media Literacy (AML) to facilitate a workshop²⁸⁸ that explored the potential and fruitful relationship between Queer theory²⁸⁹ and media literacy. Understanding that queer theory can often be untranslatable outside of a university setting, I sought to enable future secondary school teachers to conceive of an anti-homophobic pedagogy that was accessible to teens and also encouraged their students to think critically. In tandem I wanted to underscore that queer theory/studies is not an umbrella term that encapsulates scholarship that accounts for the lives and histories of all individuals one might understand as being lesbian, gay, bisexual, etc. One must resist the desire for easy shorthand. Queer critique and theorizing as Natalie Oswin²⁹⁰ notes, is fundamentally invested in “understanding how norms and categories are deployed” by whom and for what purpose. What follows is a series of critical reflections that emerged for me from that encounter.

The inspiration for the workshop was borne out of a series of moments in the months prior to it. The first provocation emerged from a random conversation with a long-time friend, now a teacher at our former junior high school. During a lunchtime chat it was revealed by my friend that teaching *empathy* was a necessary and important shift in the Toronto District School Board’s mandate regarding equity. Intrigued, I pondered how a former, familiar pedagogical imperative of teaching tolerance²⁹¹ suddenly became an investment in engendering an affective relationship to social justice.

At the time, like many other folks, I was watching television programs such as *Ugly Betty* and later *Glee*, curious about the near-coincidental emergence of narratives that focused on the lives of self-identified gay-male youth. One could imagine that such a cultural moment signals a shift in societal views or opinions about sexual-orientation(s), perhaps even an example of embracing tolerance as a successful means for confronting and resolving social conflict, as Malinda S Smith also queries in *Queering In/Equality*. Reminded of film and media scholar Kara Keeling’s caution in the essay “Joining The Lesbians: Cinematic Regimes of Black Lesbian Visibility,”²⁹² that not all visibility is inherently progressive, I was prompted to ask, what sort of moment is this where gay male youth (in

²⁸⁸ Queer Theory & Media Representations in the Classroom. (2010, October 23). *Association MediaLit*. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2izjUip0aQ>

²⁸⁹ Queer Theory. (2005). Welcome to Queer Theory!. Retrieved from <http://www.queertheory.com/default.htm>

²⁹⁰ Oswin, N. (2008). Critical geographies and the uses of sexuality: deconstructing queer space. *Progress in Human Geography*, 32 (1).

²⁹¹ Teaching Tolerance. (n.d.). Home. Retrieved from <http://www.tolerance.org/>

²⁹² Keeling, K. (2005). “Joining the Lesbians:” Cinematic Regimes of Black Lesbian Visibility. In E. P. Johnson & M.G. Henderson (Eds.), *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Analogy*. (213-227). Durham: Duke University Press.

particular) are widely represented? Further, why is it that the experiences we are invited to share primarily revolve around bearing witness to the degradation that bullying entails?

Despite the different narrative trajectories of both shows, what aligns *Glee* and *Ugly Betty* is the explicit theme that educational institutions have failed these youth. Presuming that the reader is familiar in some sense with the narratives I am referring to, the profound display of neglect by educational administrators to create a safe environment for learning resonates as itself a form of violence. Indeed, both of these shows emerge within a heteropatriarchal regime of representation and visibility. As such, an archetypal image of a gay male youth can only be knowable and represented for an audience if they are enduring such trials and tribulations. One is left with the question: Why is this the logical avenue to pursue? Further, is there an undisclosed pleasure in doing so? Do audiences, by virtue of thinking that tolerance is their mandate, secretly relish in the violence displayed before them? Watching/engaging *Glee* can make you feel *like* a ‘good’ empathetic person, from a distance. One can say to himself or herself with ease “I would never treat someone else like that.”

After encountering the *It Gets Better* campaign that was then reaching a critical mass by the time of the workshop, my focus shifted to a series of other related questions. Despite the well-intentioned gesture of empathy by primarily elder coupled gay men, towards LGBTQ youth enduring homophobic and transphobic violence, what might be the limitation of this gesture?

Gerald Walton noted in this LGBTQI2-S series, “[n]ational surveys from GLSEN²⁹³ in the United States and Egale²⁹⁴ in Canada indicate that gender atypical youth are more likely to be the target of harassment and bullying than their gender typical counterparts.”²⁹⁵ Similarly, as Melissa Carrol suggests, the *It Gets Better* campaign “evidences a widespread lack of political information, care, and sentiment for young female queers, especially those deemed unhappy.”²⁹⁶ In addition many have highlighted how the campaign lacks a nuanced understanding of how queer youth of colour negotiate homophobia. See a counter response²⁹⁷ by the Embracing Intersectional Diversity Project²⁹⁸ led by Tomee Sojourner as an example.

It is not my goal to revise these assessments, much of which I am in agreement with. However, while I concur with many of the critiques circulating in the blogosphere, the elision of ‘race’ in this conversation is striking.

²⁹³ Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network. (2012). 2009 National School Climate Survey: Nearly 9 out of 10 LGBT Student Experience Harassment in School. Retrieved from <http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/library/record/2624.html>

²⁹⁴ Eagle Canada. (2011). Youth Speak Up about Homophobia and Transphobia. Retrieved from <http://www.egale.ca/?item=1401>

²⁹⁵ Walton, G. (2011, November 30). LGBT Lessons (Not) learned: Dominant gender ideology as a basis for transphobic and homophobic violence. [Blog Entry]. Retrieved from <http://blog.fedcan.ca/2011/11/30/lgbt-lessons-not-learned-dominant-gender-ideology-as-a-basis-for-transphobic-and-homophobic-violence/#more-2095>

²⁹⁶ Carroll, M. (2011, November 25). The L-Word: It’s not Getting Better For Lonely Young Lesbians. [Blog Entry]. Retrieved from <http://blog.fedcan.ca/2011/11/25/the-l-word-it%E2%80%99s-not-getting-better-for-lonely-young-lesbians/#more-2091>

²⁹⁷ tomesojourner. (2010, October 10). I am Proff That It Gets Better-Eid Project Campaign. Podcast retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a74XuJHxid8>

²⁹⁸ Embracing Intersectional Diversity Project. (2011). In *Tomee Sojourner*. Retrieved from <http://www.tomeesojourner.com/Creative-Projects/creative-projects.html>

Let's consider for instance, the unfortunate suicide of 11-year old Carl Joseph Walker.²⁹⁹ Carl Walker an African-American youth became one of many whose suicide would be noted and signalled to as further evidence that schools are becoming increasingly hostile environments due to a rise in bullying.

Concurrently with the groundswell of *It Gets Better* submissions, the material fact that young Carl Walker may have been encountering homophobia quite differently was overlooked. He was not an archetypal 'out' gay youth. As remembered by his mother Sirdeaner Walker, he was a sensitive, caring young boy. In an interview with Oprah Winfrey³⁰⁰ shortly after young Carl's demise, Ms. Walker disclosed that Carl had never declared any internal struggle with his sexual orientation to her. Many have probably presumed that an inability for Carl to disclose his 'true' self was the cause for him taking his life. That might be a serious misstep. I was moved by Ms. Walker's insistence, that he would have been loved regardless if he were to, as we say, "come out."

If we take this moment seriously, however, the challenge before us is to critically assess whom we imagine and seek to address in anti-homophobia campaigns, as well as our pedagogy. The experiences of young Carl Walker suggested to me that homophobia was ever present in his daily life, and yet we can also infer that much of this had little to do with his 'actual' experience of his sexual orientation. As a result, black students like Carl Walker might not garner any solace, and are not addressed in the notion (however well intentioned) that "it gets better."

As has been noted in the recent study conducted by Egale "*Every Class in Every School, Egale's Final Report on Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia in Canadian Schools*"³⁰¹ an increasing number of students are encountering homophobia due to their 'perceived' sexual orientation. According to the final report, "10 percent of non-LGBTQ students reported being physically harassed or assaulted about their perceived sexual orientation or gender identity."

This empirical fact illustrates in part that experience of intolerance (in particular homophobia) by youth happen in complex ways. In tandem with the heteropatriarchal assumptions about sexual orientation and gender performance students confront, we might also consider how such assumptions are deeply racialized from the outset. Such a consideration does not necessarily mean adapting previously existing modes of inquiry so that they become 'inclusive' of the experiences of queer youth of colour, as some might infer. Rather, we might ask for instance, in what world does a sensitive black male youth (such as Carl Walker) become a target of homophobia? What limited (and racist) assumptions of and about black masculinity informed such hostile aggression?

In such a circumstance what is revealed from the outset is that many students who are interpolated as 'queer'³⁰² for gender non-conformity are also perceived to be in breach of normative racial/racist codes of masculinity/femininity. Further, it illustrates to us that racism and homophobia often operate in tandem to command particular performances of gender by youth of colour.

²⁹⁹ Donaldson James, S. (2009, April 14). What Words Can Kill: 'That's So Gay?' *ABC News*. Retrieved from <http://abcnews.go.com/Health/MindMoodNews/story?id=7328091#.T1E1hfU4iSp>

³⁰⁰ The Oprah Winfrey Show. (2009, May 6). The Truth About Bullying. Retrieved from <http://www.oprah.com/relationships/School-Bullying/3>

³⁰¹ Taylor, C. & Peter, T., with McMinn, T.L., Elliott, T., Beldom, S., Ferry, A., Gross, Z., Paquin, S., & Schachter, K. (2011). *Every class in every school: The first national climate survey on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools. Final Report*. Toronto, ON: Egale Canada Human Rights Trust.

³⁰² Ward, J. (2008). *Respectably Queer: Diversity Culture in LGBTQ Activist Organizations*. (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press).

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To pose such questions then is to take a queer pedagogy beyond the presumption that the purpose of our intervention is solely to create safer educational settings for sexual-minorities, and gender outlaws. As Sirma Bilge has posited, ‘queer’ must be understood as a political metaphor without a predetermined referent that serves to challenge institutional forces normalizing and commodifying difference.”³⁰³

Akin to what Bilge proposes as a “queer intersectionality” approach, in the workshop, I sought to engender a critical space where we could discuss how multiple systems of domination shape media representations, how they eventually circulate, and how they are consumed. A queer pedagogical approach as I imagined it at the time, might engage media literacy beyond enabling students with the skills to decipher representations. Rather, in expanding what we imagine as ‘literacy,’ media representations became a site where students could acquire the critical tools to assess cultural phenomena such as *Glee* or *It Gets Better*, within their broader sociological context.

In the end, I am left with the understanding that much work is still needed on this front. We must be able to account for those lives that seemingly fall outside of our frame of inquiry. We must be willing to also ‘queer’ ourselves, as we encourage others to be critical of the society they are inheriting.

³⁰³ Bilge, S. (2011, October 18). Developing Intersectional Solidarities: Plea for Queer Intersectionality. [Blog entry]. Retrieved from <http://blog.fedcan.ca/2011/10/18/developing-intersectional-solidarities-a-plea-for-queer-intersectionality/>

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- 2 Spirits. (n.d.). Home. Retrieved from <http://www.2spirits.com/>
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