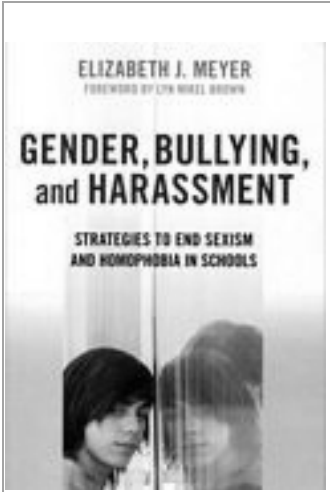


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Gender, Bullying, and Harassment: Strategies To End Sexism And Homophobia In Schools		
Author:	Elizabeth J. Meyer (2009)	
Publisher:	Teachers College Press	
Pages	ISBN	Price
101 pages	978-0-8077-4953-1	\$23.84 USD



Meyer’s comprehensive treatise on bullying undertakes a controversial subject within U.S. K-12 schools and provides guidelines that should make public and private educators more comfortable dealing with issues of homophobia and sexism. Based on her experiences as an educator, Meyer focuses on school culture and how environments perpetuate gendered and sexual orientation stereotypes and, by consequence, the bullying of LGBT students. Meyer, eloquently, delivers a stirring account of the hostile climate many LGBT students still face today in the U.S.A. She, convincingly, argues that bullying and harassment research should also include gendered harassment, as she sees this as the underlying cause of bullying against LGBT students. She addresses three types of gendered harassment prevalent in today’s classrooms: sexual orientation harassment, harassment for gender nonconformity, and (hetero) sexual harassment. Meyer gives a clear distinction of each form of harassment, in order for teachers to be well versed in the subtle nuances each form takes. She aims “to make explicit how gender, specifically the public performance of masculinities and femininities, shapes harmful behavior in schools and how educators and concerned adults can work to reduce the negative impacts of these all-too-common schoolyard behaviors” (p. 1).

Gender, Bullying, and Harassment has six chapters and two appendices. Chapter I describes the effects of gender on bullying and harassment. Meyer provides a detailed overview of the differences between bullying, (hetero) sexual harassment, sexual orientation harassment, and harassment for gender nonconformity. Chapter 2 provides research and statistics, which support claims on the devastating effects of bullying and harassment targeting LGBT

students. Chapter 3 raises important concerns for school officials and administrators on how a school's structure can either create a hostile or inclusive environment for LGBT students. Chapter 4 acknowledges who we are as educators has a direct effect on how we view and respond to bullying and harassment in the classroom. Chapter 5 challenges administrators and educators to protect themselves by learning laws concerning bullying and harassment. Chapter 6 summarizes how to transform school culture and offers recommendations for change. Appendix A supplies numerous resources to combat bullying and harassment. Appendix B provides a glossary associated with LGBT issues.

Meyer uses her study of four schools to identify two factors, external and internal, that effect the way teachers deal with bullying and harassment. External factors include: school policy, administrative procedures, curricular demands, teaching training, perception of the administration, interpersonal relationships, and school community. Internal factors include: teaching philosophy, educational biography, life experiences, and identity. Evidence from her research suggests that teachers' internal views are in alignment to those of their colleagues, more so than school policy. This is due to teacher's view of the inconsistent guidelines or policies concerning bullying. It is the internal views of teachers that guide them in their teaching. Personal beliefs and lived experiences are an enormous factor in whether or not teachers hold their students accountable for their behavior.

Obviously, each teacher has his or her own lived experiences and beliefs that will affect the way they address harassment or bullying against LGBT students in the classroom. Based on those beliefs, teachers can either ignore the harassment or become an advocate for LGBT rights. Meyer encourages the latter, obviously, because as teachers we are to provide a safe space for all students. Meyer suggests involving families and communities in creating policies regarding bullying and harassment. She admits that some communities values may not coincide with that of the schools, but "Teachers and administrators must feel supported in explicitly teaching the stated values of the school even if they may go against the religious and cultural values of some students' families. Public schools have a responsibility to prepare students for active citizenship in democracy. As such, it is important for them to teach the kinds of behavior, language, and interactions that are expected in public settings" (p. 70).

Clearly, not all teachers have experienced homophobia, racism, or sexism directly. In Meyer's interviews with teachers, those who had experienced bullying were more likely to be aware of bullying and harassment and more apt to respond to it more efficiently. This begs the question then, if certain teachers did not experience bullying as a teenager, how can they be better in touch with what is going on in their classroom regarding bullying. Can the majority identify with a minority's suffering? Meyer argues yes. She insists that more teacher education and leadership programs must be implemented to enlighten our teachers on issues they might otherwise avoid out of indifference. She also suggests that teachers and administrators must provide their students with clear rules in regards to bullying. For this to have a strong affect on students, all adults at the school must be committed to carrying out the policies. If not, it sends mixed messages and students are left to interpret various teacher responses on their own.

Meyer uses several case studies to highlight the responsibility schools and school districts have in protecting all students. She documents landmark cases where schools and school districts have been sued by students' parents for their indifference to heterosexual, gendered and sexual orientation harassment. These case studies, graphically, display how pervasive homophobia can be in schools and the toll it takes on students suffering from harassment.

On a personal note, I became infuriated while reading these cases, because as an educator myself, I feel it is my duty to support and encourage my students to be who they are and to go after their dreams, whether or not it fits heterosexual gender norms expectations. English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers can take away an invaluable lesson from Meyer's book: this is not an issue specific to U.S. classrooms. Rather, LGBT bullying and gendered harassment is very much a global concern. Although LGBT persons in the United States are in the midst of a civil rights battle to secure same-sex marriage equality, they are extended most of the same rights as their heterosexual counterparts and are in no eminent danger of being imprisoned for being gay. However, other countries have much harsher penalties for their LGBT citizens, such imprisonment, and in extreme cases, execution. English as a second language and foreign language educators have a responsibility to teach that all forms of hatred are wrong.

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