

## **S4 — Episode 5 — Queering and Trans-gressing Care**

*Goldstein, Tara and Friesen, Doug (Producers). (2022, Feb 21, 2022) [Audio podcast]*

Tara talks to **Bishop Owis** who has recently completed a doctoral thesis project called **Queering and Trans-gressing Care: Towards of a Queer Ethic of Care in QTBIPOC Education**. QTBIPOC is an acronym for Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, People of Colour, and in the interview Bishop discusses how QTBIPOC educators practice a queer ethic of care.

Tara: Hello, and welcome back to season four of Gender Sexuality School. I'm Tara Goldstein and we're podcasting from Toronto, Ontario, Canada, the traditional territory of many Indigenous nations. Toronto is covered by Treaty 13, signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit, and the Williams Treaty, signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands. In Toronto, Ontario, and Canada, we are all treaty people who need to work towards responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action. Today, Bishop Owis joins us to talk about their doctoral thesis project called Queering and Transgressing Care: Towards a queer ethic of care in QTBIPOC Education. QTBIPOC is an acronym for queer, trans, Black, Indigenous, people of colour, and Bishop's thesis answers the research question, "how do QTBIPOC educators understand and practice a queer ethic of care?" Bishop! Welcome to Gender Sexuality School. We are so happy to have you here.

Bishop: Thank you, happy to be here.

Tara: So, Bishop, to begin our interview, can you tell us a little bit about yourself as an educator, and why you wanted to research the ways educators both understand and practice a queer ethic of care?

Bishop: Yeah, okay. So, I finished teacher education in 2019, after which I started my PhD at OISE. And I've taught in a bunch of different environments before, so community settings, workshops, undergrad, and graduate classes. And you know, starting this research, I realized how much care, and thinking about care, has been a part of my life. And so, this work, as you know, Tara, like started from the research we had done together on the LGBTQ families speak out project where we had started talking about and writing about our own personal, ethical commitments to the families we were working with. And one of those principles came up, that came up was us talking about care, and centering care in the practices within our research team, but also within the families we were working with. So that really led me to think more deeply about care and how little care QTBIPOC teachers and youth experienced in K-12 settings. It was also a really personal research topic, having received some of the most validating and loving care of my life in schooling settings. And so, you know, I think we can all think of teachers who care for us in ways that went above and beyond their job, and those people really stick with us. And their forms of care and love are remembered. And it's, it's that connection and relationship. And really that ethic towards, toward one another where I believe social justice work can begin to take root and start dismantling some of those systemic oppressions that we were facing.

Tara: Thank you, Bishop, such a powerful topic and such a powerful set of reasons for taking on research about queer ethic of care. At this point, could you talk a little bit about the methods you used in your

study, you used several different methods. And they were very, very well positioned to work with each other.

Bishop: Yeah, so I did a blend of methodologies. So, the first part of it was that I interviewed three educators. There was one interview that was pretty standard, it was semi structured, that I recorded over Zoom. And then we had another kind of casual conversation between me and the folks in my study where we could both share our experiences about care as like queer trans people of colour in schools. And I structured it that way, because I wanted— I started that way because I find that when you talk to folks about care, they start to think more critically and deeply about it after the interview, and wanted to capture some of that through a very casual conversation where we as like, queer trans educators come together in community and, and share our stories, but also like validate and honour some of those difficult experiences that we face every day. And I also asked the folks in my study to choose an art based method to respond to some prompts that I gave them and ask them to think about how they experienced care or had experienced care in their time as a student in Ontario and I thought art was really important to the project and I know I love using art and art-making as a way of researching and also disseminating research because, and I wrote this in my dissertation, but I think like art helps us feel things, uh, in ways that like cognitive methods like interviewing can't really access. So, art is really healing and transformative and deeply personal and reflective. And it's absolutely necessary to be able to be vulnerable and talk about care as both a former student, former student and educator. And yeah, the art helps us get there.

Tara: What was it like analyzing people's artwork? Did you find you used a different approach than you did to analyzing your interviews and conversations?

Bishop: Yeah, well, I think one was inductive and one was deductive, that's what it kind of felt like, so I went in, I went into my interviews being like, I'm looking like, I'm digging, I'm looking for things, especially because I had like an analytical framework. And I was looking for these, like, themes that were emerging from the literature— from the interview, sorry. Whereas the art, I wasn't too ... I wasn't looking for things specifically, I was letting it speak for itself, because so much was coming out of it, that you could really interpret it in so many different ways, which is what I love about art, like, it's about the person making it for sure, but also how it lands differently in different people's bodies. It's interesting, because so much of time when we see art, we're used to, like critiquing it and being like, what does this mean? What's the meaning behind it? As if there's like one meaning, and there really isn't. So, a lot of the time when I would interpret something, and I would check in with the participant, they're like, actually, that's not what I meant. And I was like, wow, okay, so a lot is happening here. And again, I think that's why it's so powerful, because it's so personal. And, as we'll see when— when we talk about some of the findings, like, vulnerability plays a huge role in being able to like practice a queer ethic of care.

Tara: Wonderful. Well, you've taken us right into a discussion of the findings, what were some of the principal findings that you'd like to talk about with us?

Bishop: Yeah. Okay. So, there were two main findings that came out of it, and then a few practices. So, I was curious about how teachers were practicing and understanding a queer ethic of care. So, the first part in terms of understanding it, they understood a queer ethic of care as nuanced, expansive, disruptive, and transgressive. And an individualized practice that takes place within a care web. So, in that, in that finding, we're talking about having nuanced definitions of care, we're disrupting ideas of what the OCT or the Ontario College of Teachers dictates what care is and what care looks like, as well as acknowledging that, like, care needs to be tailored to individual students, because not every student wants care to, to be given and received the same way. So that was the first finding about how teachers understand a queer ethic of care. The second finding was that care, as it exists, exists in schools right now is, is quite colonial and incredibly violent. And as a result, it's forced a lot of QTBIPOC educators to imagine different forms of care that follow with a few practices. So, some of these practices were having authentic fluid, mutually vulnerable relationships with students, creating explicitly anti-colonial, anti-racist moments in their teachings, as well as all their interactions with students. And then creating moments of affirmation and recognition, of mutual recognition, as, as potential moments for, for healing. And so, you know, all these practices are disruptive to the ways that like care is practiced in schools right now. So, they often rub up against, if not completely ignore, the protocols and guidelines set up by the Ontario College of Teachers that say, like, we're not supposed to hug kids or share personal information with them. And yet, these practices that I found in this study are completely necessary in order to practice a form of queer transgressive care in schools. Yeah, and like, we know that, like, the history of education in Ontario, is like, was created by like a rigid religious indoctrination. And it was literal genocide for a lot of BIPOC, especially Indigenous children. And so, the roots of our educational system understands care and still practices care that is deeply rooted in a lot of whiteness, Christianity, and colonialism. So yeah, so some of the, the examples that are— some of the examples that are, that show care as like being white and colonial is that care is often seen as very hierarchical. In classrooms where teachers are often in charge, they're the leaders there. They make the rules, they, like, they're, you know, you're supposed to follow their guidance. And teachers are strongly encouraged not to connect with their students in emotional and vulnerable ways. Which is like a standard practice that we see so often in schools, but it doesn't really create enough space for that first disruptive practice to happen. So, you know, to have like authentic, fluid, vulnerable relationships with students. So, you know, the study, in many ways is like showing that like, the care that is authentic, and fluid and mutually vulnerable for both QTBIPOC teachers, as well as students, can help them like, connect more deeply and understand each other in ways that like, pave ways towards like a lot of healing, mutual healing, a lot of thriving, more joy, and honestly, like more care and love, which is really radical, considering like this is happening in the face of ongoing oppression, or microaggressions, from often school admin, or other white teachers. Yeah, and whatnot. And so, you know, the study really proved to me that, like a queer ethic of care is necessary in many ways. In essence, that like QTBIPOC can't drive or experience true care and joy and love in these spaces because they continue to be so like, psychologically, and emotionally violent to them. Yeah.

Tara: Very powerful, very, very powerful findings. So, as we're getting ready to wrap up our interview, who do you hope will read the book that you're going to write from your thesis? And what other plans

do you have for sharing the findings of your thesis? Who needs to, to read about the interviews that you did? Who needs to see the artwork by the educators you worked with?

Bishop: Yeah, well, I mean, I'd love for this to be a book of some sort, which is what I'm thinking through right now. You know, I think it has strong messages for several audiences, including higher education and how we're training teachers to think about and practise ethical care with students. So right now, in teacher education, it's very fear based, and heavily relies on talking about the OCT guidelines, which we know are not only unrealistic in the grand scheme of things, but also really emotionally painful for a lot of QTBIPOC youth and teachers. So definitely teacher educators, as well as like, the curriculum. And, you know, the type of program that teacher education departments are following, you know, beyond this research. Beyond that, I really, really hope that this research reaches other scholars and educators who are writing and thinking about and practising care with QTBIPOC youth, so whether that be like a catered call setting, or like a community setting. And I made this pretty well known that like, I feel a strong allegiance to QTBIPOC Community, I mean, after all, that's like my own community. And while the work that I cited in my dissertation is influenced, and pulls from a lot of community writers, so Leah Lakshmi, who wrote *Dreaming Disability Justice* is, was an incredible and really profound writer who influenced my dissertation in that work and that, that work is not situated in academia, it was situated in the community. So yeah, I hope it's, I hope that I can turn it into a book of some sorts, that is, you know, accessible. And yeah, maybe models, what like a queer ethic of care could look like in different places. So, like, whether that be a classroom, you know, a workshop or like, your relationship with your friends and family. Like it's, it's not only like a framework for thinking about how we teach and practice care in schools, but also how we like practice care in relation with one another outside of schools. So yeah.

Tara: That's wonderful. Just before I let you go, you talked about how current teacher education work around ethical practices can often be based in fear. What do you think is the relationship between what places' licensing bodies like the Ontario College of Teachers, what do you think is behind this fear-based curriculum?

Bishop: Yeah, well, this came up as, as a feedback comment in one of the drafts of my dissertation was that it was important to make note that the OCT has these guidelines around teachers being in relation with students or like hugging them or sharing personal information or gifts or all that type of stuff because it's a legal issue, right? Like OCT needs to be protected and wants to be protected for legal reasons. Um, to make sure that like, if there's something that does happen where a predator, you know, does really inappropriate things with, with the children, that they have something to fall back on and be like, look, we have this document that says this, and kind of like all their corners are covered. And, you know, I don't, I'm not disagreeing with that. I think that's important. I think that's great. I think what it does, though, is, is counterproductive, because if that document actually worked, then there would be no more sexual assaults and harassment and cases of grooming, and inappropriate image sharing and whatnot, from teachers, to students. But it happens a lot. And it's still happening to this day. And so, what it's doing at the same time is not only not stopping the issue, which is awful, because it continues to happen. But it also makes teachers who are very loving and caring people who want to practice this type of disruptive care that's more personal, it makes them scared to do it at the same time. And so, it

means that some of our most vulnerable students, unfortunately, those QTBIPOC youth are not receiving affirming care. Yeah, I don't know if that answered your question.

Tara: It totally answers my question. So, one more follow up. Given that you have these ideas about the importance and research evidence about the importance of a queer, ethical practice of care? What would you do in a teacher education course on, on a queer ethic of care? Being at the center of that course? What would you want to talk about with new teachers when it comes to ethical practices of care?

Bishop: Yeah, well, it's such an exciting thing that you're mentioning, because part of my, my job at UBC, is going to be a lot of curriculum development and writing around obviously, gender and sexuality with like race and colonialism. But part of it is that I get to rethink about how teacher educators are taught about those topics. And so, I can definitely, you know, influence those things by thinking about care. And so, if I were to rewrite that curriculum, knowing that like, it's up to each individual professor and you know, educator to teach their class, I would want it to be something that acknowledges the realities that we're living in. So, like sharing those documents with those students, seeing that you guys went to professional advisory by OCT, making them aware of these things because they don't think it's, and again, I don't think it's ethical to send them out into a world and be like, you don't know about these documents, but to problematize them and be critical. And to not share them and be like, this is the state of the world. But to be like, this is the state of the world and it's not good enough. So asking them to understand the difference between like a legal document, you know, "capital E" Ethics, thinking about like, ethical, you know, protocols with like research or about ethical, you know, things with the law, and then also thinking about like "lowercase e" ethics when we're talking about personal ethics between two people or like you in your classroom, and the differences between those and the type of harm that can come if we misinterpret those or blend those lines together.

Tara: Bishop Owis, thank you so much for joining us today. I so loved hearing you speak about your doctoral research and will really very much look forward to reading the book that you write and publish from your thesis. Bishop Owis is an educator, community activist and postdoctoral fellow at the University of British Columbia, where they work with preservice and practicing teachers at SOGI UBC. They are a graduate from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, where they recently received their doctorate researching how educators understand their own ethical commitments of care when working with queer and trans youth of colour. Bishop's research explores the intersections of gender, sexuality, race and colonialism and education using arts-based pedagogies that center care and community thriving. All right, that's our podcast for today. You can find this podcast at [WWW.gendersexualitieschool.ca](http://WWW.gendersexualitieschool.ca). This episode was produced with the support of the New College Initiative Fund and from Doug Friesen, who is a PhD student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Thanks to Kate Reid, sound engineer Lisa Patterson, and musician Doug Friesen for creating the music that opens and closes the show. I'm Tara Goldstein. All the best.