

**JEN GILBERT. *Sexuality in School: The Limits of Education.***  
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JEN GILBERT. *Sexuality in School: The Limits of Education*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. (2014). 144 pp. \$20.00 (paperback). (ISBN 978-1-4529-4222-3)

In the midst of the Trump administration's decision to revoke an executive order instructing American schools to allow transgender students access to washrooms that correspond to their gender identity, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transexual, Queer (LGBTQ) groups in colleges and universities across Toronto, Canada continue to push for gender-free washrooms. This polarized climate of policies and initiatives makes Gilbert's book a must-read for all stakeholders in education across North America – that means all of us – educators, administrators, and students. Gilbert's book provides insights and opportunities to deepen our understandings of sexuality: a politically divisive topic.

With a tense recollection of how she dresses for the first day of school, Gilbert introduces her book, *Sexuality in School: The Limits of Education*. This short narrative of dressing up for school speaks to readers who have been students and are now educators or academics, still steeped in the latency of showing up in a system that has governed fears, desires, and sexualities. In what follows, we review the book through its emergent themes: imposing narratives, the notion of risk, and thoughtful pedagogy. To conclude, we reiterate Gilbert's Reluctant Manifesto to re-generate and continue further discussion, which serves to bridge Gilbert's recommendations with schoolroom practices and policy.

Gilbert explicates how freedoms continue to be interrupted by adults – be they educators, policy makers, parents, or queers – who construct and impose narratives onto children and youth learning about sexuality. Gilbert begins theorizing about “the child” as a powerful alibi for adult desires: “[The child] is a screen for the projections of adult desires, but that screen, because it exists outside of the adult, keeps those desires in play and at bay” (p. 11). In this paradigm there is little room for the child to be anything more than a repository for an adult's narration. Gilbert posits adults' imposed narratives restrict a child from having her own experiences, subjectivities or memories. Gilbert's ideas provoke readers to question: what are the adults' reactions or thoughtful responses to the queer child?

Gilbert debunks childhood development as a linear set of predictable normative goals absent of surprises and the notion of risk. Including surprises in the uncertainty of growing up enhances Gilbert's provocation that "there is no such thing as an adolescent" (p. 34). Here, Gilbert draws on and extends Winnicott's (1956/1992) suggestion that there "is no such thing as an infant" outside the context of her environment. In other words, Gilbert calls for the reader to re-think how adolescent sexuality is similar and different to adult sexuality. Her made-up word "grownupness" adds to the compelling argument that adolescence is a construct, which allows adults to save troubled youth and impose a narrative that having sex or being sexual is risky business. Risk-taking in the sex education context, she argues, has the unfortunate reputation for being associated with behaviors or actions that lead to ominous outcomes such as contracting STIs. In order for adults to move beyond sex education being tangled up in a narrative of dos and don'ts, or even a more comprehensive categorization filled with mishaps and dangers, Gilbert posits a theory of adolescence that includes risk. Herein lies a big idea proposed by Gilbert – an education in which student experiences, experimentation, and healthy risk-taking are a valuable resource for learning about sex and sexuality in classrooms. For Gilbert, risk-taking provokes discussions about the pleasures, disappointments, losses, and loves – all of which are part of being human, yet usually remain absent in the sex education classroom. However, for many teachers and students, thinking about and discussing sex and sexuality may be a struggle.

To draw out her notion of a pedagogy based on thinking, Gilbert examines Bion's (1962) idea of a mother's capacity for thoughtfulness. In so doing, she makes space for students' thinking, including their experiences, and a teacher's thoughtful responses in sex education classrooms. Through a thoughtful pedagogy, the teacher resists instructing students and navigates through the curious environment which sexuality inspires. From this perspective, teachers learn to confront the discomfort of unexpected ideas and unasked questions. Students explore sex education and their sexuality through "the process of meaning-making," which comprises dialoguing with peers and interactions that might occasionally include their teacher. For Gilbert, focus on peer dialoguing means that students might exit classrooms not necessarily *knowing* more, but instead experience a *feeling* of being held in the teacher's mind. In contrast to prevalent approaches that tend to privilege the delivery of content, welcoming students' experiences is revolutionary in the sex education curriculum and classroom practices.

Gilbert's proposal for change, in the form of what she calls a Reluctant Manifesto, is actually a bold move to support actions including grass roots initiatives as well as institutional policy reform. Gilbert's 2014 Manifesto is timely in that it contributes valuable and needed guidelines for conversations to begin, develop and continue. Here we include a summarized version:

1) There is no “magic bullet” to eradicate LGBTQ-phobias; 2) Everything counts (policies, programs, warm gestures, and professional development); 3) Speak the words out loud – Lesbian. Gay. Bisexual. Transsexual. Transgender. Queer. The more we use them in normative discourse, the less like slurs they become; 4) Talk of LGBTQ issues as trials of ordinary life; 5) Do not forget to support LGBTQ teachers in our awareness. Most of Gilbert’s Manifesto serves as call to action for education. After reading the book, the work for the reader begins – how to thoughtfully re-think and create spaces, which welcome any type of queerness. After reading and considering each chapter and the Manifesto, we suggest rethinking Manifesto Point 1; revisited it might read: 1) Expect the unexpected and welcome it with an understanding that we are all living within uncertainty, living an erotically charged life full of elements of change and unpredictability.

Through enacting the manifesto, LGBTQ issues, struggles, and triumphs may become a little more bearable, perhaps even routine, like putting on clothes in the morning. Some days the outfit feels just right. And, some days it feels awkward and we adjust it all day long. It is through the days of adjustments that we may thoughtfully re-think sexuality, risk, as well as gender both within the classroom and beyond.

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