

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

## List of Contributors

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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,<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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>

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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:<sup>4</sup>

- 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 Alliances<sup>5</sup> 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 documentaries<sup>6</sup> have been produced to help teachers deal with combating homophobia in the classroom and bullying in cyberspace.<sup>7</sup>

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.”<sup>8</sup>

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

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

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

<sup>5</sup> 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>

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

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

<sup>8</sup> 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*<sup>9</sup> 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.*”<sup>10</sup>

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 fyrefly<sup>11</sup> aim to empower youth by helping them build personal resiliency and leadership skills. Similarly, initiatives like Interaction<sup>12</sup> 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.’<sup>13</sup>

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)<sup>14</sup> and the Embracing Intersectional Diversity Project.<sup>15</sup> The *It Gets Better*<sup>16</sup> campaign builds on these earlier efforts and it includes a YouTube channel,<sup>17</sup> video clips on

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

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

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

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

<sup>13</sup> 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](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9G_UuxbWSA)

<sup>14</sup> 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](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AARGH_%28Artists_Against_Rampant_Government_Homophobia%29)

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

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

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

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