

Book Review / Recension d'ouvrage

Growing into Resilience: Sexual and gender minority youth in Canada

by André Grace with Kristopher Wells

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Growing into Resilience: Sexual and Gender Minority Youth in Canada, written by André Grace with Kristopher Wells, is an excellent theoretical and practical "...transdisciplinary text for use in caring professional preparation" (Grace, 2015, p. xviii). This resource can expand caregivers' understanding of the socio-cultural, legal, educational, and medical landscape for sexual and gender minority (SGM) youth in Canada, and enhance their ability to engage in anti-homo/transphobic professional practice. Underpinned by queer and trans* theoretical perspectives, this book highlights discipline-significant policies (e.g., Ontario Safe Schools legislation) and suggests practical ways to better serve a generally disenfranchised 'group' of youth. The text is divided into two parts: "Steeling Life in the Face of Adversity" and "From at Risk to At Promise" and spans eight chapters—including corresponding InterTexts, which are thoughtfully dispersed throughout to spotlight the experiences and perspectives of SGM youth. Chapters 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, and the InterTexts specifically address SGM concerns and needs in schooling, and thus will be the foci of this book review.

In "Making it Better Now," Grace introduces the processes of steeling life, growing into resilience, and being at promise. These are respectively described as non-linear

processes of capacity building, skill development, and ability mobilization. Locating these terms within a historical and contemporary context of hetero/cissexist challenges, the author describes how these concepts prompt caring professionals to re-evaluate their perceptions of SGM youth as victims (see also Wright, 2005). The strengths-based framework requires the reader to turn attention to SGM youths' self-taught advocacy skills, and to reflect on the ways in which institutions, most notably health care and education, can change to make things better now for queer and trans* youth.

In Chapter 2, "Gender Beautiful: Living in the Fullness of One's Affirmed Gender Identity and True Gender Self," Grace asserts that gender is "...an intricate ecological process and construction influenced by history, social expectations, acculturation, geography, and politics" (p. 45). The author employs trans* theoretical perspectives to unpack gender-related terminology, and by doing so interrogates cissexism and genderism (see Miller, 2014), while prompting the reader to challenge gender trans*gression—the Othering of gender creativity. Like Manning, Sansfacon, & Meyer (2014), Chapter 2 explores lesser-known terminology, such as genderqueer and gender creative, to acknowledge the spectral and fluid nature of gender, and encourage caregivers to affirm each youth's true gender self. A large portion of this chapter compares Diane Ehrensaft's Model of Relational True Gender Self Therapy with Kenneth J. Zucker's Developmental, Biopsychosocial Model Used In Treating Children Diagnosed with Gender Identity Disorder. Since Zucker's model attempts to 'correct' gender trans*gressions, it is "...inconsistent with [Ontario] provincial and international human rights guidelines..." (Pyne, 2015), and is thoroughly critiqued.

Chapter 4, "Policies to Protect Sexual and Gender Minority Youth in Schooling and Health Care," signposts a barrage of SGM-based health and educational disparities, and explores the development and implementation of enumerated federal and provincial policies (i.e., anti-homo/transphobic provisions) to address hetero/cissexist regimes. In this chapter, Grace astutely focuses on how the education system has failed SGM youth, yet may ad'just' to—at the very least—fulfil the obligations embedded in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Chapter 5, "The Marc Hall Prom Predicament: Queer Individual Rights v. Institutional Church Rights in Canadian Public Education," examines the longstanding debate 'between' institutional rights (i.e., the constitutional right to have Catholic schools/morality) and individual rights (SGM youths' rights within publicly funded denominational

schools/ethics) (see also Lapointe & Kassen, 2013; Martino, 2014). Through a critical analysis of religious resistance and queer student activism, the authors simultaneously erect a Catholic/queer binary and problematize its very existence—a strategy that is unavoidable. Grace and Wells assert that the Catholic Church privatizes queer “...by defining and setting parameters to it in institutional terms that segregate being religious from being sexual in ways which limit queer acceptability, access, and accommodation...” (p. 147), and by doing so provoke thought on queer and religious intersectionality.

“Gay-Straight Alliances [GSA] and the Quest for Recognition and Accommodation in Canadian Schools” examines the history and sociocultural significance of school-based GSAs. The authors accurately position GSAs as (marginal) social-supportive spaces—specifically within Catholic education—that compensate for hetero/cisnormative learning environments (see also Rasmussen, 2006). Although GSA resistance from denominational leaders, school boards, and administrators is well documented (see Callaghan, 2014; Lapointe & Kassen, 2013; Martino, 2014), the authors overlook the innovative and supportive work of some Ontario Catholic high schools (see Liboro et al., 2015). Although this research is extremely limited (Martino, 2014), such inclusions would have provided a more nuanced account of anti-homo/transphobic education in Catholic high schools. The concluding section is extremely compelling because it signposts the future of GSAs and schooling in general if educators were to privilege student voice (Cook-Sather, 2002).

InterTexts, first-hand accounts of SGM youth steeling life, growing into resilience, and being at promise, frame and bring to life each chapter. Youth contributions challenge preconceptions of SGM youth as victims (see also Wright, 2005), in the actions and experiences they describe, and through the politics of visibility they exemplify. By using their real names and identifying their communities, the youth refuse to be positioned as ‘vulnerable’ and in need of protection, a narrative often associated with SGM youth—even within this book. In choosing visibility, the authors call for the needs of queer and trans* youth in every Canadian community to be recognized, emphasize the importance of caregiver education and knowledge development, and demand that SGM youth be recognized as advocates—not merely victims of oppression. Their narratives also prompt professionals to examine their current practices. As Sam purports in InterText 8, the road to hell is paved with good intentions, and many times educator anti-homo/bi/transphobic intervention does more harm than help. The InterTexts represented largely

highlight the voices of youth who fit the description of ‘at promise’ because they engage in SGM-related activism. While these experiences and voices are invaluable, it is important to note that not all SGM youth who are thriving are drawn to this: identifying as queer or trans* does not come with an obligation to educate or serve any given community. While some youth may choose this path, educators should be mindful of imposing this role on youth.

In sum, this book may bolster preservice teachers’ and graduate students’ awareness of systemic homo/transphobia, hetero/cisnormativity, heterosexism and genderism—a much needed departure from resources and pedagogies that are grounded in safety and inclusion discourses (see Britzman, 1995; Linville, 2009; Lapointe, 2015), and thus, build their capacity to address and (hopefully) prevent SGM-based oppression.

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