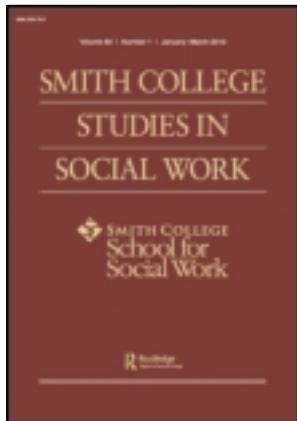


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Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Smith College Studies in Social Work

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/wscs20>

From the Dress-Up Corner to the Senior Prom: Navigating Gender and Sexuality Diversity in PreK-12 Schools, by Jennifer Bryan

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Published online: 11 Jul 2013.

To cite this article: Jean LaTerz (2013) From the Dress-Up Corner to the Senior Prom: Navigating Gender and Sexuality Diversity in PreK-12 Schools, by Jennifer Bryan, *Smith College Studies in Social Work*, 83:2-3, 324-327, DOI: [10.1080/00377317.2013.802192](https://doi.org/10.1080/00377317.2013.802192)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00377317.2013.802192>

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Bryan, Jennifer. (2012). *From the Dress-Up Corner to the Senior Prom: Navigating Gender and Sexuality Diversity in PreK-12 Schools*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 354 pp., \$ 90.00 (hardcover), \$ 42.70 (softcover).

Jennifer Bryan has written a book, including sample curricula, that is timely and much needed given the passing of same-sex marriage laws in several states, the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” and the increasingly accepted notion of sex and gender being on a continuum rather than categorical. The content of *From the Dress-Up Corner to the Senior Prom* should be a part of the human sexuality curriculum in every school system. The text is designed to raise awareness of, educate about, and advocate for those children from pre-K through high school who do not fall into the still-accepted binary category of “male/female” and “gay/straight” and should be read and use by all personnel who work in a school system.

In the Introduction, Bryan opens with two incidents that are clear examples of the ongoing, pervasive, and frequently unconscious gender stereotypes that continue to occur on a daily basis and set the context for the book. The first came from Bryan’s own childhood experience and the second was an example from her work as a school consultant and clinical psychologist. These two examples are important to mention because they set the tone for the entire volume.

Bryan frequently speaks to the reader directly—uncannily—at just the opportune moment where the personal touch is needed. The book is replete with case examples that aptly illustrate the topic addressed followed by thought-provoking questions, developmentally appropriate strategies, and additional resources that are doable and practical.

Of note, Dr. Bryan introduces a new construct that serves as the seminal paradigm for all that follows. This construct, called Gender and Sexuality Diversity (GSD), as Bryan states, “includes everyone and recognizes the centrality of gender and sexuality in all human beings” (p. xxi). And one critical part of GSD is biodiversity, “the natural variation that characterizes all species on the planet” (p. xxi).

GSD is set in the context of two essential frameworks. The first framework holds that all education must have “a thorough, contemporary understanding of gender and sexual identity development in children and adolescents, paying particular attention to the impact of heteronormative expectations” (p. xxii). The second overarching framework holds that the “school mission and educational philosophy must be central reference point for establishing policy and best ‘good’ pedagogical practices” (p. xxii). Thus, effective and comprehensive attention to GSD must be grounded in each individual educator and must be an integral part of the school system as a whole. What follows are very brief descriptions of each chapter of the book the objective being to give the reader a sense of the book’s content—chapter by chapter.

The first chapter, “Gender and Sexuality Diversity at School: What Educators Need to Know and Then Some,” presents a comprehensive overview of gender and sexual identity development and includes a clear and detailed definition of terms used throughout the text. Chapter 2, “Heteronormativity at School,” describes the phenomenon of heteronormativity—that is, society’s inclination to “box in pairs” (i.e., male/female, straight/gay, etc.). Bryan does an excellent job here, giving the reader example after example of how heteronormativity is present and often unnoticed in schools on a daily basis (note her observations on Disney stories!!). In Chapter 3, “A Framework for Engaging GSD at School: Educational Mission; Best ‘Good’ Pedagogical Practices,” Dr. Bryan stresses that GSD must be an integral part of the school system’s educational mission. It is from the educational mission that sets the central framework and goals for curriculum development and implementation and, more importantly, the school culture and climate. Chapter 4, “Understanding What You See; Thinking Critically About What You See,” will most likely serve as an “eye opener” for most readers. It is here that Bryan gives scenario after scenario collected from real teachers, parents, and students describing case examples of GSD dilemmas that are organized by developmental stage.

The next four chapters shift from defining and describing GSD and heteronormativity to a focus on professional development and curriculum

implementation and integration. Chapter 5, “GSD Professional Development: ‘Learnings’ That Lead to Best Practices,” is divided into three sections: (1) critical approaches to GSD professional development, (2) creating the context for learning, and (3) program evaluation: What did I learn? What should we do next? The chapter ends with a lengthy and comprehensive list of additional resources for the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

The next two chapters are titled “GSD in Early Childhood and Elementary Education: Strategies, Application and Curriculum” and “GSD in Middle and High School Education: Development, Safety and Curriculum,” respectively. Chapter 6 provides “strategies, approaches, models and lessons for engaging gender and sexuality diversity with pre-K–6 students” (pp. 151–152). Chapter 7 addresses middle and high school students. The content of this chapter includes the developmental stage of each group, the school safety needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and intersex (LGBTQI) students, and then presents “an integrated approach that promotes contextualized learning about GSD” (p. 197). Two exemplar curricula are offered: one for Grades 6 through 9 and one for Grades 9 through 12.

Chapter 8, “Comprehensive Health and Sexuality Education,” describes the importance for all children to receive a sequential, developmentally appropriate health and wellness information. Curricula for Comprehensive Health and Wellness (CHW) and Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) are described for each grade level. Bryan includes a time-tested, effective CHW program (Charles River School, Dover, MA). Schools who already have CHW and/or CSE programs in place could easily incorporate the GSD curriculum.

The final two chapters attend to leadership and professional identity. Dr. Bryan begins Chapter 9, “Leadership, Policies and Programs,” by stressing that “leadership for anti-bias policies and programs can and must come from students and parents” (p. 267) in addition to school administrators and staff—in other words, all school system constituencies. Leadership styles, obstacles to change, the management of change, and various outside influences are then addressed followed by a section on creating and implementing policies. The final section presents exemplar programs that support GSD education. Chapter 10, “Personal and Professional Identity in GSD Education,” begins with an exploration of where the personal and professional meet. Bryan makes a vital point for all instructors stating, “**Who you are** (i.e., identity) and **how you conduct yourself** (i.e., integrity) serve as fundamental pedagogical conduits for teaching and learning” (p. 318, bold in original). Here, Bryan ties together heteronormativity and professionalism in terms of how teachers, straight and gay, can “come out” in terms of supporting and raising GSD consciousness. The second section addresses the “visibility dilemma” for LGBTQI educators (i.e., all school staff) in terms of three options: invisibility, simple visibility, and surplus visibility. The choice of visibility level

depends on the school culture and climate that includes administrative support and buy-in from others in the community. Again, Bryan includes thought-provoking case examples from her experience as a GSD consultant.

Jennifer Bryan's *From the Dress-Up Corner to the Senior Prom* is a teaching and resource text about gender sexuality diversity that is laid out in language and content geared for teachers, support staff, and school administrators who work with students from early childhood through high school. Dr. Bryan's text would also be quite the useful resource for other professionals who work with children in nonschool settings (i.e., camps, after-school programs, day care, etc.). The information, strategies, curricula, and resources contained in the book are well researched and thoroughly cover GSD from the vantage point of teachers, parents, and students through case examples, questions for discussion, developmental context, and illustrations.

A note of caution is warranted at this point. Unfortunately, there are many schools and school systems that are not ready to review or adopt this subject matter as part of the curriculum. Thus, some readers may be able to make better use of this text informally and look for ways to make gradual gains in raising GSD awareness in different ways whether in class or among their colleagues.

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