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Sexual Harassment in Our Schools; and How to Stop Sexual Harassment in Our Schools [book reviews]

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Book Reviews

Sexual Harassment in Our Schools: What Parents and Teachers Need to Know to Spot It and Stop It. By Robert J. Shoop and Jack W. Hayhow, Jr. Allyn and Bacon, 1994

How to Stop Sexual Harassment in Our Schools: A Handbook and Curriculum Guide for Administrators and Teachers. By Robert J. Shoop and Debra J. Edwards. Allyn and Bacon, 1994

Acknowledgement of sexual harassment is coming slowly to our society. The beginning is still unclear. In the collective consciousness of the American public it probably came to light with the Confirmation Hearings of Supreme Court Judge Clarence Thomas. It is not new. It has been there beneath the surface and continues to erupt in incidents such as the Tailhook scandal. The issue is sexual harassment of both children and adults, and up until confirmation hearings for Judge Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court went beyond the political spectrum and into the vernacular of the American public. But where does it go from there and what effect will it have? One effect has been an increasing recognition of the issues of sexual harassment in governmental, corporate and educational institutions. The wake-up call was not the hearing in itself but the ramifications of a charge of sexual harassment. The explosion of litigation pertaining to this issue has alerted both the public and private sector to some of the consequences associated with sexual harassment. The intense media exposure of the issue has both informed and warned the public. Education and dissemination of the impact of sexual harassment must follow this awakening.

Robert Shoop has taken upon himself the task of co-authoring two books that bring to light the various issues interlinking sexual harassment and targeting it's association with the educational system. Along with myriad challenges that the educational system confronts, sexual harassment is an increasingly complex concern. Its importance rises with the increased numbers of reported incidents and the monetary and psychological effects that accompany it.

After years of research and practical observation of intervention and prevention of sexual harassment, Shoop and co-authors present us with two books, one for parents and teachers, the second for administration and teachers. Both books provide guidelines to identify, prevent, and ultimately eliminate sexual harassment in the schools. In their discussion of sexual harassment in the schools the authors give more attention to student-to-student occurrences, focusing on female students. The majority of sexual harassment incidents that are teachers-to-teachers, students-to-teachers, group harassment, sexual harassment of gay, lesbian and bisexual students, and harassment by non-employees. The authors offer narrative examples, obtained through their countless training interventions in schools, to illustrate the wide range of behaviors that are and are not considered sexual harassment. Furthermore, the authors demonstrate an awareness of their audiences through their writing style that welcomes each reader further into the issues without relying on an over abundance of legal jargon. The authors delve briefly into the legal background in an effort to add a foundation to further assertions of the causes and consequences of sexual harassment. One helpful detail in these books is the discussion of the evolution of how sexual harassment has been defined in our judicial system, giving the reader a sense of what has been and what is now defined as sexual harassment. Furthermore, the explanations of unfamiliar and conceptual terms dealing with sexual harassment and how each relate to the school, proves to be a helpful way to inform and demonstrate concepts without confusing the reader.

Once again the authors purpose in both books is to educate the reader on how to detect, confront, and prevent sexual harassment. In the discussion of sexual harassment the authors state that it is caused by the behavioral perceptions based on "sexual stereotyping, sex role stereotyping, sexism," and the issue of power and attitudes expressed and accepted in the culture. We believe the authors intention is not to paint a picture of doom and gloom surrounding this issue but to inform and elevate an issue that demands we confront it. Through the development of policies and educational programs in our schools, which will educate our children and prepare the school community, the authors anticipate fewer incidents of sexual harassment in the future. The importance of developing policies and educational programs in elementary and secondary schools stems from the increase in reported incidents of sexual harassment in which the schools have been involved in litigation. As with many other social problems, sensitivity to sexual harassment should be addressed as early as possible in our children's lives. Prevention of sexual harassment must begin with education in how to identify and prevent incidents. Clearly prevention is important because of the need to eliminate the physical and psychological harm that our children suffer as a result of sexual harassment.

Consequences of sexual harassment to children, according to the authors, include a decrease in motivation, low self-esteem, a sense of unworthiness, betrayal and stigmatization causing isolation and withdrawal from others, and in the extreme instances, suicide. We all must understand and insist that because the students have no option but to attend school, it is the role of school officials in association with parents, to provide a safe, non-threatening educational environment.

The collaboration of Robert Shoop and Jack Hayhow Jr. produced *Sexual harassment in our schools: what parents and teachers need to know to spot it and stop it*. The authors offer the reader a more thorough understanding of the issue as not merely an isolated incident but as a flashpoint or culmination of a series of stages. From the initial chapter, the authors take great effort to present sexual harassment as a complex phenomenon that has far-reaching effects beyond those reported by sensationalized televised or print media. Addressed as well within the initial stages of the book are topics that initiate thought beyond the monetary detriments to children and pose theoretical dilemmas that carry forth into adulthood. The issues are addressed in many instances from both a victim and victimizer role which adds both depth and richness to the arguments. The sensitive nature of the topic demands that authors walk gently through issues without getting into a "bashing" mode that we too often see in the daily media. This is not to say that the authors avoid confrontation, but that their approach is one of balance and control. The examples and terms utilized by the authors convey a harsh reality that both alerts and cautions the reader about the severity of sexual harassment.

The intended audience of this initial collaboration is as the title suggests, both parents and teachers. Beyond the informational dialogue created by the authors is a practical and applicable approach to dealing with sexual harassment. Lists of procedures, policies to be developed, steps parents can take, recommendations for developing sexual harassment programs and a host of very usable guides are offered to the intended audience. With the audience selected, the authors have created an informative piece of writing that should have the capacity to educate the audience and provide the impetus to deal with the issues on a daily basis. The authors have avoided the heavy reliance on statistical information which frequently accompanies scholarly writing. The included information is targeted to be directly helpful to the intended audience.

As the title suggests, the second book co-authored by Robert Shoop and Debra Edwards, *How to stop sexual harassment in our schools: A handbook and curriculum guide for*

administrators and teachers, deals with direct issues of concern to administrators and teachers. This book is designed to assist administrators and teachers in developing educational programs on how to confront and eliminate sexual harassment. As the authors point out, misconceptions, fear of reprisals, ignorance of procedural guidelines, and a lack of understanding of legal repercussions, are all present in our schools. Each of these factors serve to create a climate of inactivity, where school administrators prefer to avoid dealing with the issue. The perception of school administrators is often that by ignoring the issue of sexual harassment, it will go away. It is because of this inactivity that the authors in this book chose to focus more on providing examples, and step-by-step guides on what administrators and teachers must and should do to stop sexual harassment. The authors understand that the educational system is a complex and bureaucratic one. The recommendations in this book go far beyond the generic solutions proposed by other authors. The recommendations by Shoop and Edwards (1994), are targeted specifically to school administrators and teachers. But more importantly, it provides examples that administrators and teachers confront on a day-to-day basis. These examples offer the readers with an understanding of the issues without confusing them with situations unfamiliar to them.

In this book the authors make clear the importance for school administrators to develop written policies on the issues of sexual harassment. As stated before, the creation of preventive programs is important and the authors offer school administrators and teachers several recommendations to deal with this issue in the bureaucratic nature of schools. The authors really give a wide range of recommendations. The book dedicates a whole section to curriculum guides or activities as

ideas to be used by teachers to deal with and educate on the issue of sexual harassment in the classroom. It is clear that the authors understand the problematic nature and complexities of sexual harassment. They provide their intended audience with a series of usable job aids. The book lacks probing discussion on the legal milieu of sexual harassment, but again this is not the authors' intention. This book is sound in the generation of ideas and the creation of awareness of the issue and how to deal with it. If school administrators and teachers require more expertise on the subject of sexual harassment, beyond that which is offered in this book, the authors recommend a consultation with the appropriate legal counsel.

Having read both books co-authored by Robert Shoop, we believe the books target specific audiences and address the issues that are important to each. While both books offer a common point of reference, the ultimate goal of each book is realized through a realistic and informative approach to the issue of sexual harassment. Either book can be used as a starting point in the education of sexual harassment, due in part to the abundance of overlapping information within each book. For those who intend to utilize the book as a guide, we believe the consumer should examine their situation and select accordingly.

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