QUEER ISSUES IN THE STUDY OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE III

A 2011 CANADIAN SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF EDUCATION (CSSE) PRE-CONFERENCE

Saturday, May 28, 2011
8:30 AM – 4:00 PM
Congress 2011, New Brunswick University & St. Thomas University, Fredericton

André P. Grace, Cory M. Dawson, & Alexis K. Hillyard
Pre-Conference Organizers and Editors of the Proceedings
BIENVENUE! WELCOME!

The Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services (iSMSS), an interdisciplinary institute in the Faculty of Education, University of Alberta is pleased to host and welcome you to the third CSSE Pre-Conference on Queer Issues in the Study of Education and Culture. In organizing this pre-conference, iSMSS hopes to continue to create a dynamic, communicative space for scholars and students across disciplines and members of school and larger communities to share research and other work on sexual and gender minority issues in the study of education and culture. Once again, we had a wonderful response to the Call for Papers for this year’s pre-conference. Papers included in these proceedings indicate a synergy between interdisciplinary queer research, educational and cultural practices, and advocacy to make the world better for sexual and gender minorities. We are also delighted to include PowerPoint presentation slides prepared by the Gay-Straight Alliance from Leo Hayes High School in Fredericton. In addition to a selection of papers and the GSA presentation, there will be a closing panel that I will chair. It includes Mr. Jeff Dodds, Head, Public Health Promotion, Prevention and Control with the Public Health Agency of Canada and Dr. Kristopher Wells, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Consultant with Edmonton Public School Board and Postdoctoral Researcher at iSMSS.

In last year’s welcome, I spoke to the need for school boards, schools, principals, and teachers to be held accountable. I stated that they needed 1) to develop policy that respects and accommodates sexual and gender minority students and those perceived to be, and 2) to implement that policy so that it is visible and expressed in everyday schooling and its social and cultural practices. As a sign that wonderful things are happening, a number of school boards in Canada have been developing new standalone policies to support sexual and gender minority students, families, and staff. For example, Edmonton Public School Board trustees voted in favor of developing a new policy to address the Board’s expectation that sexual and gender minority persons are welcomed, respected, accepted, and supported in its schools. As part of its policy work to address equity and inclusion, the Board is finalizing a separate policy to address the specific needs of those students, families, and staff who identify or are perceived as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, queer or questioning in their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Once the policy is approved, the Board will develop administrative regulations and a three-year implementation plan to ensure this policy is properly resourced, targeted, and supported by all district staff. For example, the regulations will deal with leadership, safety and anti-harassment, guidance and counseling supports, staff development and education, curriculum, learning and library resources, student programs, employment equity, school community partnerships, gender identity and gender expressions, and definitions. These progressive school boards are to be commended for acting in the spirit of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms so sexual and gender minority children and youth, families and staff are treated as persons and citizens.

It takes a collective effort to complete the many tasks that organizing a preconference requires. I would like to say a special “Thank you!” to Alexis Hillyard and Cory Dawson who have helped me tremendously to organize this pre-conference. Enjoy the day and your time at Congress at University of New Brunswick / St. Thomas University in scenic Fredericton.

André P. Grace, Ph. D.
Killam Professor & Director, Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services
Faculty of Education, University of Alberta
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Call For Papers

QUEER ISSUES IN THE STUDY OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE III

A PRE-CONFERENCE HELD IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE 2011 ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE CANADIAN SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF EDUCATION (CSSE)

Pre-Conference Location: The University of New Brunswick and St. Thomas University, Fredericton, New Brunswick

Saturday, May 28, 2011

8:30 am – 4:00 pm

Pre-conference Organizers:

André P. Grace (agrace@ualberta.ca)
Cory M. Dawson (cory.dawson@ualberta.ca)
Alexis K. Hillyard (hillyard@ualberta.ca)

PRE-CONFERENCE CALL FOR PAPERS

(Due Date for Proposals: Friday, January 28, 2011)

The Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services (iSMSS), Faculty of Education, University of Alberta is pleased to host the third annual CSSE Pre-Conference on Queer Issues in the Study of Education and Culture on Friday, May 27, 2011. In this Call for Papers, we invite submissions from scholars, students, activists, educators, artists, and others who research or otherwise engage queer issues in the study of education and culture. We encourage submissions from the wide-ranging topics presently constituting queer research and practice in education and culture from cross-cultural, historical, political, policy, comparative, and other perspectives. The intention of the pre-conference is to cover a diversity of topics, inviting stances and reflections from a variety of temporal, geographical, and interdisciplinary perspectives. We also encourage a variety of types of submissions, including academic papers from across disciplines, creative submissions, performances, storytelling, visual arts, and other alternative formats. Submissions may reflect the 2011 Congress theme, which is Coasts and Continents: Exploring Peoples and Places. Conference presenters will have an opportunity to have their work published in pre-conference proceedings.

Details regarding location and other pertinent information will follow later. The submission deadline for proposals is Friday, January 28, 2011 at 11:59 pm. Proposals are to be sent by email to Dr. André P. Grace, Director, Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services, Faculty of Education, University of Alberta (andre.grace@ualberta.ca). To submit a proposal, please send in one file:

- A 100-word abstract of your proposal, naming the type of submission.
A title for your proposal.

Your proposal summary document (750-1000 words) (A list of references may be added and will not be included in the proposal summary word count.)

You must be a current member of CSSE to present at this pre-conference. A pre-conference fee of $20.00 Canadian for all participants will be collected at registration at the opening of the pre-conference.

If you have questions, please contact Dr. Grace (andre.grace@ualberta.ca).

PRE-CONFERENCE FORMAT:
(1) Presentations of various types (selected from proposals)
(2) Guest speaker(s) (TBA)
(3) Open dialogue session

PAPER PRESENTATIONS / ALTERNATIVE FORMATS:
• Depending on the number of proposals accepted, each presenter will have up to thirty minutes (30 min.) to present on the day of the pre-conference.

• In addition to presentation proposals prepared as described above, please include the following in the body of the email to which your proposal is attached: Name of author(s)/presenter(s); Affiliation(s); Mailing address(es); Email address(es); Phone number(s); Title of presentation; AV requests; and don’t forget to attach your proposal.

• The deadline for submission of proposals for the pre-conference is Friday, January 28, 2011.

• A committee will peer review proposals.

• Accepted authors will be notified by Monday, February 14, 2011.

• Criteria for judging proposals will include quality of the submission, and the significance of the topic to expanding our conceptualizations of queer studies in education and culture.

• Please send proposals by email, as a WORD file to: Andre P. Grace at andre.grace@ualberta.ca

• Accepted authors must submit (by email to Andre P. Grace) a written paper from three to five pages in length including references, single-spaced, and following APA guidelines, by Monday, March 28, 2011. The paper will be included in the Proceedings to be distributed at the Pre-conference.

• Guidelines for writing papers for the proceedings will accompany letters of acceptance of proposals.

• Cost of attending the pre-Conference is $20.00 (Canadian), payable on site, and includes the cost of the Proceedings.
# Program Schedule

**QUEER ISSUES IN THE STUDY OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE III**

*A 2011 CANADIAN SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF EDUCATION (CSSE) PRE-CONFERENCE*

University of New Brunswick & St. Thomas University, Fredericton
Saturday, May 28, 2011, 8:30 AM - 4:00 PM
Room 114, Marshall d’Avray Building

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:30 AM</td>
<td>Registration opens, refreshments and continental breakfast provided</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:00 AM</td>
<td>Welcome: Dr. André P. Grace</td>
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<tr>
<td>9:15 – 9:45 AM</td>
<td>Derritt Mason&lt;br&gt;Queer Youth, Mobility, and the Narratives of It Gets Better</td>
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<td>9:45 – 10:15 AM</td>
<td>Lindsay Maxwell&lt;br&gt;The Presence of an Absence: Youth Perspectives of Alberta’s Bill 44</td>
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<td>10:15 – 10:30 AM</td>
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<td>10:30 – 11:00 AM</td>
<td>Anne Stebbins&lt;br&gt;The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie: A Curious Relationship Between Sex and Learning</td>
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<td>11:00 – 11:30 AM</td>
<td>Michel Levesque&lt;br&gt;Autobiographical Occasions as Transsexual Education</td>
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<td>11:30 – 12:00 PM</td>
<td>Ellen Retelle&lt;br&gt;The Principal’s Roles and Responsibilities in Ensuring Safe and Informed Schools for LGBT Youth, Staff, and Parents</td>
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<td>12:00-1:30 PM</td>
<td>LUNCH (on your own)</td>
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<td>1:30 – 2:30 PM</td>
<td><strong>AFTERNOON SESSIONS</strong>&lt;br&gt;<em>Myths about GSAs and Moving Beyond Them</em>&lt;br&gt;Gay-Straight Alliance, Leo Hayes High School, Fredericton&lt;br&gt;<em>Student Presenters:</em> Jeri Gingell, Kayla Wilkinson, Chantal Plourde, Natalie Thibodeau, Spencer Vibert, Kerri Buckingham&lt;br&gt;<em>Teacher Mentor:</em> Jackie DesMeules</td>
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<td>2:30 – 2:45 PM</td>
<td>BREAK (refreshments provided)</td>
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<td>2:45 – 3:45 PM</td>
<td>Working toward Synchronicity in Research, Policy, and Practice to Help Sexual Minority and Gender Variant Youth to Grow and Develop as Happy, Healthy Individuals (Panel Presentation)</td>
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<td>Jeff Dodds, Head, Public Health Promotion, Prevention and Control, Public Health Agency of Canada</td>
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<td>Kristopher Wells, Postdoctoral Researcher, iSMSS</td>
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<td>Andre P. Grace, Killam Professor &amp; Director, iSMSS (Chair)</td>
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<td>3:45 – 4:00 PM</td>
<td>Dr. André P. Grace: Closing Remarks</td>
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Autobiographical Occasions as Transsexual Education

Michel Levesque
Concordia University

Abstract: This paper discusses how autobiographical narratives of transition, the process by which transsexuals change sex and/or gender, are opportunities to broaden understandings of gender beyond a female-male binary. To illustrate the discussion of transition as gender reconceptualization, the author will narrate his transition from female to male as a case study.

Introduction

For me, transition is reaching for a true and visible self. Transition encompasses a complex series of psychological, physical and social changes to align a body and a mind that do not match. Its process and outcomes are highly individual; there is no one way to transition. I have been a woman, a transgendered person, a female-to-male transsexual and a man. Transitioning through these identities allowed me to deconstruct the rigid female-male gender binary that surrounds us and to perceive gender as moveable and formed on self-identity. These insights on gender will be shared through an autobiographical account of my transition. This paper will focus on how gender norms in the healthcare system impacted my transsexual narrative. Telling my story to professionals in the healthcare system while transitioning constituted autobiographical occasions, defined by Robert Zussman (2000) as moments where people “are encouraged and, at times, required to provide accounts of themselves. These are the moments at which narrative and social structure meet” (p. 5). I will expand upon Zussman’s concept at the end of this paper.

Pre-Transition: Woman

Transgender is generally employed as an umbrella term denoting individuals who embody or move between the female and male gender and/or sex. The meaning of the term varies among individuals and communities. The variant meaning of transgender underscores the diversity seen in transgender people: transsexual (pre-, post- and non-operative), cross-dresser, gender-bender, bi-gender, gender-questioning and many more. For many, such disparate conceptualizations of transgenderism make this human phenomenon difficult to understand. Misunderstandings and naivety surrounding transgenderism are critical issues to overcome in healthcare as many transgender people, particularly transsexuals, rely on modern medicine to relieve gender dysphoria, a profound confusion towards one’s gender and/or sex. Mental health professionals guide transgender individuals through the psychological and social aspects of transition while endocrinologists and surgeons alter the body to achieve a desired sex different from the one assigned at birth.

According to Helma Seidl (2008), healthcare professionals and therapists lack transgender education and “the current typologies and terminologies used to refer to transgender people by healthcare professionals lacks inclusiveness” (pp. 1-2). Seidl (2008) believes transgender people are typically evaluated on transsexual typologies, models of transition that
focus on sex reassignment surgery and hormone replacement therapy; consequently, other transgender identities are neglected, leading to misdiagnosis or refusal of treatment (p. 2). To make therapy more inclusive to all transgender identities, Seidl (2008) developed a model of transgenderism for clinical therapists that makes “the distinction between transgender individuals who make use of the gender binary and those who require gender fluidity” (p. 1). Seidl (2008) recommends clustering transgender people into a fixed or fluid gender identity. Gender identity is one’s core feeling of being a gender. A fixed gender identity encompasses transgender people who live and identify as male or female full-time with or without sex reassignment surgery and hormone replacement therapy (Seidl, pp. 2, 120, 281). Transsexuals fall under this category. A fluid gender identity encompasses transgender people who experience gender on a spectrum and as movable and, thus, live as both male and female part-time (Seidl, pp. 2, 120, 281).

I do not remember having a fixed or fluid gender identity as a child. Prior to puberty, there were no overt indications of gender confusion. With the onset of puberty, however, my body developed in ways that felt fundamentally wrong. It is generally assumed that a body accompanied by breasts, ovaries, a vagina and soft skin houses a woman. In my body, there was no woman to be found. Because of my body, I experienced social pressure to be a teenage girl, but shied away from the role. I avoided the most feminine of attire, shirked makeup and was admonished for being too aggressive in gym class lacrosse. In retrospect, these could be typical signs of yearning to be the opposite sex and gender but, at the time, I never thought it possible.

Notions of anorexia in the healthcare system were the first to impact my transsexual narrative. Symptoms of my transsexuality - reducing breast size, eliminating fat deposits and halting menstruation - were diagnosed as an eating disorder. I was deemed a typical young woman with body image issues. I was told to get healthy and to gain weight despite being terrified of the result. I would be recovering a female body I had worked hard to destroy over two and a half years. I perceived myself as sick and wrong because I did not want to attain a healthy female body. Anorexia was an extreme strategy to masculinize my sex. It was also a way to weaken my body so I did not have the energy to engage with the world. Remaining locked in my bedroom allowed me to disengage with my assigned female gender where I did not have to be the girlfriend, the pretty socialite or the aspiring care-giver. By reducing time with friends and family, I was exposed to less social pressure to be a young woman, but I was incredibly lonely.

Severe depression is easily associated with what I described above, but what exacerbated my depression was a sense of personal failure. As a child who was diagnosed with learning disabilities and Tourette’s Syndrome, I had worked very hard to overcome a brain anatomy that made daily functioning very difficult. I had always believed that, if I worked hard enough, I would overcome my biological challenges. Transsexuality was a challenge I failed to solve and, at the time, a problem I could not name. Prior to hearing the word transgender at twenty, I did not know men could inhabit female bodies.

**Transition: Transgender**

Gender Identity Disorder (GID) is the diagnosis for transsexuality listed in the fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association [DSM-IV-TR], 2000). Keeping GID in the DSM-IV is contentious, a topic Judith Butler (2004, pp. 75-101), examines in her essay *Undiagnosing Gender*. Butler (2004) analyzes how a GID diagnosis regulates the exercise of transgender autonomy and reaches the conclusion that transgender autonomy, under current social and legal conditions, is paradoxical: to transition, one must navigate a medical system that pathologizes transsexual individuals. In other words, a
GID diagnosis facilitates transition because it justifies radical alternations to bodies that challenge gender norms. For example, health insurers will only cover sex reassignment surgery, if it is medically necessitated (Butler, p. 75). The diagnosis, however, implies that one is mentally ill by failing to conform to gender norms (Butler, p. 77). Moreover, one must conform to the diagnosis’s definition and the psychological discourse it derives from to obtain the status required to access hormones and surgeries (Butler, pp. 93-99).

I was not given a GID diagnosis until after finding a gender therapist. I was, however, pathologized while trying to find one. I bounced between nearly a dozen different healthcare professionals - counsellors, psychologists, gynecologists, a schizophrenia expert - who generally agreed I was transsexual but who: a) were ignorant on the subject; b) recommended tests to find a biological cause to my transsexuality to justify treatment; or c) helped me get by until I found real help. Being placed on birth control pills to halt my menstruation, being told I was a control freak in regards to my body and attending an eating disorder clinic when I was not anorexic are among the worst experiences of my life. Being shifted between so many different specialists over many months reinforced that I was a walking psychological and physiological abnormality. I felt that nobody was listening to me or cared. I became so demoralized during this process that I eventually let others navigate the medical system for me, which delayed access to genuine help.

In Doing Justice to Someone: Sex Reassignment and Allegories of Transsexuality, Butler (2004, pp. 55-74) examines the case of David Reimer. Reimer experienced a botched circumcision as an infant, a procedure that brought him under the care of Dr. John Money, a psychologist and researcher interested in studying gender identity as malleable and not biologically fixed (Butler, pp. 59-61). Money was involved in the non-consensual sex assignment of Reimer as a child, under which Reimer had his testicles removed and was raised a girl (Butler, p. 59). The case was eventually deemed a botched sex reassignment and Reimer become a man, but not before Money widely published the case as a successful example of gender identity being socially determined (Butler, p. 61).

David Reimer was not a transsexual nor did he have GID. He fell victim to a medical system that deemed him unfit to be a man because of an ablated penis. To Butler (2004), Reimer’s case highlights how complying with gender norms is a criterion for acknowledging someone as human; in other words, a coherent gender determines human intelligibility (pp. 57-58). She takes interest in how Reimer understood his own intelligibility in relation to gender norms (Butler, p. 67). Based on statements by Reimer, Butler suggests he believed he had worth beyond his penis, that he could be loved without it (pp. 71-72). This conviction disrupts the gender norm, putting Reimer on the edge of intelligibility because he is claiming to be a person without fulfilling the gender norm (Butler, p.74). Butler suggests Reimer’s position at the edge of intelligibility gives us the perspective necessary to expand the norm; we see where the norm fails and understand that there is something besides gender that makes Reimer human and, thus, worthy of intelligibility (pp. 73-74).

One way to expand human intelligibility to include transgender people is to legitimize self-identification as a basis for gender. Self-identification helps individuals deconstruct gender norms that fail to represent them. I was given the opportunity to self-identify early in therapy, an opportunity David Reimer was completely denied. In therapy, I was never told how to act, how to dress or how to speak. No type of masculinity was imposed on me. I was free to experiment with and implement the masculinities I had observed during my life. I was free to keep the femininities I had experienced, a process that facilitated an understanding that, as a man, I could keep experiences, activities, roles, behaviours and expressions experienced as a woman. I did
not become a new person or create a former self upon transition. I was the same individual but one entering a transgender identity: someone with characteristics of two genders.

Therapy brought me to the edge of intelligibility in a positive way. Being encouraged to embody a fluid gender identity allowed me to form a unique approach to gender. I could negotiate which gender norms constituted me and look at them critically. In the process, I started to understand the unnecessary restrictions gender norms placed on me. Such an approach to gender was crucial in dealing with the unforeseen ways in which I changed. I would not feel like a failure if I did not attain an idealized body or a masculinity that ignored elements of my female experience.

**Post-Transition: Contingent Man**

Have I completed transition or will I remain, in a way, gender incongruent? I do not know. Presently, I am a man in a transsexual body. This is the most honest way I can describe my gender and sex. I inhabit a surgically modified and chemically induced body, one without male chromosomes, bone structure or organs. Many would say I can never truly experience manhood without a penis. I am also a man who was socialized as a woman and, thus, value the importance of expressing emotion, intimate gestures of friendship and ways of communicating deep and personal thoughts without a round of drinks. If I used such unmanly behavior in public, more than my gender would be questioned.

It is not uncommon for transsexuals to strive for a complete sex, to become the biological sex with which they were not born. The desire to be a particular sex can be so overwhelming that some transsexual men undergo multiple surgeries to construct a penis that is either small yet erectile or atheistically pleasing yet permanently flaccid, except when a stiffening device is implanted. Such surgeries vary in success.

Would penis construction benefit me? Would it mitigate insecurities around my small hands and feet, my wide hips or the crescent moon scars on my chest? Absolutely not. My body is what it is and it will never conform to a biological male sex. To wish and to strive for a perfect male sex, for me and for me only, is futile. If other transsexuals wish to undergo all the surgeries and hormonal treatments available to them, I support their decision as long as it fulfills a genuine, internal need to be who they are. I, however, would much rather love myself and risk expanding the definition of the male sex and of masculinity in the process.

**Autobiographical Occasions of Transition**

At the beginning of this paper, I briefly defined Zussman’s (2000) autobiographical occasion. Autobiographical occasions examine how social structures and narratives affect each other (Zussman, 2000). They recognize that others alter the autobiographer’s narrative or impose other narratives and identities on the autobiographer (Zussman, 2000). They are broad life stories, formed through prolonged and systematic self-analysis (Zussman, 2000).

Zussman (2000) explains that autobiographers exercise freedom and agency in autobiographical occasions by creating narratives that serve their interests, but control and structure is imposed by the conditions under which those narratives are recited and to whom they are recited. Each appointment, therapy session and surgery was an autobiographical occasion in which I had to recite my transsexual development or history. My goal was to get treatment, but healthcare professionals delayed or advanced that goal by imposing gender norms or perspectives of transsexuality that changed how I perceived my human value and my gender. Some were pathologiz-
ing - an anorexic woman who did not want a healthy female body, an untreatable abnormality - while others were liberating - a young adult who could be himself.

I have used my transsexual narrative to elucidate how self-identification as a basis for gender and imagining gender as a continuum create a more viable existence for transgender people. To tie my experience to broader medical and identity issues in the transgender community, I cited Helma Seidl’s clinical therapy model of fixed and fluid gender identity as well as Judith Butler’s perspectives on gender identity disorder and gender as a determinant of human intelligibility. From this paper, I hope you will use language and conceptualizations that are more inclusive to transgender people. As autobiographical occasions demonstrate, you may profoundly influence a transgender person’s conception of self, if he or she confides in you.

And what about the reading of this paper? This too is an autobiographical occasion although its impacts on my narrative are yet to be determined.

References
Queer Youth, Mobility, and the Narratives of It Gets Better

Derritt Mason
University of Alberta

Abstract: This paper explores the limited forms of mobility narrated in the It Gets Better project to argue that we require new spatial metaphors for thinking creatively about the relationship between queerness, youth, and adulthood.

In response to a devastating rash of queer youth suicides in the fall of 2010, American writer Dan Savage and his partner Terry Miller founded the It Gets Better project, a website inviting adults to submit videos that offer messages of hope and encouragement to youth who may be struggling with their sexualities in difficult environments. Fuelled by contributions from well-known public figures like Barack Obama and a host of celebrities including Ellen DeGeneres, It Gets Better garnered widespread attention and within three months of its launch more than six thousand videos had been uploaded to the website, which had drawn over twenty million views. The It Gets Better book, co-edited by Savage & Miller, was released in March 2011 and appeared on the New York Times Bestseller list within weeks.

Without a doubt, the wide reach and popularity of the It Gets Better campaign contributes to increased awareness about homophobia, bullying, and queer youth suicide, social issues that persist in spite of the ostensible progress being made in the realm of liberal gay rights in our North American context. We can safely speculate that many queer youth who regularly confront homophobia or feel isolated due to an uneasy fit with the heteronormative mainstream have been touched by an It Gets Better video. As Savage (2011) notes in the introduction to the It Gets Better book, “thousands of LGBT adults who thought they were going to contribute a video found themselves talking with LGBT youth, offering them not just hope but advice, insight, and something too many LGBT youth lack: the ear of a supportive adult who understands what they’re going through” (p. 6).

As It Get Better’s popularity surged, however, critiques of the project surfaced. Cultural critic Tavia Nyong’o (2010) notes that It Gets Better largely hails an upwardly mobile class of mostly white, gay youth while excluding those for whom adulthood does not necessarily bring a reprieve from forms of anti-queer violence – particularly, Nyong’o writes, “the gender nonconforming and/or trans” people (n.p.). Sponsored by the Gay-Straight Alliance of San Francisco, the Make It Better project takes aim at the passivity implicit in It Gets Better – the idea that simply enduring adolescence will result in improved social conditions – by offering practical tools for taking action against homophobia in schools and communities and on a national level. The narrowing of queerness’ significance for both adults and youth is Jasbir Puar’s (2010) concern in her Guardian article, in which she argues that It Gets Better “might turn out to mean, you get more normal” (n.p.). Most explicitly, in a Facebook post, queer activist Charlotte Cooper challenged the idea that queer youth require adult stories to survive, writing: “I wish there was some kind of an It Gets Better campaign in which fucked up queer teenagers give reassurance and advice to windy and pompous bourgie grown-up homos” (n.p.). These responses point to a long-standing critique of how queer youth identity gets narrated and interpreted: adults often understand queer youth as what Eric Rofes (2004) describes as “Martyr-Target-Victims” – the voiceless, passive, suicide-prone victims of inevitable anti-queer violence and bullying (p. 41).
As Susan Talburt (2004) argues, this narrative not only limits the complexity of the discourse surrounding queer youth, but it also “[constitutes] a production of subject positions in which adults administer a group with problems and needs – and participate in inventing those whom we would help” (p. 18).

Nyong’o and Puar note that a familiar narrative of upward-mobility appears in many *It Gets Better* videos. I argue that mobility is more central to *It Gets Better* than these critics suggest, and it is by thinking about different forms of mobility that we can both critique the project and begin to think with greater complexity about how queerness and youth identity get narrated. I suggest that three overlapping types of mobility play fundamental roles in *It Gets Better*: according to the project, to survive the transition into adulthood queer youth must be (1) physically and geographically mobile, moving from small towns to big cities that are ostensibly more accepting of non-heterosexual identities; (2) upwardly-mobile in terms of class and career; and (3) able to move through a linear and teleological narrative, one that sees queer youth grow from troubled martyr-target-victims into successful adults who openly embrace an essential and stable sexual identity. Savage notes that “the point of the project is to give despairing LGBT kids hope. The point is to let them know that things do get better, using the examples of our own lives” (p. 6). Yet, the version of hope that *It Gets Better* provides has particular content that can be accessed only by making particular movements through time and space that are available only to particular individuals. Against what I see as the forward-oriented movement of Savage & Miller’s project I would like to posit a different spatial metaphor for thinking about how we can do better than *It Gets Better*: what Kathryn Bond Stockton (2009) calls “sideways growth.”

The *It Gets Better* online archive contains over ten thousand videos, and because of its sheer volume I have limited my analysis to the more manageable hundred and five stories contained in the book version of the project. Featuring textual transcripts of videos curated by Savage & Miller and a handful of original contributions from gay public figures, the book also functions as an archive of the project’s core texts, those deemed by *It Gets Better*’s founders as truest to the project’s intentions. I do not intend to suggest that every chapter tells the same exact story, but there are undeniable similarities across stories that raise questions about who is allowed to tell an *It Gets Better* tale and why, how contributors re-imagine and re-narrate their own mobility and movements in relation to an imagined audience of young queer martyr-target-victims, and the significance of slippages in the repetition of these stories.

At its most crude, the narrative framework of the vast majority of *It Gets Better* stories can be described as follows: I was raised in a conservative small town and/or in a conservative family and/or as part of a conservative religious community. I was bullied, sometimes violently, in school, felt isolated as a result, and contemplated suicide. I endured high school and moved to a big city and/or attended a college with a diverse campus. I found a community of like-minded queers, accepted my true self, and came out. Love, a successful career, and a family followed. Now: this narrative is probably quite familiar to us; in fact, many of us may have lived it, or variations of it. I am not attempting to diminish the very real experiences of those who have lived lives similar to this. However, with a few small exceptions, reading the *It Gets Better* book cover-to-cover is like reading and re-reading this story a hundred and five times. The problem is not the story itself, but rather the excessive repetition of this story, the fact that this story is essentially the only one in *It Gets Better*.

A turning point in almost every chapter is the narrator's move from a small town to a city or college, a form of physical and geographical mobility that sometimes seems mandatory if queer youth are to survive into adulthood. Brinae Lois Gaudet explains that “the cool thing
about high school ... is it doesn't last forever. ... Once you get out of high school you are free. ... You can go see the world. You can do things; you can get an education; you can make something of your life” (Savage & Miller, p. 28). Joseph Odysseus Mastro counsels queer youth to move as soon as possible: “If you're in high school and you're gay, bisexual, or transgender, and you're being tormented, find some way to get through school and then get to San Francisco, get to the Bay Area, get to Miami or Chicago or New York City” (Savage & Miller, p. 209). And A.Y. Daring stresses the critical importance of this type of mobility: “I can attest to the fact that I honestly, legitimately, literally do not know of a single queer adult who graduated from high school and went on to bigger cities and bigger schools and didn't eventually find a place where they belong” (Savage & Miller, p.65). In Daring's story and many others, non-mobile queer youth, youth unable to readily relocate, youth who simply choose to stay put, and their opportunities for finding acceptance and community are left unspoken and unimagined.

Of the hundred and five stories in the It Gets Better book, there are two narratives that deal with geographical mobility and deviate from the standard move-or-else story. Stephen D. Lorimor is the only contributor to say that “college was worse” (Savage & Miller, p. 238). In her playful story called “Rockin' the Flannel Shirt,” Krissy Mahan extols the virtues of being a rural-dwelling queer. “As a person who lives in the country and doesn't have a lot of money, I can tell you that not all gay people are urban or rich,” she writes; “I've been really happy being a big rural dyke. So, if you want to live in the country, or just can't move away, you'll be fine” (Savage & Miller, p. 71). Mahan's narrative is also noteworthy in the way it encourages movement away from community and into relative isolation: “One of the nice things about being in the country is you don't have to deal with people all the time. There's land out there, and you can just get away. Go build yourself a little fort in the woods. ... You'll be a butch dyke and you'll be hot. Everyone will love it. It will be good” (Savage & Miller, p. 71). Why are stories like Mahan's so rare in It Gets Better? Why is Mahan's narrative lost in a mass of pro-urban narratives that demand particular types of physical and geographic mobility from queer youth? Have these stories been intentionally omitted from the collection, or do queers in situations like Mahan's simply leave their lives unnarrated, feeling as though their brand of hope is incompatible with Savage & Miller's?

In the standard It Gets Better story, geographical mobility enables upward-mobility, career growth and the accumulation of physical, emotional, and financial assets. Much of Savage & Miller's version of hope is invested in establishing a successful career. “Do what you love to do,” writes Dave Holmes, “and I guarantee you there is a place in this world where someone will pay you to do it. So find it” (Savage & Miller, p. 191). While it is undeniably important for young queers to recognize that they too can obtain employment, the problem as Puar illustrates lies in the simplistic way that successful queer adulthood is equated with a successful career. In his introduction, Savage writes: “without gay role models to mentor and support them, without the examples our lives represent, [youth] couldn't see how they might get from bullied gay teenager to safe and happy gay adult” (p. 3) Physical, geographical and upward-mobility feed into a larger narrative through which queer youth are supposed to make the exact transition that Savage describes: the movement from precarious adolescence to the sanctuary of adulthood. The telos of this linear narrative of development is almost always the same: a stable relationship, a stable career, and a stable sense of sexual self. “I am a gay man who loves his life,” proclaims Darren Hayes, former member of pop duo Savage Garden; “I have a career that I love. I've got a partner that I adore beyond all comprehension. And I am surrounded by friends and family and a community who accept me and support me for who I am” (Savage & Miller, p. 151). Jenn and Erika Wagner-Martin advise readers that “we're not so different from those kids from high school who
used to harass us and pick on us for being different. ... I have my family. I have my life. I get up and go to work every morning” (Savage & Miller, p. 97). And Jessica Leshnoff claims that she and her partner are “ridiculously normal. As in: We fall asleep on the couch together and watch movies and go grocery shopping and do laundry and go to Starbucks and make meat loaf. ... And you'll have that one day, too. You really will. I promise” (Savage & Miller, p. 252). But what if we don't want it?

It is in these moments that It Gets Better feels more like a medium for the rehearsal of a fantasy of fixed adult identities than anything to do with its imagined audience of young martyr-target-victims. The It Gets Better metanarrative must be so vehemently repeated to disguise its nature as fiction. The more normativity for queers is rehearsed and staged in It Gets Better, the more its failure becomes clear: It Gets Better exists precisely because it hasn't, and doesn't, for everyone – in particular many of those whose voices are absent from this collection. Through It Gets Better's retrospective narratives of mobility through space, class, and time, it becomes clear that most of those who contribute to the project imagine themselves as having navigated the martyr-target-victim/out-and-proud narrative and achieved an ending that enables them to become It Gets Better storytellers: adulthood is a vantage point from which one can look knowingly back on youth as a period of flux and turmoil that ultimately produces a complete adult self. In its comfortable normativity, this same narrative then gets re-narrated as desirable for queer youth. It Gets Better is rife with the language of essentialism, as though sexuality both concretizes and becomes transparent once uncovered and is never again subject to change. “Finding my true sexuality has changed my life and I wouldn't change anything that I went through for the world,” writes Hunter Brady; “I have found who I really am and I am happy now. And that is all that matters” (Savage & Miller, p. 144). Brady is a 16-year-old, not a traditional adult, and yet she qualifies as an It Gets Better storyteller because she has successfully progressed from martyr-target-victim to stable, confident bisexual.

These unspoken It Gets Better author qualifications slip to the surface in Lynn Breedlove's story. He writes: “when I heard about this project, I thought, 'I never got bullied so I have nothing to offer,' but then I remembered they always called me 'weird' in grammar school, and I didn't have many pals” (Savage & Miller, 228). Anyone can participate in It Gets Better as long as they can make their individual story fit the way it should. This is precisely what enables Barack Obama – president of a country where homophobia remains institutionalized on numerous levels – to make an It Gets Better video, claiming that “I don't know what it's like to be picked on for being gay. But I do know what it's like to grow up feeling that sometimes you don't belong” (Savage & Miller, p. 9). All individual differences may apply, so long as they culminate in resilience and success while largely ignoring the conditions that enable some stories to be told while others remain silenced. Breedlove, however, goes on to tell one of the few stories in the It Gets Better volume that celebrates queer creativity and its potential for imagining non-heteronormative social forms. “If I had had a family who said they would love me only if I pretended to be someone I wasn't, things might have turned out differently,” he writes; “but if you have that kind of family, you can make your own family who will love you unconditionally. That's why queers call each other Family. We create one that will love us for who we are. We have drag moms and dads, dyke uncles, and matriarchal mamas” (Savage & Miller, p. 230). Breedlove's version of the family differs dramatically from the others in the collection in its view of social and sexual relations as fluid and changeable; queers can remain relationally mobile in creative ways instead of accepting It Gets Better's fictional telos and insisting on the sedimentation of their sexual selves.
In *The Queer Child*, Stockton (2009) argues that we require a new spatial metaphor for growth since our language of child and adolescent development is impoverished. To account for how queer or “proto-gay” children grow and delay growth in ways that exceed what she calls “the vertical, forward-motion metaphor of growing up,” Stockton introduces the metaphor of “growing sideways,” which “suggests that the width of a person’s experience or ideas, their motives or their motions, may pertain at any age, bringing ‘adults’ and ‘children’ into lateral contact of surprising sorts” (p. 11). Since specific forms of mobility are so central to *It Gets Better*'s stories, we need to follow this spatial and temporal turn in queer theory to begin thinking mobility in more complicated ways and telling more complicated stories about youth, adulthood, and sexuality. For me, this is the work that Breedlove and Mahan's stories begin to do: provide us with versions of sideways growth into creative social relations that challenge hegemonic notions of age, family, community, and sociality.

In a way, *It Gets Better*'s own sideways growth – through the many critiques of and responses to the project and the many slippages in repetitions of its own metanarrative – is the most interesting and productive thing about it. If nothing else, *It Gets Better* reiterates what has been implicit throughout this paper, and what initially compelled me to write it: the simple fact that stories matter. As Sean P. O'Connell (2001) argues, “stories have at once referential and performative power. They set up possible ways of being in the world, invite one to the realization of those possibilities, but they do so by drawing together what has already been, is now, and can be” (p. 100). But as Charlotte Cooper illustrated with such colourful candour, there are important stories that remain untold, stories that could set up much more radically creative ways of being in the world that don't privilege individual movements through such a specific, linear, forward-oriented narrative. How can we continue to interrupt the repetition of the well-worn narratives of *It Gets Better*, symptoms of a culture with a limited imagination when it comes to queerness? How can we make lateral space for stories by and about adults and youth that don't fit tidily under the *It Gets Better* model? How, in other words, can we do better than *It Gets Better*?

References
The Presence of an Absence: Youth perspectives of Alberta’s Bill 44

Lindsay Maxwell

The Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services/University of Windsor

Abstract: Alberta’s Bill 44 (2009) has significant implications for Queer issues in culture and education. Consistent with the conventions of educational reform, Bill 44 was passed without consultation or dialogue with the public school students it would affect. This phenomenographic study details self-identified youth’s complex and varied understandings of Bill 44’s implications for Queer issues in both education and public life.

Introduction

Alberta’s Bill 44 (2009) is of particular relevance to educational researchers interested in LGBTQ rights in public schools. Historically, Bill 44 is the most recent piece of legislation in a long chapter of Queer activism that stretches back over nearly two decades. Due to Delwin Vriend’s dismissal from The Kings College (1991), the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that provincial human rights codes must include explicit protection from discrimination for LGBT individuals (1998). Although nine of Canada’s ten provinces quickly amended their human rights codes to reflect the Supreme Court decision (Wintemute, 2004), Alberta resisted this change until 2009 when it passed the “Human Rights, Citizenship, and Multiculturalism Amendment Act” in 2009; commonly referred to as Bill 44. This bill amends Alberta’s provincial human rights code to include sexual orientation as protected grounds from discrimination.

Bill 44 also includes a substantial reform to the teaching and learning about sexuality and sexual orientation in Alberta’s public schools. Section 11.1 states that public school boards must provide notice to parents or guardians when teaching subject matter that “… deals explicitly with religion, human sexuality, or sexual orientation” (Hansard, 2009, p. 4). Parents and guardians, upon receiving said notice, now have the right to withdraw their child from “courses of study, educational programs or instructional materials, or instruction or exercises” (Hansard, 2009, p. 4) that pertain to these three subjects. Teachers and school boards accused of not providing adequate notice to parents and guardians when teaching human sexuality, sexual orientation or religion are subject to charges of provincial human rights violations and will be tried in provincial human rights tribunals. Although the legal and historical impetus for Bill 44 appears to be a modernization of Alberta’s human rights code, the inclusion of Section 11.1 means that it is also a significant piece of educational reform. It also strengthens the a priori right of parents to control their children’s education (United Nations, 1948) by entrenching a parental opt-out clause in the provincial human rights code.

The public school students whom this legislation was poised to affect (hereafter referred to as ‘youth’, and generally assumed to be under 18 years of age) were not invited to share in the drafting or amending of Bill 44. This is not unusual, as the participation of young people remains unsolicited by many, if not most, educational decision-makers (Ericson & Ellet, 2002; Grover, 2006; Zion 2007). Within the Canadian context, Fullan’s (1991) comment “We hardly know anything about what students think of educational change, because no one ever asks them” (p. 182) is of continuing relevance, not just in the case of Bill 44, but in all areas of educational reform. Informed by Fullan’s statement, the purpose of this research is to analyze how youth understand Bill 44 in relation to LGBTQ rights, curriculum representation, and social movements.
Theoretical Framework

This research extends Queer theory beyond sexuality as a subject (Loutzenheiser & MacIntosh, 2004; Talburt & Rasmussen, 2010) to ‘Queer’ in the sense of a purposeful disruption of how youth identity is constructed, particularly in the realms of political and educational decision-making. The prevailing notion of youthfulness is that it is a state of *infantia*, the concept of ‘not knowing’ or ‘not being able to’ (Bergstrom, 2010). By queering youth *infantia*, this research challenges the adult-created rhetoric of civically uninformed (Griffiths & Wright, 2007; Clark, 2009) and disengaged (Butler, 2010; Ellis, et. al, 2006) young Canadians, particularly in social movements such as advancing LGBTQ rights. In analyzing youth understandings of a piece of educational reform from the province of Alberta, the data suggests that there are many knowing and capable youth who demonstrate complex and sophisticated understandings of the politics of educational reform through thoughtful dialogue and activism. This demonstrated engagement of youth turns the concept of universal youth *infantia* on its head.

Methods

This research presents a case study of Alberta’s Bill 44 (2009). Bill 44 was chosen as a case study because of its unique positioning as a piece of educational reform embedded in provincial human rights legislation, as well as its relevance to LGBTQ social movements in public schooling, and on account of the of the widespread media attention that it has received (Kay, 2009; Fiedler, 2009; CBC, 2009). The 239 youth participants were Facebook users who self-identified as youth under the age of 18, and who joined a Facebook group that either supported or resisted Bill 44. They wrote a total of 549 comments in a publicly accessible Facebook forum, which were analyzed for this study. Unlike other social networking sites, Facebook users tend to accurately represent their offline identities on the site (Maranto & Barton, 2009; Pempek, Yermolayeva, & Calvert, 2009; West, Lewis, & Currie, 2009). It can thus be reasonably assumed that the majority of the Facebook users in this research who self-identified as youth were indeed under the age of 18. Each self-identified Facebook user was assigned a number from 1-239, and to protect their identity, is referred to as such in this study.

Data was collected directly from Facebook advocacy groups, and analyzed using a phenomenographic approach. This methodology hierarchically categorizes the qualitatively distinct understandings that a collective holds of a given phenomenon (Svensson, 1997; Barnard, McCosker, & Gerber, 1999) into a table, which is referred to as the ‘outcome space’. The hierarchical categorization allows for organizational, rather than evaluative representation of the spectrum of youth understandings of Bill 44. Each category name describes the necessary and sufficient conditions of the category. Of the 15 qualitatively different understandings that the collective (self-identified youth Facebook users) held of the phenomenon (Bill 44), seven were particularly relevant to Queer issues in culture and education, and are the focus of this paper.

Results

The following outcome space organizes the seven qualitatively distinct understandings of Bill 44 that were related to LGBTQ social movements in schools in ascending order, from least complex on the far left-hand side, to most complex on the right.
Within the lowest level of complexity, there is some focus on what Bill 44 is. Participants who described the bill as outrageous typically dismissed it, often by pejoratively calling it ‘gay’. This use of language draws attention to areas for future research, as youth who called Bill 44 ‘gay’ often commented on its implicit heterosexism in other discussion threads in the Facebook forum.

The second level of categories combines not only an understanding of what Bill 44 is, but also a projection of what it could do if passed. Within the first subcategory, youth understood the cause of gay bashings to be ignorance of Queer history and culture, and therefore predicted that Bill 44 would increase violent crimes against suspected or self-identifying LGBTQ persons. The second subcategory consisted of predictions made by a small minority of participants, who described “the need to discuss religion and sexual orientation to be very irrelevant to education” (Youth Participant 22). This minority predicted that Bill 44 would protect education from an onslaught of unnecessary curriculum topics. In the final subcategory, youth predicted that Bill 44 would be threatening to both teachers and social cohesiveness. In describing the projected threat to teachers based on their lived identities one participant commented, “What's next? Opting out of a class because the teacher isn't white? Or because they're homosexual?” (Youth Participant 146). Social cohesiveness is also predicted to be threatened by Bill 44, because the bill is understood as preventing some students from learning about diversity in Alberta’s public schools. This understanding often stressed the importance of teaching ‘tolerance’, and is demonstrated with comments such as “You don’t (sic) have to be homosexual to say you agree with them and their beliefs but you can at least tolerate it or learn they aren’t bad people” (Youth Participant 78). It is predicted that tolerance in general, and tolerance towards LGBTQ people in particular, will be threatened by Bill 44.

The third most complex categories related what the phenomenon is and predictions of what it could do with understandings about what motivated lawmakers to draft Bill 44. Within the first subcategory, lawmakers were understood as wanting to censor education pertaining to LGBTQ students, their families, and the history of the gay liberation movement. One participant dismissed this perceived attempt at censorship as ineffective, by commenting, “You need to wake up and smell the coffee, people are homosexual and falling in love. I don't care whether it’s a scientific fact… but its reality.” (Youth Participant 201). This comment demonstrates a belief that LGBTQ people will continue to be visibly present regardless of whether or not they are explicitly included in within the mandatory curriculum, which therefore renders total censoring of the existence of Queer culture ineffective.
Youth also understood Bill 44 as being motivated by a heterosexist backlash against recent legal advancements in LGBTQ rights and recognition. One participant held the premier directly responsible for what he understood as a heterosexist reaction to the Supreme Court’s mandate that sexual orientation be included in Alberta’s human rights code: “If Ed Stelmach feels the need to compensate for the homosexual people of Alberta having the rights they deserve he is not only ignorant but a complete fool as well” (Youth Participant 88). Another youth participant affirmed this comment and responded with “All on a simple revision to sexuality that should have been done nearly a full decade ago!” (Youth Participant 191). This dialogue demonstrates that youth were aware of Bill 44’s contextual history, and used this knowledge to understand and develop opinions on why lawmakers were motivated to draft this legislation.

Within the most complex category, youth understood Bill 44 as a political construction, a human-made phenomenon that they could influence. The overwhelming majority of youth believed that their rallies, protests, marches, and email and letter writing campaigns to MLA’s would result in some change to the bill. Their enthusiasm is captured by Youth Participant 44’s invitation to participate in a rally, with “it's true that the students can change this around. Let's do it!” Despite the eagerness of their peers, a minority of youth refused to participate in civic activism because they did not foresee youth resistance as having a meaningful effect on Bill 44. Youth Participant 134 supported this position by referring to the general political disenfranchisement of youth: “The government doesn't really care about what students want or think or need or feel because we don't do anything for the government.” Consistent with recent literature concerning low youth voter turnouts (Chareka & Sears, 2006), this comment suggests that rather than refusing to participate in civic activism because of apathy (as adult-created rhetoric often suggests) youth are withdrawing because they believe their participation will yield little tangible change.

Discussion

The data suggests that youth have rich, varied, and complex understandings of Bill 44 as a phenomenon that affects LGBTQ rights, curriculum representation, and social movements. Participants cited NGOs, government agencies, professional bodies, medical associations, news articles, human rights charters, Supreme Court decisions, peer reviewed research (the links to which they often posted on the Facebook wall) and their own experiences as informing their understandings of Bill 44, and helping to situate it within multiple contexts. The overwhelming majority of youth who posted comments in the Facebook advocacy groups were distressed by Bill 44, often because they understood that it would have a deleterious effect on the burgeoning LGBTQ rights movement in the province of Alberta.

Themes of resistance were central to the dialogue and action planning on youth Facebook forums. Youth portrayed themselves as resisting government legislation, which was in turn positioned as a resistance against the growing visibility and acceptance of LGBTQ individuals in groups in public life in general, and public schools in particular. The finding that the majority of youth Facebook users opposed Bill 44 on the grounds that it was seen as prejudicial to LGBTQ students, families, and curriculum content is encouraging to researchers interested in increasing LGBTQ awareness and acceptance in public schooling.
References


*Queer Issues in the Study of Education and Culture III*
The Principal’s Roles and Responsibilities in Ensuring Safe and Informed Schools for LGBT Youth, Staff, and Parents

Ellen Retelle, Ph.D.
Central Connecticut State University

Abstract: The objective of the conversation is to discuss how principals are/should lead in ensuring that schools are safe and welcoming for LGBT youth, staff, and same-sex parents and how they support policies and curriculum. Participants will share information about the roles and responsibilities of principals.

Open Dialogue Description
Theoharis (2004) defines social justice school leaders as “…principals [who] advocate, lead, and keep at the center of their practice and vision issues of race, class gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States” (p. 2). Social justice school leaders use their power and authority to ensure that children at the margins of society receive a quality education (Shields, 2004). School leaders who embrace a social justice philosophy are transformative, educative, and critical (Foster, 1989). Cochran-Smith (1999) defines social justice as a philosophy that encompasses basic legal, civil, and human rights for all individuals. According to Bell (1997):

The goal of social justice is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure. (p. 3)

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) youth are more likely to encounter difficulties and challenges in schools than are their peers. Social justice school leaders focus on equality and equity for all students to make changes in schools (Larson & Murtadha, 2002); that is, they must address the marginalization of LGBT youth. Moreover, social justice school leaders must implement practices, programs, initiatives, and policies to eliminate homophobia, homophobic bullying, and name-calling in schools.

Homophobia, homophobic bullying, and name-calling are serious concerns in Canadian and US schools. The first Canadian study on LGBTQ students in schools is disconcerting (Taylor, Peter, Schachter, Paquin, Beldom, Gross, & McMinn, 2008). About 75% of students reported that homophobic comments are prevalent in Canadian schools. About 75% of LGBTQ students report that there are unsafe spaces at schools. The US Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) commissioned several surveys that reported on how middle school and high school students and teachers observed and experienced harassment and bullying in their schools (Harris Interactive & GLSEN, 2005, 2007, 2009). In the 2005 study, 52% of youth frequently hear students make homophobic remarks, and 69% of teens hear “that’s so gay” or “you’re so gay”; “gay” is used to denigrate LGBT people. In 2008, GLSEN published a study on the experiences of students and their LGBT parents entitled, “Involved, Invisible, Ignored: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Parents and Their Children in Our Nation’s K–12 Schools”. “The Principal’s Perspective: School Safety, Bullying and Harassment” was published in 2008. These studies and other studies will be used to stimulate the conversation. The princi-
pal’s roles and responsibilities to ensure that the school is safe and respectful towards LGBT youth, staff and parents are the foci of this conversation.

Questions

• What are the principal’s roles and responsibilities to ensure that schools are safe and staff are knowledgeable about LGBT people (e.g., implementation and enforcement of policies, programs/curricular, practices, resources, staff knowledge, community organizations)?

• How effective are principals in leading, promoting, and advancing social justice, as it relates to LGBT people, in their schools (e.g., implementation and enforcement of policies, programs/curricular, practices, resources, staff knowledge, community organizations)?

• How do Canadian public schools compare to US public schools in welcoming and being supportive of LGBT youth, staff, and parents?

• How do university leadership programmes influence and support principals?

References


The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie: A Curious Relationship Between Sex and Learning

Anne Stebbins

York University

Abstract: Muriel Spark’s (1961) The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie is set in the 1930’s in Edinburgh, Scotland, at the Blaine School for Girls. A group of six girls, known as the “Brodie set,” receive a special education from their teacher, Miss Brodie, who has forward ideas about teaching and learning. This coming of age story follows the educational detours of the set, focusing particularly on Brodie’s favourite student, Sandy Stranger’s. Her wandering trajectories of identity, identification, and desire both contradict and compliment her experiences of schooling; paradoxically, Sandy’s learning both pushes up against and is entangled by her curiosity about sexuality. Her sexuality is presented simultaneously as an obstacle to, as well as the grounds for, her learning. In this paper I explore this tension by examining the ways in which Sandy experiences her sexuality through the context of her education.

Introduction

Muriel Spark’s (1961) The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie is set in the 1930’s at the Blaine School for Girls in Edinburgh, Scotland. Here, a group of six girls, known as the “Brodie set,” receive a special education from their teacher, Miss Brodie. This coming of age story follows the detours of the life of Brodie’s favourite student, ten year old Sandy Stranger. Paradoxically, Sandy’s learning both pushes up against and is entangled by her sexuality. The wandering trajectories of Sandy’s sexual identity, identification and desire are presented simultaneously as both an obstacle to, and the grounds for, her learning. To explore this tension, I examine the ways in which Sandy experiences her sexuality through the context of her education under the guidance of her teacher, Miss Brodie.

The Pedagogy of Miss Jean Brodie

Miss Brodie's pedagogy is radically different from the other teachers at the Blaine School for Girls. She teaches Sandy and the other members of the set lessons that feature sexuality not as special topic, but a broader part of the discussion that is woven into the fabric of her lessons. Rather than adhering to the school’s timed curriculum periods, Brodie is a story teller who shares her life experiences and thoughts about womanhood with her girls. For example, during a lesson about European art, Brodie's students also learn about the Frenchman that Brodie met on a train ride to Biarritz (p. 9). While teaching a history lesson about war, Brodie describes her love affair with a young gentleman to whom she was engaged, who fell on Flanders' Fields (p. 11). Throughout her lessons, Brodie critiques the limited nature of the possibilities that are readily available to women living in a male dominated, fascist pre-World War II Europe. Offering her girls a radical version of female sexuality, Brodie challenges them to dream alternative lives for themselves. During these lessons, which are laden with messages about sexuality, femininity, power, and knowledge, Brodie invites Sandy and the other members of the set to glimpse the possibility of their futures as independent or “dedicated” (p. 82) women. Brodie models this lifestyle by dedicating herself to the teaching of her students while she is in her sexual “prime”
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She challenges her girls to conceptualize creating more expansive possibilities for themselves as young women living in a patriarchal world.

While Brodie’s eccentric teaching style and philosophy of education invite an openness to learning that she believes is superior to route learning, in many ways her pedagogy also enacts the very approach to learning that she purports to reject. She proudly explains to her girls the way in which her view of education is different from that of their out-of-touch head master, Miss Mackay:

The word education comes from the root e from ex, out, and ducō, I lead. It means a leading out. To me education is a leading out of what is already there in the pupil’s soul. To Miss Mackay it is a putting in of something that is not there, and that is not what I call education, I call it intrusion, from the Latin root prefix in meaning in and the stem trudo, I thrust. Miss Mackay’s method is to thrust a lot of information into the pupil’s head; mine is a leading out of knowledge, and that is true education as it is proved by the root meaning. (p. 45)

For Brodie, learning elaborates upon and brings something out from inside students. She believes that she does not implant knowledge and rather, leads knowledge out from her students. Paradoxically, while Brodie’s departure from route learning is radical for her time, the spelling out of her pedagogy also indicates her own method for ‘thrusting’ knowledge upon her students. Even as Brodie claims that her pedagogy rejects traditional styles of teaching, she also perpetuates a form of implanting knowledge through her insistence that her girls take up the philosophies and ways of living that she articulates. Just as Brodie claims to be exempt from the paradox of teaching, she is also caught up in the very difficulties that teaching and learning present. However, Brodie’s teaching style does invite participation from her girls with what is inside of them; the way in which this is radical is that it includes an acknowledgement of the presence of sexuality.

Pedagogy and Sexuality

Brodie’s pedagogical engagement with sexuality makes her claim for leading information out of her girls rather extraordinary. This style of teaching allows space for the presence of sexuality that is caught up in her girl’s experiences of learning. For example, the Brodie set consider their final junior year to be their “most sexual year,” (p. 55). Indeed, the year 1931 marks a “...crowded year of “stirring revelations. In later years, sex was only one of the things in life. That year it was everything” (p. 55). In the set’s junior year, they explore questions of sexuality inside and outside of the classroom. Sandy, described as having “pig-like eyes,” (p. 12) is known for her startling instinct; despite her non-existent eyes, she is keenly aware of, and curious about the details of her teacher’s sex lives. Sandy observes sexual tension between Brodie and Mr. Teddy Lloyd, the art teacher and Brodie and Mr. Gordon Lowther, the music teacher and gossips with the other members of the Brodie set about the possible ‘going-ons’ of their teachers. Such wonderings lead the girls to listen attentively in school as they carefully watch their teachers in the hopes of ascertaining information about sex that they can relate to their lives. Despite overt messaging from the school headmistress that sex is to be separate from schooling, sexual curiosity wrangles its way into the Brodie set’s education during their junior year. For example, when one member of the set, Monica Douglas, claims she saw Mr. Lloyd kissing Brodie in the art room, the girls become preoccupied over the possibility of their teacher’s sexual relationship. They speculate and debate at length about the probability of Brodie’s involvement with Mr. Lloyd. During class, Sandy obsessively watches Brodie’s stomach to notice if she is pregnant with Mr. Lloyd’s baby (p. 68) and although Sandy observes a change in Brodie, she does not no-
tice her teacher’s expanding stomach. Later, Sandy begins to suspect that Brodie has an interest in Mr. Lowther because Brodie “wore her newest clothes on singing days” and was “agitated before, during, and after the singing lesson” (p. 71). When Brodie and Mr. Lowther are both mysteriously absent from school for two weeks, Sandy further suspects a romantic liaison between them.

Sandy’s literary education is an important location for her exploration of sexuality. Because the extent to which Brodie is sexually involved with Mr. Lloyd or Mr. Lowther is unclear to Sandy, she creatively writes erotic plots in her diary that elaborate upon and mingle sexual fantasies with real events. Fantasy sits next to reality in Sandy’s stories, such as her interest in Brodie’s engagement to the fallen soldier Huge Carruthers. Sandy creatively mixes the character traits of Brodie’s three men, Lloyd, Lowther and Carruthers, in the stories that she coauthors with her best friend and fellow member of the Brodie set, Jenny Gray. Together, Jenny and Sandy write scenarios about their teacher’s sexual encounters and determine that Mr. Lloyd “must have committed sex with his wife” (p. 17) because the couple recently had a baby. Speculating over whether or not Mr. Lloyd and Brodie are sexually intimate, Sandy determines, “I don’t think they did anything like that. Their love was above all that” (p. 22). Sandy’s positioning of the love that Brodie and Mr. Lloyd share as superior or outside of sex mimics the dominant message of their schooling, that sex is separate from, indeed an obstacle to, learning. Eventually, Sandy settles on the fact that, “It was impossible to imagine Miss Brodie sleeping with Mr. Lowther, it was impossible to imagine her in a sexual context at all, and yet it was impossible not to suspect that such things were so” (p. 79). Sandy’s muddled assessment of Brodie’s sex life prompts her written mingling of factious stories with reality. She is unable to answer many of the questions that she has about her teacher’s sex lives and so in the absence of information, she drafts a final letter from Brodie to Mr. Lowther, congratulating Mr. Lowther on both his singing and his sexual intercourse. The letter ends with Brodie's denouncement of his request for her hand in marriage. In a final scene laden with sexual overtures, Sandy and Jenny “press” the incriminating letter into a “damp hole” (p. 97) in a cave by the sea shore in order that they might enter their senior year having sufficiently satisfied their curiosities about their teacher’s romantic affairs.

A Queer Turn to Sandy’s Sexual Desire

There is also a queer turn to Sandy’s fantasy life; she creatively conjures up vivid fantasies involving women. In these scenarios she creatively combines her formal education with her informal learning about sex. Mingling her passion for reading with her curiosity for sex, she muses over the characters in her favourite books *Kidnapped* and *Jane Eyre*. Eventually Sandy trades in her daydreams about fictional characters and sublimates them for sexually charged stories about real, live women. For example, she draws upon her experience of attending a school field trip to fuel her sexual fantasies. After attending a trip with Brodie and the set to a ballet performance of Swan Lake, Sandy daydreams encounters between herself and the famous ballerina, Anna Pavlova. In these intimate exchanges, Pavlova holds Sandy’s hand and conveys that they are both real artists; Pavlova tells Sandy that she is the only person who truly understand her (p. 82). Sandy also develops an interest in her science teacher that is not indistinct from her fascination with science. She drops ink on her silk blouse “at discreet intervals of four weeks” (p. 27) so that she can go to see Miss Lockhart and have her arms held by the beautiful woman. Sandy describes her trips to the science room as her “most secret joy” (p. 29). She is mesmerized by the senior girls, some of whom have “bulging chests” (p. 28) and she reports to the other members of
the Brodie set that senior school will be fantastic. Sex and schooling sit side by side in Sandy’s junior year.

Toward the end of the set’s junior year, the direction of Sandy’s desire becomes more pointedly queer. While walking alone along the Water of Leith, her friend Jenny encounters a man who exposes himself to her. Jenny escapes unscathed although the incident occupies the Brodie set for the remainder of their junior year and provides Sandy with a new source of love:

The question of the policewoman was inexhaustible, and although Sandy never saw her, nor at that time any policewoman (for those were in the early days of the police woman), she quite deserted Alan Breck and Mr. Rochester and all the heroes of fiction for the summer term, and fell in love with the unseen policewoman who had questioned Jenny, and in this way she managed to keep alive Jenny’s enthusiasm too” (p. 87).

Sandy repeatedly presses Jenny for details about the police woman and in the absence of information Sandy imaginatively names the police woman ‘Sergeant Anne Grey.’ In her daydream scenarios she imagines, “Sandy was Sergeant Anne’s right-hand woman in the force, and they were dedicated to eliminate sex from Edinburgh and environs” (p. 89). The duo's objective, to rid the city of sex, somehow does not contradict Sandy's fantastical sexually charged interactions with the police woman. The sexual tension is especially apparent when, “Sergeant Anne pressed Sandy’s hand in gratitude; and they looked into each other’s eyes, their mutual understanding too deep for words” (p. 90). Sandy also corresponds with Sergeant Anne about the mysterious liaison between Brodie and Mr. Lowther and follows up on the police woman’s recommendation that Sandy find an incriminating document to solidify the case.

Senior Year: A Rejection of Sex

While a great deal of Sandy's fantasy life in her junior year is devoted to the subject of sex, her entrance into senior year marks a rather distinctive and purposeful intention to end to this preoccupation. She describes the set’s arrival to school in the fall as serious because the set must eagerly dedicate themselves to mastering their subjects. Sandy articulates the group’s deliberate departure from sex, saying, “There’s not much time for sex research in the senior school” (p. 106). Jenny also declares, “I feel I’m past it” (ibid). Indeed, the set’s days are occupied and “brisk with the getting of knowledge,” (p. 101) that is purportedly different from Brodie’s philosophy of learning. When their resolve to separate sex from the seriousness of schooling begins to crumble, the girls are reminded, paradoxically from Brodie herself. Yet, this reminder is also delivered during a rather sexually charged classroom moment with Mr. Lloyd. During an art lesson, Brodie reprimands the girls for giggling over sexually suggestive photographs. Even as Mr. Lowther runs his pointer over the lines of the 'bottoms' of the ladies of Primavera, Sandy and her classmates are told to maintain an “artistic attitude” (p. 65). According to Brodie, the girls’ giggling indicates a lack of culture and a poor heritage (p. 62). Yet, Brodie’s reprimands contradict her posture; she sits in on Mr. Lloyd’s class, “with her legs apart under her loose brown skirt which came well over her knees” (p. 62). The girls struggle to maintain their concentration on their art lesson, disavowing their excitement over the photographs and the sexual chemistry that is present between their teachers. While Brodie vocalizes the message that sex and schooling are separate, her posture playfully contradicts this. Just as their senior year is supposed to mark a separation between sex and schooling, sex emerges as a part of their encounters with learning.
Conclusion

Miss Jean Brodie’s usual pedagogy provides her students with an opportunity to engage sexuality as a tenet of their learning. Although the dominant messaging of the Blaine School for Girls is that sexuality is an obstacle to learning, Sandy and the other members of the Brodie set both explore and disavow sexuality as an important part of their experiences of schooling. Although Sandy determines that her passing into the senior year must mark a departure from her sexuality, sexuality emerges as a controversial presence in her learning. It both impedes and spurs on her learning in a way that suggests that sexuality is a rather significant component of education, residing at the very core of the self who learns.

References

Myths about GSAs and Moving beyond Them

Gay-Straight Alliance
Leo Hayes High School
Fredericton

Student Presenters

Jeri Gingell
Kayla Wilkinson
Chantal Plourde
Natalie Thibodeau
Spencer Vibert
Kerri Buckingham

Teacher Mentor

Jackie DesMeules
Myths about GSAs

- GSAs are not necessary in schools today

- Statistically, one in ten individuals is gay, lesbian or bisexual (Kinsey, 1948).

- They need to feel safe also.
Myths.....

➢ GSAs are not necessary in schools that have anti-bullying groups.

LGBTTQ experience a unique type of bullying. Students who are bullied can often go home and feel safe and supported not always true for the LGBTTQ students.
More Myths

- GSAs are not suitable for Middle and Elementary Schools

- Middle school is when students try to figure out their own sexuality and run into conflict when their opinions do not match their sexuality.
- Elementary school is when students start to form opinions about sexual identity.

- Resources are limited.
- Teachers GSAs are likely most appropriate.

More Myths

- Schools who try to start a GSA have a lot of resistance.
➢ Not necessarily true. With supportive administration and guidance any resistance will not be tolerated.

More Myths

➢ Only Gay students attend GSA meetings.
Most GSAs report having about an even split in sexual orientation.

What is LHHS GSA doing???

- Where do we start?
  - Meet every Wednesday (video announcement of meetings (stating “GAY STRAIGHT ALLIANCE meeting today”)
  - Members sign in at each meeting (just to check numbers- confidential)
  - Special events........
→ Ally Week in October
→ Purple Day
→ Christmas Tea/Meet and Greet
→ Activity/Karaoke Evening
→ Movie Night
→ Day of Silence in April
→ Pride Week
→ Video announcements to promote awareness
→ Walked in Pride Parade

What does having a GSA mean to me???
Working toward Synchronicity in Research, Policy, and Practice to Help Sexual Minority and Gender Variant Youth to Grow and Develop as Happy, Healthy Individuals

Jeff Dodds, Head, Public Health Promotion, Prevention and Control, Public Health Agency of Canada

Kristopher Wells, Postdoctoral Researcher, iSMSS

Andre P. Grace, Killam Professor & Director, iSMSS (Chair)

Despite legal, legislative, and other changes since the 1998 Supreme Court decision in *Vriend v. Alberta* that granted equality rights to lesbian and gay Canadians, homophobia and transphobia are still pervasive retrograde antisocial forces that threaten the safety and do damage to the health and wellbeing of SMGV (sexual minority and gender variant) individuals in Canadian culture and society. SMGV youth, especially those under the age of majority, are particularly vulnerable as they mediate life in Canadian schools, communities, and other social and cultural spaces they occupy in their everyday lives. Research shows that SMGV youth are subjected to sustained symbolic violence such as anti-SMGV name-calling and graffiti. Some experience physical violence such as extreme bullying that involves assault and battery. Most SMGV youth know the daily sting of marginalization and disenfranchisement that entrench mistrust, alienation, and a sense of helplessness and hopelessness. This leaves them susceptible to life-eroding or life-ending behaviors including suicidal tendencies. As a growing body of research indicates, these youth often experience schooling and legal, medical, and government services as fragmentary and insufficient to address the stressors and risks associated with living with adversity and trauma induced by heterosexism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia and their multiple enacted expressions. The stressors include poverty; abuse and victimization through symbolic and physical violence; and neglect by key adults including uncaring parents, school administrators, and teachers. The risks include truancy; quitting school; running away; developing alcohol and drug addictions; developing emotional problems, often expressed through cutting and eating disorders; contracting sexually transmitted infections or HIV/AIDS; being susceptible to mental illness; and being disposed to suicide ideation, attempts, and completions. Since many SMGV youth experience adversity and dysfunction in their everyday lives, research, policy, and practice ought to be interconnected to identify and address personal and social vulnerabilities and make life better for these youth so they develop as happier and healthier individuals who make good choices and take care of themselves. Here health, education, and other social institutions need to work together to inform and implement community-based intervention and outreach programming and best practices to help SMGV youth deal with stressors and risks as they transgress life traumas and grow as more resilient individuals. During this panel, presenters will speak to these issues from the work they do in the arenas of policy, research, and practice. As always, the goal is help SMGV youth to build capacity (a solutions approach), moving away from unconstructive strategies focused on stigmatizing or fixing these youth as a source of social disorder (a problems approach).