



The Experiences of LGBTQ Families in Ontario Schools: 2014-2020
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto
(Funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2016-2019)
www.lgbtqfamiliespeakout.ca

Prof. Tara Goldstein (Principal Investigator)
Austen Koecher (Research Manager 2017-2018, Research Assistant)
Pam Baer (Research Manager 2014-2017, Research Assistant, Artist Researcher)
benjamin lee hicks (Research Assistant, Artist Researcher)
Kate Reid (Research Assistant, Artist Researcher)
Jenny Salisbury (Artist Researcher)
Tarra Joshi (Research Assistant, 2014-2017)
Katerina Cook (Research Assistant 2016-2018)
Alec Butler (Research Assistant, 2016-2017)
Edil Ga'al (Research Assistant, 2018-2019)
Yasmin Owis (Research Assistant, 2018-2019)
Ty Walkland (Research Assistant, 2018-2019)
Helgi Audarson Gudmundsson (Podcast Editor, 2018-2019)

Interim Report: September 7, 2018

Prepared by Tara Goldstein, Principal Investigator

Goal of the Study

The goal of this research study is to interview lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) families living in four different regions in Ontario about the issues they experience at school and how they work with teachers and principals to create safer and more supportive learning environments for their children.

We use the initialism LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer) with the intention of including people who identify as transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, questioning, intersex, asexual, ally, pansexual, agender, gender queer, gender variant, and/or pangender. We understand the names people use to describe their gender and sexual identities are always evolving and that the most important thing is to be respectful and to use names that people prefer.

The study is asking and answering two research questions:

1. Two to five years after the passing of the Ontario Safe School Act (2012), what do LGBTQ families say about their experiences in public schools?

2. How are LGBTQ families working with teachers and principals to create safer and more supportive learning environments for their children?

To answer these questions, the research team has:

1. conducted video interviews with LGBTQ families living in the cities of Toronto, Ottawa, Sudbury and London, as well as in suburban and rural communities located close to each city;
2. analysed the issues and conflicts LGBTQ face in schools and the work families do with teachers and principals to create safer and more supportive learning environments for their children.

To share our findings the research team has been:

1. curating, tagging and uploading the video interviews onto our website www.lgbtqfamiliespeakout.ca and using the interviews in professional development workshops and courses for educators and LGBTQ families;
 2. developing a set of verbatim theatre scripts from the interviews – accompanied by visual images and music – that can be used in professional development workshops and performances for educators and LGBTQ families;
 3. writing scholarly articles for refereed journals and books in education, curriculum, pedagogy, and arts-based educational research;
 4. including findings from the study in Tara Goldstein’s book *Teaching Sexuality and Gender at School: Letters to Teachers*, scheduled to be published by Taylor and Francis in the fall of 2018 or the winter of 2019.
- creating a podcast to supplement the interviews on our lgbtqfamiliespeakout.ca website and the teaching work we do with the interviews.

Current Progress

To date we have:

1. conducted video and audio interviews with 36 families both within and outside the cities of Toronto, Ottawa, Sudbury, and London.
2. Worked to curate, tag, and upload video and audio clips from 35 of these interviews onto our website: www.lgbtqfamiliespeakout.ca

One interviewee asked us not to upload their clip onto the website, but to use their words anonymously in our writing about the study.

We expect to complete the tasks of curating, tagging, and uploading the videos sometime this fall.

3. Worked with the interviews in both an undergraduate and a graduate course at the University of Toronto since 2016. About 100 students have worked with the interviews so far. Another 110 students will work with the interviews in the 2018-2019 academic year.
4. Performed *Out at School* for
 - an audience of LGBTQ families and the general public at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in January 2017.
 - an audience of educators at the Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexuality Diversity Conference in Toronto in April 2017.
 - an audience of middle school students at Northlea Elementary and Middle School in May 2017.
 - an international audience of LGBTQ families and the general public at The L Fest in Llandudno, Wales in July 2018.
5. Begun to plan a set of three performances of *Out at School* for the Toronto Pride Festival on June 14 and 15, 2019.
6. Begun to plan a screening of a sample of the interviews at the Queer Studies in Education and Culture (QSEC) meeting within the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE) conference in June 2-4, 2018. For more information about QSEC please see <https://canadianwomenineducation.wordpress.com/affiliates/qsec/>

Findings So Far

- Both parents and children make strategic decisions about if, when, and how to “come out” about living in a LGBTQ family depending on whether or not they believe coming out is safe. Decisions about coming out can shift over time and place;
- Despite the passing of the Ontario Safe School Act in 2012, several LGBTQ families in communities both within and outside of the cities of Toronto, Ottawa and Sudbury report their schools are still not addressing incidents of homophobic and transphobic bullying;
- One family has chosen to homeschool their transgender child until they find a safer school for them;
- While many (but not all) schools discussed in the interviews have Gay Straight Alliances, participate in Pink Shirt Day (an annual day to raise awareness about bullying), and have

books about LGBTQ families in their classrooms, only one school discussed in the 34 interviews has created and delivered LGBTQ-positive classroom curriculum;

- School-wide commitments to the inclusion of LGBTQ families are rare;
- Gay Straight Alliances, Pink Shirt Day activities, and the collection of books about LGBTQ families happen because of the work by *individual* teachers (and sometimes vice-principals and principals) who are committed to creating safer and more supportive learning environments for LGBTQ families and students;
- Teachers often rely on the support of LGBTQ families to create safer, more supportive practices at school;
- Parents, children and youth have to advocate for themselves and their families when there is no or little school or individual teacher commitment;
- Teacher allyship makes a difference to families who are raising transgender children;
- Some school boards still do not have policies in place to support transgender children.
- Families who identify as heterosexual and cisgender and are raising a transgender child talk about the need to access the LGBTQ community for support and resources. They also talk about the need to become allies, advocates and allies for their transgender children and other members of trans communities.
- Multiple and simultaneous identities that LGBTQ families bring to school can impact their experiences at school. For example:
 - A white lesbian mother talked about how her masculine gender performance had outed her four-year daughter as a child from a LGBTQ family.
 - A Black parent talked about the racial marginalization their daughter was experiencing at school and how their daughter had asked them not to come out to her teachers and friends at school because she was worried about being further marginalized.
 - A white Catholic lesbian mother, working as a teacher in a Catholic secondary high school, discussed the preparation that had undertaken with her daughter's religion teacher to ensure her daughter would not feel marginalized by having two mothers.
 - Two families who identified as Indigenous and Two-Spirit talked about how the lack of teacher knowledge and the lack of teacher interest in the history of residential schooling, and current Indigenous issues alienated their children and required them as parents to teach this history at home.

Publications and Conference Presentations

An asterix (*) indicates the author is an undergraduate or graduate student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and member of the research team.

Book

Goldstein, T. (in press). *Teaching Gender and Sexuality at School: Letters to Teachers*. New York, NY: Routledge. With contributions by *benjamin lee hicks.

Book Chapter

Goldstein, T., *Salisbury, J., *hicks, b.l., *Reid, K., *Koecher, A., and *Baer, P. (2018). Inviting Startling Empathy Through Performed Ethnography: A Queer(ed) Collective Research Project. In Gallagher, K. (Ed.) *The Methodological Dilemma: Creative, Critical and Collaborative Approaches to Qualitative Research*. New York: Routledge.

Refereed Journal Article

Goldstein, T., *Koecher, A., *Baer, P., and *hicks, b.l. (2017 online). Transitioning in elementary school: Advocacy and allyship. *Teaching Education Journal*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10476210.2017.1372410> .

Conference presentations

1. *Goldstein, T. *Baer, P., *Salisbury, J., *hicks, b.l., *Reid, K., and *Koecher, A. (2018). *Out at School: A Verbatim Theatre Project about the Experiences of LGBTQ Families in School*. Arts-Based Educational Research (ABER) SIG. *American Educational Research Association*. New York, NY.
2. *Koecher, A., Goldstein, T. *Baer, P., *Salisbury, J., *hicks, b.l., and *Reid, K. (2018). Learning about Other People's Families from Other People's Families. Division K, Section 5: Preservice Teacher Education Coursework. *American Educational Research Association*. New York, NY.
3. *Koecher, A., Goldstein, T., *Baer, P., *hicks, b.l., *Joshi, T, and *Salisbury, J. (2017) LGBTQ Families Speak Out. *Canadian Critical Pedagogy Association (CCPA), Canadian Society for Studies in Education (CSSE)*. Toronto. May 2017.
4. Goldstein, T., *Baer, P., and *Salisbury, J. (2017). *Out at School: A Verbatim Theatre Project about the Experiences of LGBTQ Families in Ontario Schools*. *Arts Researchers and Teachers Society (ARTS), Canadian Society for Studies in Education (CSSE)*. Toronto. May, 2017.

5. Goldstein, T., *Baer, P., and *Salisbury, J. (2017). *Out at School: A Verbatim Theatre Praxis Workshop about the Experiences of LGBTQ Families in Ontario Schools*. *Canadian Association of Theatre Research Conference*. Toronto. May 2017.
6. Goldstein, T., *Koecher, A., *hicks, b.l., *Baer, P. (2017). *The Experiences of LGBTQ Families in Schools*. *Lesbian Lives Conference*. Brighton, England. February 25, 2017.

Next Steps

- Finish curating, tagging and uploading all 35 interviews.
- Continue using the interviews in professional development workshops and courses for educators and LGBTQ families;
- Continue developing a set of verbatim theatre scripts based on the interviews;
- Continue using the scripts in professional development workshops and courses for educators and LGBTQ families.
- Create a podcast called *Gender. Sexuality. School.* to supplement the interviews on our lgbtqfamiliespeakout.ca website and the teaching work we do with the interviews.