

# JoLLE@UGA

JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE & LITERACY EDUCATION

Volume 10 Number 1

Spring 2014

Editor  
Stephanie Anne Shelton

<http://jolle.coe.uga.edu>

---

## Review of *Generation Bullied 2.0: Prevention and Intervention Strategies for Our Most Vulnerable Students*

Miller, sj, Burns, D. B., & Johnson, T. S. (Eds.). (2013). *Generation Bullied 2.0: Prevention and Intervention Strategies for Our Most Vulnerable Students*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

ISBN: 978-1433120718

Pages: 228

Stephanie Anne Shelton  
The University of Georgia

---

Please cite this article as:

Shelton, S.A. (2014). Review of generation bullied 2.0: prevention and intervention strategies for our most vulnerable students. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education* [Online], 10(1), 204-210. Retrieved from <http://jolle.coe.uga.edu/>

Though the numbers differ from study to study, there is consistent research to demonstrate the very real and pressing issue of bullying in America's schools. In 2001, a study found that 75 percent of American public school students were bullied (Nansel et al.). A 2007 study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics found that over 30 percent of American students, ages 12 to 18, reported being bullied in some capacity. A survey in 2009 determined that 70-80 percent of students had been bullied in school or cyberspace (*School Bullying*). 48 percent of polled teachers and administrators reported in a 2012 survey that students made them aware of bullying on a weekly basis (School Safety 911). And, when surveys focus on specific groups of students, such as those with special needs or who are LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning), the numbers are typically higher and more consistent. sj Miller, Leslie David Burns, and Tara Star Johnson's *Generation Bullied 2.0* features chapters that seek to educate readers on the issue of bullying in pre-K-12 schools, especially as it affects particular student groups, and to inform readers of potential responses and even solutions to the issue. *Generation Bullied 2.0* begins with a Foreword by Elizabeth J. Meyer, one of the leading scholars in the discussion of bullying. Meyer situates bullying within cultural norms (p. xi), which links to later chapters' efforts to demonstrate how cultural norms enable and perpetuate bullying in schools. Dianne Smith follows with the Preface, in which she describes her own experiences with being bullied and retrospectively realizing that she was also a bully. In addition, she challenges the "regime of truth" that allows American society to normalize bullying as "kids being kids" (p. xiv). From the start, the book situates bullying as steadily situated on political and cultural foundations that the authors seek to shake and topple.

Chapter 1 begins by not only outlining the content of the following nine chapters, but also by arguing, in relation to the Foreword and Preface, that bullying is a "systemic issue that lives and thrives on the vulnerable in the social environment in which are pre-K-12 students are supposed to learn" (p. 1). Miller briefly references Dan Olweus (1993), whose definition of bullying strongly influences most bullying-related programs and legal documents, to contextualize later chapters' references to Olweus's research. In doing so, Miller also provides reference tables to establish various forms of bullying, differentiating as Olweus does between active and passive bullying, and providing examples of each (pp. 7-8).

Chapter 2 begins the series of chapters that examine bullying's effects on particular student populations, with Miller and Gilligan focusing on LGBTQGV (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, gender variant) students. The authors provide statistics to clearly indicate how vulnerable this student population is to all forms of bullying, with most studies demonstrating that gender identification and sexual orientation are the reasons that students are most often bullied by students, and even adults (p. 39-41). Pascoe (2007) says that "queer bullying," as Miller and Gilligan term it, happens because our society perpetuates "heterosexist and homophobic discourses about" gendered self-presentations and identifications, which they say "permeate(s) the educational process" and pop culture media (as cited in Miller & Gilligan, 2013, p. 36). The chapter provides discussion of various laws, issues, and societal ramifications of this type of bullying, with the authors concluding with examples of ways that LGBTQGV bullying is normalized and prevalent in schools (p. 42).

Chapter 3 addresses the societally common but typically ignored issue of weight/size discrimination. Johnson and Cutter offer examples of legal cases in which students and their

families successfully argued that schools are responsible for protecting students who are bullied because of their weight or size (pp. 51-52). They follow with a discussion of what a major issue weight and size are in American culture, linking the problem to medical reports and media representations (p. 52). The chapter concludes with a description of Cutter's action research project as a pre-service teacher, for which she posed questions that encouraged her students to discuss weight discrimination (pp. 57-58).

Chapter 4 discusses the bullying that students with disabilities endure in schools. Morgan and Adams explain that a "common thread connecting students with disabilities is that some of their characteristics deviate from the educational norm, and as a result they require individualized educational services" (p. 62), which makes singling this population out easier for bullies. In addition, the authors consider the ways that students in this group might become bullies themselves, or be mistaken for bullies by others, due to their emotional and/or behavioral needs (p. 68). Morgan and Adams then provide information on legislation that protects these particular students and encourage readers to consider ways that classrooms might better support students with disabilities rather than labeling them as "different" or "deviant" (p. 73).

Chapter 5 considers the rarely discussed issue of Black "insult rituals," which Rivers and Espelage refer to as "roasting," and which my students used to call "janking" (p. 75). The authors consider the ways that roasting is often permitted as a cultural feature, but that surveyed Black students often felt bullied by the practice (p. 79). Rivers and Espelage provide historical contextualization of the practice, situating it in slavery, and explain why the practice is problematic both socioculturally and individually, for students who feel threatened and marginalized by roasting (p. 82).

Chapter 6 focuses on Latina and Latino students, and the chapter begins with the heartwrenching story of David Ray Ritcheson, a high school student who committed suicide after being attacked by white supremacists (pp. 85-86). Rodriguez then goes on to describe how the "challenges facing many Latino students are far greater than those facing their peers, with patterns of bullying and harassment appearing in our news feed every week" (p. 87). The challenges are often linked to issues such as looking or sounding different from the dominant cultural/social norms (p. 90), and Rodriguez ends the chapter by examining ways that pre-service and in-service teachers might confront not only Latina and Latino bullying, but all forms of bullying that are the result of students being perceived as different.

Chapter 7 takes on the relatively new but extremely important issue of cyber-digital bullying. Miller and Beyer provide a chart that outlines the various forms that cyber bullying may take (p. 101), and then discuss the ways that concerns over public humiliation and revoked internet privileges prevent some students from coming forward to guardians or other adults when they are cyber bullied (pp. 102-103). The chapter then offers warning signs for teachers and guardians to attend to, in order to determine if a student is being cyber bullied, and considers ways that digital media might be used to empower and support students and to combat cyber-digital bullies (pp. 108-109).

Chapter 8 examines the far-reaching consequences of bullying for both the affected students and American schools and society. Burns writes, "Allowing classrooms to become psychologically

threatening places for young people is antithetical to nearly everything that we claim we want from our schools, everything we want for our children, and everything we want young people to learn and do as they grow into adulthood” (p. 114). The chapter considers the issue of “stereotype threat,” when “real or perceived threats...lead to concerns that one will be judged or treated negatively based on false assumptions about one’s identities” (p. 115) and how stereotype threat and bullying affect students’ cognition (pp. 117-118) and poison what should be a safe classroom environment (p. 123).

Chapter 9 provides larger contexts for bullying, including national and international information. Miller writes that he and his co-authors “recognize that for all of the stories and statistics we have shared here, our American culture’s complicity in supporting bullying as a rite of passage, along with its failure to enact changes that end such support, not only condones bullying and allows it to continue but also sends messages about who and what we value as a nation and as civilized human beings” (p. 131). The chapter provides a variety of possible interventions and discusses programs and legislation successfully implemented by other nations, such as the United Kingdom and Norway (pp. 134-135).

Chapter 10 is a resource chapter that provides lesson plan ideas and school-wide ideas for each of the forms of bullying that the authors discuss. The ideas, the authors say, are ways to encourage action and change, so that all participants in American education can become “agents of change today” (p. 173).

This book is an important examination of the ways that American society permits and even encourages bullying inside and outside schools, and the ways that bullying is always a culturally informed and often supported action. The authors’ thorough inclusion of statistical information and legislative decisions and protections are important resources for any person who is concerned for the welfare of American schools and school children.

However, in attempting to cover so much in such a brief span, there are moments when the book falters. Throughout, there are inconsistencies in the expected knowledge base of the reader. For example, the acronym LGBTQ is explained (p. 21), but when Miller references a GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network) study, the shifting to GLBTQ is not explained. For people who are familiar and comfortable with the acronym, the change is minute, barely noticeable. However, as someone who often discusses these issues with the uninitiated, I know that the change has confused many. Another example is the seeming contradictions between some of the authors’ personal narratives. Smith discusses her personal disappointment with the realization that in retaliating against a boy who had often bullied her, she had become a bully too (p. xiv); Johnson, in her acknowledgements, recounts her father’s celebration of the day that he and a friend “jumped the bully” who had terrorized them (p. xix). Such conflicting positions toward the book’s central issue make it difficult to determine what the contributors view as appropriate responses to bullying.

I also worry, as a teacher educator, about some of the moments in the book when suggestions that authors make seem to stretch beyond teachers’ qualifications into those of school counselors. In one account, a student teacher is unsure of how to respond to a student who struggles with “abject self-loathing” of her body (p. 56). The chapter concludes with the student teacher reflecting on ways that the classroom might offer opportunities for students to safely and

thoughtfully consider such issues. I know that many novice teachers want badly to soothe their students' hurts and help solve the students' problems. I think that the book offers responsible and realistic options in this particular case, but there is no acknowledgement that there might need to be lines drawn, even legally, in terms of what a teacher (and especially a pre-service teacher) might deal with directly.

A final critique is something else that is not fully explored, when it seems responsible to have done so. A number of the solutions that the book offers, in individual chapters and in the Chapter 10 resource chapter, do not acknowledge resource limitations. Some of these limitations include basics, such as the fact that many teachers, especially in districts primarily comprised of low-income minority students who are often bullying victims, have fully prescribed curricula that permit little or no deviation. I do not mean to suggest that teachers should not include culturally sensitive materials and education throughout their curriculum, but I do not believe that this book takes into account the extreme level of accountability, including prescribed curricula, that many teachers face today.

And while the book acknowledges that idealism is important but not sufficient, there are times when the idealism seems to move from positive and productive to limiting. An example is the Georgia anti-bullying law that the book references in several chapters (e.g., p. 12, p. 21). As someone who has taught and researched in Georgia, I know that the existence of a law means little when the cultural beliefs and norms informing interpretation and implementation of a law weaken the legislation's intended purpose. There are moments when the authors acknowledge the reality of laws and rules not necessarily being as effective as possible, but ultimately, their faith in school- and state-level programs and government mandates are unrealistically optimistic. There is ample evidence that even the most comprehensive anti-bullying programs may fall short (Hu, 2011), particularly in light of the book's strong emphasis on the ways that sociocultural normativity shapes what schools enforce and punish.

The book's shortcomings seem primarily to result both from the text ambitiously covering so much at once, which is admirable and important, and from an attempt to make the chapters and solutions applicable to as many people, areas, and situations as possible.

I do, however, strongly recommend this book to any teachers, researchers, community members, parents, or students who want or need to know more about types of bullying (and the book does a good job over covering a great deal of ground here), the research on those issues, and potential resources to support victims and to address individual and systemic perpetrators. The bottom line is that this book is timely, thoughtful, and thorough. It offers resources and suggestions that are rarely available to educators, all in a single text. In summing up the Conference on English Education Commission on Social Justice's statement, Miller writes, "Bullying is an issue of social justice. We believe all students should be free to study, learn, thrive, and grow in school environments that foster their intellectual, physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health with regard to promoting respect across multiple social categories" (p. 28). The book's overall goals are ones that nearly all educators share, despite the ways that teachers are often implicated in bullying. Miller continues, "We believe that every student deserves to be supported and should have enhanced (not limited) opportunities for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. School should be about learning, not survival" (p. 28). This book strives to provide chapters that help

educators to promote and even realize such learning environments; despite the consistent findings that bullying continues in America's schools, there is hope in such a future.

## References

- Hu, W. (2011, August 30). Bullying law puts New Jersey schools on spot. *New York Times*. Retrieved from [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/31/nyregion/bullying-law-puts-new-jersey-schools-on-spot.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/31/nyregion/bullying-law-puts-new-jersey-schools-on-spot.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)
- Indictments in Atlanta public schools cheating scandal*. (2013, March 29). Retrieved from [http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/03/29/us/atlanta-schools-indictment.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/03/29/us/atlanta-schools-indictment.html?_r=0)
- Nansel, T. R., Overpeck, M., Pilla, R. S., Ruan, W. J., et al. (2001). Bullying behaviors among us youth prevalence and association with psychosocial adjustment. *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*, 285(16), 2094-2100.
- National Center for Education Statistics U.S. Department of Education, (2007). *Student reports of bullying and cyber-bullying: Results from the 2007 school crime supplement to the national crime victimization survey* (NCES 2011 -316). Retrieved from U.S. Department of Education website: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011316.pdf>
- Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do*. Mahwah, NJ: Blackwell.
- School Safety 911. (2012). *2012 national survey on bullying*. Retrieved from <http://www.schoolsafety911.org/PDF/2012SSACBullyingSurvey.pdf>