

Review of *Sexuality in School: The Limits of Education* by Jen Gilbert, University of Minnesota Press, paperback, 2014, 120pp., \$20.00

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Discovering the new work by Jen Gilbert was particularly valuable, applicable, and timely for me as feminist/queer education researcher. Situating firmly in the philosophical, ontological, and epistemological foundations of education, Gilbert provides significant contributions to queer and sexuality scholarship. I found *Sexuality in School: The Limits of Education* effectively challenging as it relates to the socially constructed boundaries and norms of education. This work is a robust commitment to the messiness, complications, and contradictions that circulate within knowledge production of school aged children.

Gilbert begins the text by situating her positionalities as a queer educator who is emotionally invested in the subject of school as a social justice advocate/activist. Additionally, she provides the theoretical lens to which she examines schooling as a productive force. Queer/after-queer theory intersects with psychoanalysis enabling Gilbert to discursively articulate the ways sexuality is always already part of schooling. She demonstrates how sexuality is operationalized to manage cultural norms and reminds educators to think with theory towards inventing space for “our unintelligible selves” and unleashing possibilities (pg. xxiv).

The book has five topical chapters that are all entangled but have specific analytic goals. The first chapter is crucial as it frames and serves as a methodological tool for the following chapters. The following chapters expound on the assertions that are contextualized in chapter one. Additionally, Gilbert strikes a strong balance between theoretical inquiry and applied examples. In doing so, she breathes life into the complexities of sexuality in schooling while creating accessible, material illustrations of educational theories in practice.

In the first chapter, Gilbert effectively delineates how adults and at-large cultural norms inform school environments and in turn regulates and limits the metaphysical “child” and childhood sexuality. By eliminating queer knowledge, becomings, and possibilities from educational arenas, schools imagine that they successfully have saved our future through preserving hope that exists within the rhetorical narrative of the innocent, pure, child; yet, Gilbert notes how quite the opposite occurs. She articulates how this productive, xenophobic epistemology harms all people (e.g. students, parents, teachers, administrator, the public) who are entrenched within and place value into this narrow, discriminatory schooling cultural climate.

In the later chapters, she continues to skillfully demystify sex and sexuality of children, unveils the flawed nature of liberal sex and sexuality education, and challenges and encourages schools to be hospitable for open discussions about sexuality, sex, desire, and pleasure. Gilbert is able to demonstrate how heteronormative sexuality is entrenched in schools, the deliberate actions that schools take to mute and/or curb non-normative and unimaginable sexual possibilities, and the political becomings of “the child” that adults exploit for their own particular agenda. Her call to action and mantra throughout the text is that “being on the right side of an issue is not enough if, in standing there, we erode the possibilities for new, more expansive understandings of sexuality and learning” (pg. xiii).

In review of the text, I contemplated how Gilbert's work might be effectively utilized in formal higher education curriculums. Gilbert's audience is clearly a person who has exposure and familiarity to queer/feminist/discursive/critical theoretical frameworks. While I would use this text with pre-service teachers, I believe there might be language barriers as it is heavily grounded in depths of philosophical knowledge. However an instructor who takes care to supplement the text chapters with additional practitioner-based research, further philosophical readings, or provides space for in-depth classroom discussion, Gilbert's text would encourage students to imagine possibilities and critically recognize and interrogate the borders that are erected around educational environments. Additionally, I think it would be good for any gender/sexuality classroom curriculum and should be a staple for any graduate studies program in education.

One concern. I would have liked Gilbert to spend more time delineating her conceptualization of sexuality as inclusive of sexual orientation *and* gender through her deployment of after-queer as her theoretical approach. She addresses this briefly in the introduction and further in an endnote. Knowing how often sexuality and gender is dangerously conflated, I think this purposeful and strategic decision by her needs to be more pronounced for troubling of these complex concepts. I agree with Gilbert conceptualization that "sexual and gender minorities are cast in schools as repositories for sexuality itself and how the categories we use to name sexuality, however provisional and however necessary, end up describing and limiting the range of intimate possibilities available" (pg. 105). In this assertion, she challenges me and the readers to imagine the dangers and possibilities that rise with entwining these two intra-acting concepts. This minor notation does not overshadow the value that this text brings to schooling and education.

Overall, I personally found Jen Gilbert's work a highly desirable addition to sexuality in education literature. I have already incorporated this work into my own research inquiries. It is challenging, thought-provoking, and pertinent. In the era that educators must be cultural competent to effectively engage their students, Gilbert provides educators with the ability to imagine possibilities for their classrooms and schools.

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