“Get That Freak”: A Conversation about Homophobia and Transphobia in High Schools

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Thank you

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• *Otter Books*, for being a local, independent bookseller in the 21st century ... And for ordering copies of *Get That Freak*.

• Rebecca Haskell, researcher and lead author of our book [http://blogs.btvancouver.ca/tag/gay](http://blogs.btvancouver.ca/tag/gay) (Becky interviewed on City TV)
Online sources

• Think before you speak (Wanda Sykes)
  http://www.thinkb4youspeak.com/psa.asp?play=tv
  spots&video=TV_Pizza_30

  “Emma and Julia”

• http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uEpBYSKOs3ys
  – It gets better
  – Make it better
  – Homorazzi.com
Online sources

• Lady Gaga, “Born this way”
  “Rejoice and love yourself today
  'Cause baby you were born this way
  No matter gay, straight, or bi,
  Lesbian, transgendered life
  I'm on the right track baby
  I was born to survive
  No matter black, white or beige
  Chola or orient made
  I'm on the right track baby
  I was born to be brave
Rebecca Drysdale “it gets better”

• Dance, music, explicit lyrics about sexuality & gay-baiting

• http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cTQNwMxqM3E
“Flashmob” Jan 27, 2011

• Oakridge Centre, Vancouver

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MhYyAa0VnyY

• song is Bruno Mars' "Just The Way You Are"
Little Sister’s Book and Art Emporium

- http://littlesisters.ca/blog/

- Janine Fuller & Jim Deva (2008 clip)
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jSBQ58YE C6A
Pink Shirt day (February 23)

- [http://www.vsb.bc.ca/calendars-events/wear-pink-day](http://www.vsb.bc.ca/calendars-events/wear-pink-day)

- "..wear pink to show support against bullying, discrimination and homophobia"

- (fall 2007): Central Kings Rural High School, N.S.
  - grade 9 boy harassed for wearing pink shirt
  - Two grade 12 students launched the Sea of Pink with 50 pink t-shirts.
  - Support from ILWU – longshore & warehouse union
Research on Bullying

• Dr. Brenda Morrison, Barry Cartwright, Becky Haskell (researchers in SFU Criminology)

  – “shame and humiliation”
  – Is bullying just one of life’s lessons?
... Brenda Morrison

- Zero-tolerance policies (toughness, accountability)
- Restorative approach
  - “repair the harm”
  - Intensive interventions e.g. Circle of care
  - Need for more thoroughgoing evaluations as opposed to anecdotal accounts
Rebecca Haskell
Book launch at Little Sister’s
Get That Freak
## The Participants

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Some Definitions

Homophobia
- “…the fear or hatred of homosexuality…”
- “…based upon the assumption that homosexuality is unnatural or inferior to heterosexuality”.

Transphobia
- “…a reaction of fear, loathing and discriminatory treatment of people whose gender identity or gender presentation… does not match in the socially accepted way, the sex they were assigned at birth”.

HTP
- Homophobia and transphobia

LGBTQ/Queer
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, two spirit, queer
Experiences of homophobia

- 50-60% experience direct & indirect verbal harassment, & graffiti
- 25-30% experience physical violence
- 60% feel unsafe at school
HTP in Schools: What we Know

Experiences of Transphobia

– 60-70% experience verbal harassment (Kosciw et al., 2008)

– 30-40% experience physical violence
  (Kosciw et al., 2008; Wyss, 2004)
  • Pushed, shoved, raped, set on fire

– Often directed at males seen as not “manly” enough
  (Kosciw et al, 2008; Shelley, 2008)
Experiences of Transphobia

“The threat of violence toward transgendered persons, particularly transgendered youth who must attend community schools, is made all the more powerful by the fact that they do not have to do anything to receive the violence. It is their lives alone that precipitate such action” (Mallon, 1999a, 11, italics added).
Terminology

Homophobia (Forde, 2006, 277)
- “…the fear or hatred of homosexuality…”
- “…based upon the assumption that homosexuality is unnatural or inferior to heterosexuality”.

Transphobia (Trans Accessibility Project..., n.d., n.p)
- “…a reaction of fear, loathing and discriminatory treatment of people whose gender identity or gender presentation... does not match in the socially accepted way, the sex they were assigned at birth”.

HTP
- Homophobia and transphobia

LGBTQ/Queer
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Existing Literature

- Little attention to trans youth
- Experiences of homophobia
  - Most experience direct & indirect verbal harassment, & graffiti
  - About 1/4 experience physical violence

Effects

- School truancy & drop out
- anxiety; depression
- substance abuse
- unsafe sexual practices
- Suicide
Research Questions

1. Context
   • Where? When? What happened? Frequency? Who was involved?

2. Effects
   • Long- and short-term? Positive?

3. Why does HTP harassment happen?

4. How to Prevent/Address HTP?
Sampling

• Gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, two spirit, queer (GLBTTQ) person who felt they were bullied in high school based on their sexual orientation of gender identity

• 19 years of age or older

• Left or graduated a high school in Canada in 2002 or later (past 5 years)
  – Did not have to be ‘out’ in high school
Methods

• Interviews and small group discussions

• 16 queer youth
  – Left high school in the past 5 years
  – 19 years +
  – lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, two-spirit, or queer
  – All but one attended high school in B.C.
Findings

• Subtle forms of HTP are most prominent

• Participants’ thoughts on why HTP persists

• Effects of subtle forms of HTP on young queer people
Subtle forms of HTP violence

• Physical violence often portrayed in the media, but more subtle forms of bullying were most common
  – homophobic and transphobic name-calling
  – Exclusion
  – Avoidance
  – Heterosexist & gender-limiting environments

• Emphasis on subtle forms of bullying may however lead youth (and others) to downplay experiences with HTP

• Main point – LGBTTQ youth ARE experiencing homophobia and transphobia even if it is not the most visible forms
I think the whole, ‘that’s gay’ was still common and still went on in the classroom and the teachers still didn’t do anything about it.

… one student was like ‘I hate all gay people. I wish they would all die’. And the teacher… basically just ignored it…. She said…‘well, we shouldn’t really say things like that in class.’ But she was smiling the whole time.
Limitations

- Exploratory/in-depth vs generalizability
- Intersectionality not analyzed
- Lack of trans/two spirit volunteers
- Only one participant from outside of B.C.
Transgendered-rights bill
Feb 10, 2011  Globe & Mail

• “Bill C-389 would amend the Canadian Human Rights Act to protect the rights of transgender or transsexual citizens. It would prohibit discrimination on the basis of “gender identity” or “gender expression” in the workplace or elsewhere, and would amend the Criminal Code so that crimes committed against people because they are transgender or transsexual would be treated as hate crime” (John Ibbitson)