



Sexuality Education in Canada: Is There a Role for Joy?

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June 13, 2025 (Friday)

16:00 – 17:30

Room 203, Runme Shaw Building, HKU

Chair: Professor Liz Jackson

Abstract:

How might centering joy help change the way we teach sex education in schools? In this talk, I explore how the idea of *queer joy*—celebrating LGBTQ+ people, stories, and identities—can be a powerful tool to challenge negative and fearful messages found in schools today. Across Canada and many other places, there has been a rise in anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-trans policies. At the same time, there has also been a rise in fear and confusion about what’s happening in sex ed classrooms. To understand these conditions better, I undertook a study in New Brunswick, Canada. I talked with 80 sex education teachers and worked with them in six creative workshops where they shared their challenges and hopes through conversation and art-making. I found that many teachers are struggling. They want to support their students, but they don’t always know how to teach in ways that respect the religious, cultural, and sexual diversity in their classrooms. This is precisely where queer joy comes in. Instead of focusing only on problems or fears, what if we centered our teaching on love, celebration, and connection? What if we imagined classrooms where all students—queer, straight, cis, trans, religious, and non-religious—feel seen, valued, and joyful? This talk invites us to think differently about sex ed. It’s not just about facts about disease and pregnancy production—sex ed classrooms can become spaces where everyone belongs, and where the future feels full of possibility.

About the speaker:

Dr Casey Burkholder is a Tier II Canada Research Chair in Social Justice in Youth and Child Studies and an Associate Professor at Concordia University. Previously, Casey worked as an Associate Professor at the University of New Brunswick (2017-2024). In choosing a research path at the intersection of resistance & activism, gender, sexuality, DIY media-making, art production, queer joy, and participatory archiving, Casey engages in research for social change through participatory visual approaches to local issues with 2SLGBTQ+ youth, adults, elders and teachers. She is the co-founder of the Fredericton Feminist Film Collective, and is the PI of Pride/Swell+ and SexualityNB.

