

S1 — Episode 7 — Queer Songs and Song Writing

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Tara talks to LGBTQ Families Speak Out team member Kate Reid about the music she composed for the project's verbatim theatre piece *Out at School*.

Tara: Hello and welcome to Gender Sexuality School. I'm Tara Goldstein and we're podcasting from Toronto, Ontario Canada. Today on Gender Sexuality School, LGBTQ Families Speak out team member Kate Reid is here to talk about the music she composed for the team's verbatim theatre piece, *Out at School*. *Out at School* is a script of verbatim monologues that the research team has created from interviews we collected in the LGBTQ Families Speak out study. The term "verbatim" refers to the origins of the word spoken in the monologues. In a verbatim monologue, the words of people who are interviewed are transcribed, edited, arranged, and recontextualized so that they can be, so they can be performed on stage by actors. *Out at School* is a work in progress. It currently consists of a script that contains 11 verbatim monologues based on interviews with 10 different families, a set of visual images that accompany each monologue drawn by Benjamin Lee Hicks and two songs, "Pushing the envelope" and "Let Love Be the Way", both composed by Kate Reid. The songs draw on a number of themes in the monologues. Kate, welcome back to Gender Sexuality School.

Kate: Hi, Tara, thanks for having me back.

Tara: It's great to have you here. Kate, can you tell us about your process of creating both songs? Let's start with *Pushing the Envelope*. What was your process to create that song?

Kate: So, I had a reading, sort of reading-coding process that consisted of three steps. So, the first step was that I would, I took the monologues that you gave me, and I sort of read them over to get a general impression of what was happening in those monologues and the interviews. And then the second part, the second time I read through, I was sort of noting like major themes that were emerging from all of the interviews and monologues together. So, some of, sort of the like main, some of the sort of similarities in the stories, I guess, is what I'm trying to say. And then the third read, I was looking more for specific phrases, or words that stood out from the interviews that I could use as actual lyrics. And so, I sort of had those, those notes taken. And then I began composing the song and I was, you know, experimenting with chords, and vocal melodies. And while I was doing that, I was also sort of considering other themes and ideas and sort of some forms of activism that are, were relevant to the topics that I was talking, or that I was working with in the song that was sort of like mesh with some of the things that the interviewees were talking about. And then I also sort of filled in some gaps. Sort of as I was building the song with, where there were places where I needed to sort of add some

more, I guess, sort of some, sort of meat to the stories, I had to sort of start, draw on my own experiences and some of the experiences of people in my life who are queer and trans, to sort of flesh those out a little bit. And so, Pushing the Envelope specifically, I included some direct phrases and sort of little idioms from the interviews in that song. There's a couple of cultural references in there. I did include a couple of questions in the song as lyrics as well to sort of invite the audience to do some work around thinking around some of the issues that some of the families talk about in the interview. So, I did that kind of thing to sort of, as a way to invite the— the audience or the listener into, you know, into the song to do their own work in thinking about, you know, if they hadn't thought about some of these issues before, what would it be like for them to think about those? So that was my Pushing the Envelope sort of process, I guess.

Tara: Wonderful. Thank you so much. So, we're going to actually hear your song, Pushing the Envelope. As we're listening is there anything special you want us to look out for or listen for?

Kate: Yeah, I guess, like thinking about some of those questions that I, that I put in there. So, one of them is at the very beginning. It's a question about, you know, sometimes when LGBTQ people or marginalized people, I guess, think, consider whether they should speak up and say something to, to something that they've heard that they don't agree with, or to some kind of comment or situation or issue where they feel invisible or something. So, there's that question and then there's another question, and I'll quote it. It is: What would it mean to live without the fear of being interrogated, to be free to articulate our bodies in any way we want? And so, this is just sort of a question more for, in general, more for people to consider, like, because that was a bit of a theme in that set of interviews as well about, you know, being questioned about our bodies and our relationships and our families. Right. And so, I wanted to put that in there. You know, what would it mean for us to be able to go around and not have to sort of be questioned about who we are all the time, or asked to explain certain parts of our lives. So, I think those are some interesting pieces. And then there's another, for me as a folk singer, I think there's like another interesting, hmm, it's like a nod to sort of the folk music community and in particular, to a song called We Shall Overcome. And so that kind of comes at the end of the song. And because I, you know, consider myself a folk artist, I wanted to sort of put that nod to the folk community in there because that's a very well-known song that's been sung in a range of different contexts. Like civil rights movement, the union movement, like those kinds of like the working-class movement and things like that, in terms of as a protest song, right. So, I wanted to sort of put that in there too, as a as a nod to the folk music community and some of the work that folk music has done over the years in terms of like activism and social justice, so.

Tara: Alright, so we are going to take a listen to Pushing the Envelope by Kate Reid.

Kate singing: The same old question runs around in my mind / should I speak or should I just keep quiet / so I owe them some kind of disclosure or explanation every single time in every single situation /

Some people don't even have to think about it / They don't look beyond their own reality / How can we make sense of ourselves in this absence that's present every day / like we're fighting something bigger than we can name / And one day we won't need to be pushing the envelope / We won't be represented by permission slip home / and it won't be trendy to advertise our families and we won't be legitimized by posters on a wall.

I don't see myself amongst these pages / the people I love are nowhere to be found / Someone please explain all this controversy around the word family because I know that love and community created kinship too/

Anytime you bend the gender roles, folks tend to notice / They always want to put you back in a box / What would it mean to live without the fear of being interrogated to be free to articulate our bodies any way we want /

And one day, we won't need to be pushing the envelope / We won't be represented by permission slips home / it won't be trendy to advertise our families and we won't be legitimized by posters on the wall / I still feel this tension between wanting to be accepted and wanting to let my freak flag fly /

But I'm not a character in their narrative and I won't rehearse their lives for them / I'm writing a new script for you and me about the beauty of nonconformity / weave ourselves into the fabric of this world / Disrupting constructions of boy and girl then boy meets girl/ changing language and policies, celebrating families, the bonds and identities if we raise our voices strong, We Shall Overcome / And one day we won't need to be pushing the envelope / we won't be represented by permission slips home / and it won't be trendy to advertise our families and we won't be legitimized by posters on the wall / one day, we won't need to be pushing the envelope oh no / we won't be represented by permission slips home / and it won't be trendy to advertise our family and we won't be legitimized by posters on the wall.

Tara: That was Pushing the Envelope by Kate Reid. So, Kate, the second song that you composed for us from our interviews was called Let Love Be the Way. Tell us a little bit about that song, what went into creating that song?

Kate: So, I use a very similar process in composing that song as I did with Pushing the Envelope. So, I had that sort of three step reading process. The song's a little bit different in terms of the content, because, and I think this, this is a really cool thing about this song is that it, it is a song that is entirely built on questions like the whole song is a whole set of questions. And the reason why I did that was because the sort of overarching theme in this sort of second set of

interviews of monologues that you gave me, was this idea that LGBTQ people and families and youth et cetera often have to, like answer questions from school personnel. So, we're talking about LGBTQ families in schools, right? Answer questions, or explain themselves, because there's questions coming out them, right. And so, so I really wanted to sort of flip that idea around and have the listener consider what that might be like to experience this sort of barrage of questions coming, coming at them, like every day. And so, it's actually a song directed to a more straight and cisgender audience, although, of course, anyone can listen to it. But and I guess, the flip side of that is, of course, it is a song for LGBTQ people, because it's also a way of saying, I, you know, I hear your experience, this is a thing that we have to deal with a lot of times, right. And so, but it does do a lot of, it does invite-- not invite, it more demands that the audience do a lot of emotional labour and some thinking around some of the issues or questions raised in the song and-- and of course, those questions come from the interviews, and then also my own experience and the experience of the people that are in my life who are queer and trans. So, and it's every single line of that song is a question. So, so I think that's kind of really cool. And when you first gave me the, the monologues and I sort of came up with an idea, I was like, super excited about it to try and, you know, challenge myself to write a song that was just a string of questions. So, so that's what that song is about.

Tara: Wonderful. Is there a question in particular or, a set of questions in particular that you want us to listen out for?

Kate: I think like you and I've talked about this before too, the bridge I think we both find particularly compelling, because there's this like, it's a shift in the, in the way that the song, you know, the melodic part of the song and sort of vocally there's a shift as well. So, it sort of stands out right as a, as a sort of peak moment, I guess, in the song. But it's just sort of this like one after the other, question, question, question, like just sort of, like sort of this like rapid fire, you know, have, you know, have you ever been questioned about the way you look, the way you dress, the way you talk, like who you love, like, and so I think that's kind of a really sort of compelling moment in the song. Because it really does give the listener and as-- as a singer it's, it really gives me the sense of, too, of have that sort of rapid fire like having to think on your feet because they just come at this really quick pace. And I think it really gives the listener a sense of, you know, that sort of feeling of just, you know, always facing these questions and then how do you respond, right. So, so I think that's kind of a neat part of the song too.

Tara: Alright, we're gonna listen for that part of the song. Here is Let Love Be the Way by Kate Reid.

Kate: Hey there hello you don't know me, and I don't know you / But I have a question or two, thought I'd turn the tables on you /
What's it like to walk down the street with your partner and never wonder, what if / to know that wherever you go together you're safe because your love blends in? / Would you imagine being unexpected, unforeseen in the grand scheme of things? / And then have to reveal yourself, describe and define your love, your children, your family? / What would it take to let love be the way? / could you listen to people then raise them up? Could you up your own game and say no big deal, be inspired instead of afraid? / How would it feel to live two separate lives, to hide your true self away? / And to have to conform to someone else's arbitrary rules and always be asked to explain? / Have you ever had to carve out a space for yourself because there was no room for you? / And imagine there were only five choices to line up at school, LGBT and Q / What would it take to let love be the way? Could you listen to people then raise them up? / Could you up your own game and say no big deal? / Be inspired instead of afraid? /
Have you ever had to try and justify your body to people you've never met? / Or tried to translate yourself to someone else's language to make yourself legible? / Do you have to defend which public bathroom you use? Have you ever thought about that? / And then felt them attempt to decipher your intentions while you're standing there washing your hands? / Have you ever been told that you don't know who you are? Your pronouns are wrong they don't match, they're grammatically incorrect / Your name is wrong your clothes are wrong your hair is wrong your families are wrong Your love is wrong you are wrong / what would it take to let love be the way? could you listen to people and raise them up? / Could you up your game and say no big deal, be inspired instead of afraid? what would it take to let love be the way? Could you listen to people then raise them up? / Could you up your own game and say, no big deal? be inspired? Could you be brave? /
Has someone with good intentions work to accommodate you and try to fit you in? / And have you ever considered how accommodating someone doesn't really change anything? /

Tara: That was Let Love Be the Way by Kate Reed. So, Kate, how did creating both songs deepen your understanding of what the families who we interviewed were telling us?

Kate: Yeah, this is a really interesting question that I'm glad you asked, because it made me really think about that. Because I do use song writing, writing as a way, song writing and singing actually as a way to understand things and make sense of things. So, so thanks for asking that question. I think it really allowed me to, like, you know, not only see in the reading of the monologues and the interviews, but also feel the similarities of the experiences that LGBTQ families face. And of course, you know, I saw, I saw these similarities. And of course, amongst those similarities, there's lots of nuance, you know, to these experiences, they're not identical experiences. But sort of seeing these big themes emerge was really interesting for me, and

especially, you know, the theme of having to do that intellectual, emotional, and social labour of educating school personnel. But also, that theme of having to explain your identities and your relationships and your family configurations. And those kinds of things. Like those were, that was really neat for me to see sort of these two big themes emerging. But I think the really interesting thing about you know, playing music as a way to, or writing and playing music as a way to sort of do an analysis on something is that, you know, playing with lyrics and singing, and singing lyrics, and then working that out on my guitar, it really, you know, it really sort of puts their stories into my body in a way that it wouldn't otherwise. And so it's like, I can feel those experiences that they're talking about in the interviews in the monologues as they merge with my own in my body. And then, because, you know, I've had similar experiences, right? And so, but it's like, I'm singing, it's almost like I'm singing with people, the people that we interviewed, even though they're not there when I'm singing, but it's like, when I'm singing, I feel like I'm singing with them. Because I'm singing about their stories and their experiences, right. So, I don't know if that makes sense. But that's sort of how I how I can articulate it, I guess. I really feel like they're present with me while I'm, while I'm singing because I'm thinking about them. But I'm also feeling that experience, because I also, in a lot of ways, I also understand it right. So, so it's kind of really powerful that way.

Tara: Very powerful. Yeah. Thank you. Thanks, Kate. Thanks so much for joining us. I loved hearing you speak about the ways you created *Pushing the Envelope* and *Let Love Be the Way* and how that process deepened your understanding of what our families had to tell us. Here is a little bit about Kate Reid. Slam storytelling and folk music meets many a queer themed tune in Toronto based singer songwriter Kate Reid. She has five albums under her belt and performs at live music venues, public schools, music and pride festivals, conferences, union meetings and in people's living rooms. Kate is particularly interested in using song and song writing as a way to make sense of and open up understandings around gender, sexualities, bodies, and relationality. As a PhD student in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Kate is researching the use of queer folk songs in curriculum development, about gender and sexual diversity. You can find out more about Kate Reid at WWW.KateReid.net, k-a-t-e-r-e-i-d.net. Alright, that's our podcast for today. If you have any burning questions about gender and sexuality in school, send an email to info@LGBTQfamiliespeakout.ca with the subject line, Ask Gender Sexuality School. In future podcasts, I'll take listeners' questions about issues of gender and sexuality at school and try to answer them with the help of some amazing folks who have been thinking about gender and sexuality for a while. You can find this podcast at WWW.LGBTQfamiliespeakout.ca This episode was produced with the support of New College Initiative Fund and from Doug Friesen who is a PhD student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. I'm Tara Goldstein. All the best.