

BOOK REVIEW

ELIZABETH J. MEYER. *Gender, Bullying, and Harassment: Strategies to end sexism and homophobia in schools*. New York: Teacher's College Press (2009). 120 pp. Paper: \$24.95. (ISBN 0807749532). Cloth: \$54.00 (ISBN 0807749540).

This book is a down-to-basics examination of the problem of school harassment generally, as well as gender harassment, more specifically. Its six chapters provide an explanation of the phenomenon of harassment, children's experiences through stories, and a practical guide to creating school and community-wide change. The author reviews considerable research, which is enriched by specific examples and explanations. This is combined with practical tips to create an easy-to-read book.

The book begins with a specification of terms such as sexual orientation harassment (i.e., harassment directed at gay, lesbian, and bisexual people), gender nonconformity harassment (i.e., attacks on people's non-traditional sex role behaviours), and sexual harassment (i.e., talking about and interacting with students as if they are sexual objects). Although the first chapter addresses effects of harassment, little research is presented in support of the variety of ways victims of all forms of harassment are impacted. There is some mention of truancy, drug and alcohol abuse, and suicide as a reaction to various harassing behaviors (i.e., verbal, physical, cyber); however, there are few references to the substantial number of research articles documenting the multitude of behavioural, cognitive, and social negative consequences of bullying. In regards to the impact of gender harassment, which is more the focus of this book, the author presents some insights into victims' experiences. This is a difficult task, considering there is a paucity of such information in the empirical research.

In chapter two the author presents research on the disproportionate amount of bullying directed at gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth compared to heterosexual youth. These studies provide irrefutable evidence of the essential need to devote attention to creating safe school environments for all students.

Chapter three provides a broader perspective on the complexity of gender harassment by turning the focus towards school systems that model complicity.

ity in acts of harassment perpetrated by students. These systems are described as including school policies, procedures, curriculum demands, and teacher training. Most importantly, is the recognition of social norms for teachers and administrators within these systems that serve to maintain attitudes that are tolerant to gender harassment. In essence, the author is suggesting that adults may feel disempowered in harassment situations as much as do students when colleagues and superiors do not speak out or take action for fear of negative repercussions (e.g., in the form of a less desirable teaching assignment). Just as harassment can lead to student drop-out, it can lead to teacher burn-out. The author also points to the lack of interest, motivation, and concern on the part of adults to intervene when gender harassment occurs.

In addition to students' experiences of gender harassment addressed in the book, teachers' reports of these same aggressive behaviours directed at them by their colleagues are discussed in chapter four. Much of the content of this chapter is based on the author's own interviews with 5 heterosexual and 3 gay or bisexual teachers. Due to the value these teachers placed in their role as models and leaders of citizenship for students, most of the teachers expressed concern about gender harassment. They identified several obstacles, however, to being instrumental to effecting change. As a result, intervention often fell to one-on-one attempts with students to address incidents they witnessed.

Chapters five and six transition into actions on the part of society to manage gender harassment, and they include legal implications as well as institutional change. Specific legal cases are discussed along with school staff responsibilities. Often when discussing issues of child development with school staff, teachers are unaware of how the law applies to these issues. Thus, chapter five is perhaps the most informative chapter for teachers: it provides compelling reasons to attend to the interests of students, which simultaneously reduces their own personal risk. Finally, a school systems model of intervention is presented as a guide to administrators, teachers, students, parents, and the broader community. As with most well-intentioned anti-bullying programs, though, there is no evidence presented in the book for the effectiveness for any or all recommended strategies within the model. It is the responsibility of the readers, regardless of their role in the school, to look for confirmation that the strategies are indeed working towards, rather than hindering, change.

The author raises many challenging and sensitive issues, which are all difficult to address in a single source. Here are some thoughts for future work. The author begins to draw a parallel between heterosexual and non-heterosexual experiences of harassment, such as its negative impact, legal implications, and responsibility for all members of society. This is an avenue of research that has barely been explored. Another perspective on gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth is largely absent in the book: the need for unconditional acceptance for all youth. Adolescence is typically described as a time of exploring and developing identi-

ties. This includes taking risks, trial and error, and, inevitably, lots of mistakes. Youth, regardless of their sexual orientation, need support and understanding for their thoughts and feelings. Recognizing these fundamental needs as their *rights* puts the emphasis on support for all youth and de-emphasizes the tension between imposing beliefs for or against homosexuality. It is important for everyone, regardless of their stage of life, to question, explore, and challenge their beliefs to find meaning in their lives. For decades now there has been a call for safe schools for all; now is the time.

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