Beyond the Queer Alphabet: Conversations on Gender, Sexuality and Intersectionality

Edited by Malinda Smith and Fatima Jaffer
Beyond the Queer Alphabet: 
Conversations on Gender, Sexuality & Intersectionality

Malinda S. Smith  
Associate Professor, Department of Political Science  
University of Alberta  
Edmonton, Alberta

and

Fatima Jaffer  
Liu Scholar, Interdisciplinary Studies Graduate Program  
University of British Columbia  
Vancouver, British Columbia
Beyond The Queer Alphabet

Teaching Equity Matters E-Book Series

Series Editor: Malinda S. Smith, Political Science, University of Alberta

Blog Series: Editor: Malinda S. Smith, University of Alberta

Communications Director: Alison Hebbs, Director of Policy and Communications, Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences

Communications Team: Karen Diepeveen, Policy Analyst, Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences

E-Book Research Assistant: Eréndira Cervantes-Altamirano, University of Alberta

This publication is licensed under a Creative Commons License, see www.creativecommons.org. The text may be reproduced for non-commercial purposes, provided that credit is given to the original authors.

http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0

Collection as a whole © Malinda S. Smith and the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences 2012

Individual articles © Individual authors 2012
Contents

List of Acronyms ................................................................................................................................. 5
List of Contributors ............................................................................................................................ 7
Preface and Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ 9

Part I: The Queer Alphabet & Beyond

1. Queering In/Equality: LGBTQ, ‘It Gets Better’ and Beyond ...................................................... 15
   Malinda S. Smith

2. Developing Intersectional Solidarities: A Plea for Queer Intersectionality ...................................... 19
   Sirma Bilge

3. Queering the Language of ‘Sexual Minorities’ in Canada ............................................................... 24
   Alexa DeGagne

4. Black Queer and Black Trans-Imagine Imagination Imaginary Futures ........................................... 28
   Rinaldo Walcott

5. T-Trouble: Structural and ‘Administrative En-Gendering’ as the Academic-Corporate Complex ........ 32
   Bobby Noble

6. Disorders of Sex Development: De-Queering the ‘I’ in LGBTQ12-S ............................................ 36
   Catherine Clune-Taylor

7. ‘Stand Up’ for Exclusion?: Queer Pride, Ableism and Inequality ................................................. 39
   Danielle Peers and Lindsay Eales

8. Trans Rights in Mexico and Canada: Queering the Geopolitics of Privilege ................................... 42
   Oralia Gómez-Ramírez

9. Homonationalist Discourse, Queer Organizing and the Media .................................................... 45
   Fatima Jaffer

Part II: Resisting Closets: Hate, Bullying and Violence

10. Coming Out: Re-Engaging the Radical ............................................................................................ 50
    Elise Chenier

11. Closets, Cloisters and Other Corrective Measures ........................................................................ 54
Richard Sullivan

12. Rethinking Hate Crimes: The Hard Work of Creating Social Equity.................................57
Lucas Crawford and Robert Nichols

13. Linking Structural and Interpersonal Violence in LGTBQ Lives..............................................60
Janice Ristock

14. The L-World: It’s Not Getting Better For Lonely Young Lesbians...........................................63
Melissa Carroll

15. Seeking Refuge from Homophobic and Transphobic Persecution...........................................67
Sharalyn Jordan and Christine Morrissey

16. LGBTQ Struggles for Human Dignity and Equal Rights in Uganda.......................................71
Val Kalende

17. LGBT young people, public spaces and policing in Australia...................................................76
Angela Dwyer

18. LGBT Lessons (Not) Learned: Dominant Gender Ideology as a Basis for Transphobic and Homophobic Violence........................................................................................................79
Gerald Walton

Part III: Building Resilience: Toward a More Inclusive Education

19. Beyond Homophobia: We Need to Make it Better.................................................................84
Kris Wells

20. Education Matters: Confronting Homophobia and Transphobia in Schools.............................87
Brian Burtch

21. Anti-homophobia Education Beyond Bullying........................................................................91
Hélène Frohard-Dourlent

22. Twenty Years Later for GLBTQ Youth: How Far Have We Come?.........................................96
Gloria Filax

23. Desiring and Doing Equity: The Triangle Program for LGBTIQ2S..........................................100
Doreen Fumia

24. Conversion Therapy Fantasies and Religious Opposition to LGBTQ-Inclusive Education..................104
Catherine Taylor

25. Post Secondary Education and Queer Student Engagement in Canada.....................................108
Rachael Sullivan
26. How (Not) to Do Queer Studies in the Classroom: Teaching to Think
Beyond Tolerance
Christopher Smith

Bibliography
### List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACT UP</td>
<td>AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AARGH</td>
<td>Artists Against Rampant Government Homophobia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AML</td>
<td>Association for Media Literacy (AML)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APA</td>
<td>American Psychological Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSD</td>
<td>Disorder of Sex Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EGALE</td>
<td>Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTM (F2M)</td>
<td>Female to Male Transsexual or Transgender Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GID</td>
<td>Gender Identity Disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLAAD</td>
<td>Gay &amp; Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLSEN</td>
<td>Gay, Lesbian &amp; Straight Education Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSA</td>
<td>Gay-Straight Alliances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HRC</td>
<td>Human Rights Campaign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HTP</td>
<td>Homophobic and Transphobic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IGB</td>
<td>It Gets Better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISNA</td>
<td>Intersex Society of North America (Accord Alliance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBT</td>
<td>Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgendered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTI-Q2-S</td>
<td>Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgendered Queer Intersex 2-Spirited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTTIQQ2SA</td>
<td>Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transsexual Transgender Intersex Queer Questioning 2-Spirited and Allies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTTTQ</td>
<td>Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgendered Two-Spirited Queer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQ</td>
<td>Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgendered Queer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQAII2-S</td>
<td>Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgendered Queer Asexual Allies Intersex 2-Spirited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQIA</td>
<td>Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgendered Queer Intersex Asexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQIQ</td>
<td>Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgendered Queer Intersex Questioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCCT</td>
<td>Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSGI</td>
<td>Minority Sexual and Gender Identities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTF (M2F)</td>
<td>Male-to-Female Transsexual or Transgender Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFLAG</td>
<td>Parents Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QPOC</td>
<td>Queer People of Colour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>Straight Allies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMUG</td>
<td>Sexual Minorities Uganda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCE</td>
<td>Sexual Orientation Change Efforts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SVR</td>
<td>Sexuality, Vulnerability, Resistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TDSB</td>
<td>Toronto District School Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TS</td>
<td>Transsexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commission for Refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-T</td>
<td>Two-spirited</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Contributors

Sirma Bilge is an associate professor in the Department of Sociology at the Université de Montréal.

Brian Burtch is a professor in the School of Criminology and an associate member in the Department of Gender, Sexuality & Women's Studies at Simon Fraser University.

Melissa Carroll is a doctoral candidate at McMaster University, and a blogger on queerness and everyday life called www.newdaynewmood.com.

Elise Chenier is an associate professor in the Department of History at Simon Fraser University, Director of the Archives of Lesbian Oral History, and the author of Strangers in Our Midst: Sexual Deviancy in Postwar Ontario.

Catherine Clune-Taylor is a doctoral candidate and lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Alberta.

Lucas Crawford is a doctoral candidate and Trudeau Scholar in the Department of English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta.

Alexa DeGagne is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Political Science at the University of Alberta.

Angela Dwyer is a Sociologist and Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Law, School of Justice at Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia, and co-author of Sex, Crime and Morality.

Lindsay Eales is a Master’s student in the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Alberta.

Gloria Filax is an associate professor of Equity/Equality Studies and Chair of the Centre for Integrated Studies at Athabasca University, and author, of Queer Youth in the Province of the ‘Severely Normal’.

Hélène Frohard-Dourlent is a doctoral student in the Department of Sociology at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver.

Doreen Fumia is an associate professor in the Sociology Department at Ryerson University, a member of the Triangle School Community Council for over 12 years, and a member of the LGBTIQ2S Working Group at the Canadian Association of University Teachers.

Oralia Gómez-Ramírez is a doctoral candidate in Anthropology, a Vanier Scholar and Liu Fellow at the University of British Columbia.

Fatima Jaffer is a doctoral student and Liu Scholar in the Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies Program at the University of British Columbia, and a Board member of Trikone Vancouver.
Beyond The Queer Alphabet

Sharalyn Jordan is an assistant professor in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University and Christine Morrissey is with the Rainbow Refugee Committee.

Val Kalende is a Master of Theological Studies (Leadership Development) at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge Massachusetts, a board member with Freedom and Roam Uganda and an activist with Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG).

Robert Nichols is an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Alberta.

Bobby Noble is an associate professor of Sexuality and Gender Studies in the School of Women’s Studies at York University in Toronto, and author of *Masculinities without Men?: Female Masculinity in Twentieth-Century Fictions*.

Danielle Peers is a doctoral student, Vanier Scholar and Trudeau Scholar in the Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation at the University of Alberta.

Janice L. Ristock is Associate Vice-President (Research) and a professor in Women’s and Gender Studies at the University of Manitoba, and editor, *Intimate Partner Violence in LGBTQ Lives*.

Christopher Smith is a doctoral student in the Department of Sociology & Equity Studies in Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto.

Malinda S. Smith is an associate professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Alberta in Edmonton.

Rachael E. Sullivan is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of British Columbia.

Richard Sullivan is an associate professor in the School of Social Work at the University of British Columbia.

Catherine Taylor is a professor in the Department of Rhetoric, Writing and Communications at the University of Winnipeg, and co-editor, *Inside the academy and out: lesbian/gay/queer studies and social action*.

Rinaldo Walcott is an associate professor and Chair of the Department of Sociology and Equity Studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto, author, *Black like Who?: Writing Black Canada*.

Gerald Walton is an associate professor in the Faculty of Education at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

Kristopher Wells is a postdoctoral researcher in the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services in the Faculty of Education, University of Alberta, and cofounder of Camp fYrefly.
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 Rutger’s 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 Burtch, 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
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, LGBTT1QQ2SA, 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:
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
Queering In/Equality: LGBTQ, ‘It Gets Better’ and Beyond

Malinda S. Smith, University of Alberta

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

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

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

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

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

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

---


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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

---


Obama signed the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act 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.”

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

I don’t know how effective the It Gets Better social media campaign will turn out to be. But I do know that some of the most inspired efforts to combat homophobia and hate crimes against LGBTQ have come from activists, artists and film-makers, such as Artists Against Rampant Government Homophobia (AARGH)14 and the Embracing Intersectional Diversity Project.15 The It Gets Better16 campaign builds on these earlier efforts and it includes a YouTube channel,17 video clips on

---


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


Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free / Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below