

Meyer, Elizabeth J. 2009. Gender, Bullying, and Harassment: Strategies to End Sexism and Homophobia in Schools. New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University. 120pp. \$24.95.

Gender, Bullying, and Harassment argues that most approaches to bullying in schools fail to address the underlying problem behind gender-related bullying and harassment. Cases of bullying and harassment involving sex, sexual orientation, and gender nonconformity stem from social factors and assumptions unrelated to typical bullying. Yet most schools' policies either treat such cases as bullying or ignore them.

Meyer distinguishes ordinary bullying from gendered harassment, which she divides into (a) sexual harassment, (b) sexual orientation harassment, and (c) harassment based on gender nonconformity. She relays the conclusions of studies on bullying and harassment, showing why typical responses to bullying will be ineffective against gendered harassment due to the ways gender, sex, and sexual orientation affect bullying power dynamics.

Meyer interviewed teachers about their experiences with bullying and harassment in order to identify formal and informal obstacles to dealing effectively with gendered harassment in school. The small sample size left me wondering how representative her teacher sample might be, and the self-selection process made me wonder how different the responses might have been had she procured her sample of educators differently. As she notes, a large percentage had a greater degree of sensitivity to these issues. That can provide information that someone sensitive to gender harassment issues might more likely detect. On the other hand, it gives less information on how teachers in general

would report their experiences, especially teachers from perspectives less friendly to Meyer's.

She summarizes (mostly) U.S. law, focusing on seven notable cases affecting gendered harassment. The book ends with suggestions for pursuing changes in policy and school culture toward reducing gendered harassment and the harm it causes. Appendices include (a) a list of resources, including such factors as cost, time commitment, and content and (b) a three-page glossary of terms.

The book's intended audience is "education professionals, family members, community groups, and other youth workers" and thus is not expected to be familiar with information or terminology common just within academia. Meyer communicates well toward non-specialists, and the glossary helps greatly when she uses terminology that is not well-known outside LGBT circles and gender/sex studies specialists. She tends to summarize the conclusions of sociological studies rather than subjecting her popular-level audience to research details.

In several places, however, this distance from details might have an opposite effect. When Meyer relies on studies' conclusions without saying how they established such conclusions, non-specialists might have little inclination or resources to pursue references, and they might be left wondering about the basis for those conclusions. More summary of the reasoning might have helped educate her intended audience better than simply giving citations and conclusions.

The goal of Meyer's book is to provide "an accessible source of information" to improve understanding of gendered harassment, prevent its occurrences, and facilitate successful responses when they do occur. She explains the issues well, arguing that

gendered harassment should be treated differently from ordinary bullying and presenting a course of action for parents, teachers, administrators, and students that allows for slow steps when those are all that are possible but with a long-term goal of fundamental change as the only permanent solution.

She argues that the best long-term method for rooting out gendered harassment is to change minds about the normalcy of behavior and identities viewed by many as deviant or morally problematic. One worry about how well this book will serve that goal involves a large group of potential allies who might see themselves as opposed to gendered harassment but who themselves hold those traditional views. They strongly disapprove of calling anyone “fag” or making fun of people for any reason, even if they also disapprove of the non-traditional identities and behavior that are being made fun of in these cases. It would be hard to get them on board with removing heteronormativity from our assumptions if they think heterosexuality is in fact normative, based on religious and/or philosophical commitments that will not easily disappear. Yet they might well be allies in the broader fight against gender harassment.

This group might feel alienated by her lumping together three different things under “heteronormativity” as she does in her glossary – “a bias toward heterosexuality that denigrates and devalues GLB people. Also, the presumption that heterosexuality is superior to homosexuality or prejudice, bias, or discrimination based on these things.” There are people who fit all three definitions, but some have moral objections to homosexuality and yet oppose many forms of discrimination against GLBT people and disapprove of denigrating and devaluing anyone, even those whose identity formulations or behavior they see as wrong. To them, the three components of the definition are not in

the same category, and they could feel insulted by such a definition. Meyer might argue that deeper moral issues are at stake, but I wonder if it is counter-productive to alienate potential allies.

At the end, Meyer gives an argument that lasting change requires deconstructing gender identity. How we divide the world by gender, sex, and sexual orientation is familiar and comfortable. It will take hard work questioning and reconceiving to transform our categorizations and assumptions, but she urges that we do so, because some people in fact identify along other axes and feel uncomfortable being classified and identified according to standard conceptions. She can't think that it's always wrong to make someone uncomfortable for any reason, because she thinks most of us need to be uncomfortable to reject our traditional conceptions. But then she needs more argument to move from the "is" (some people are uncomfortable) to the "ought" (we should alter arrangements so they're more comfortable). As a philosopher, I was looking for a stronger line of reasoning, since her strategy includes the hope of convincing people away from traditional assumptions. The purpose of this volume is not to provide philosophical support, however, and she does accomplish her limited aims well.

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