Focus: Gender Justice

Sexual Harassment –
Safe Learning Environments for All Students

by Michelle Martínez Vega

This is a pivotal moment in American culture. The spotlight on sexual harassment, misconduct and bullying, and its prevalence, has reached a fevered pitch in mainstream and social media. While sexual harassment is not a new phenomenon, the courage to speak out and take on aggressors publicly is new to many of us. Just like adults, our youth are viewing these brave survivors tell their stories on the public stage.

We are amid a teachable moment; while adults and adolescents alike may feel confused or impassioned by what they are witnessing, we should capitalize on this moment. What can we do as adults to ensure our students feel comfortable talking about this difficult subject? How do we empower students to advocate for each other to speak up when necessary and to act to protect themselves and their peers?

Sexual harassment is not just a female issue. Both male and female students can be victims or harassers, and it can occur between students of the same or opposite sex. Sexual harassment can take on many different forms. The conduct can be carried out by trusted friends, co-workers, family members or complete strangers. It also can occur in any age group. It is not just adults who suffer sexual harassment or other forms of sexual misconduct and violence.

Defining Sexual Harassment
Sexual harassment as defined by the U.S. Department of Education and the Office for Civil Rights is any unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature. It includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal, nonverbal, or physical conduct of a sexual nature. *Sexual violence* is a form of sexual harassment. A number of different acts fall into the category of sexual violence, including rape, sexual assault, sexual battery, sexual abuse and sexual coercion. The misconduct can occur anywhere – at an after-school program or at a school-sanctioned activity, in a school facility or school transportation, off campus or online. Harassment can be verbal, nonverbal or physical. *Gender-based harassment* is the unwelcome conduct based on a student's sex or harassing conduct based on a student's failure to conform to sex stereotypes. (OCR, 2017)

Impact on Education and Prevalence
The American Association of University Women (AAUW) commissioned research using a nationally representative sample of 2,064 public school students in eighth through 11th grades finding that eight in 10 students experience some form of sexual harassment at some time during their educational career (2001). How do these experiences impact education?

Students report that, in addition to feeling upset or embarrassed, there are consequences that are more directly tied to education. In addition to increased absences, one quarter of the students who experience harassment say they do not talk as much or participate in class, and two in 10 found it hard to pay attention and stay focused *(cont. on Page 2)*

"Children need places and spaces that are safe, that are nurturing, that welcome them as they are."

– Dr. María "Cuca" Robledo Montecel, IDRA President and CEO

on learning. The type of harassment also can determine the severity of the impact on the student. Students who experience physical harassment are more likely than those who experience nonphysical acts to report these types of behavioral and educational consequences.

Safeguarding the Learning Environment

Educators are trusted adults. Students often look to their teachers and administrators as guides for social interaction. Therefore, it is imperative for educators to speak up if they witness harassment or bullying. In fact, the law requires it. "See something; say something!" Do not let the action or behavior go unchecked. When students see an adult ignoring or excusing words or actions of sexual harassment, bullying or misconduct, they are more than likely to do the same.

Speaking up, acknowledging and stopping the behavior is paramount to the student's feelings of safety. If sexual harassment is known to occur between individuals, further steps may need to be taken to ensure safety. Title IX requires schools to take actions to prevent and remedy sex-based harassment (including sexual violence) and gender-based harassment (Sparks, 2011).

The IDRA EAC-*South*'s capacity-building technical assistance can help state and local education agencies in addressing inequities and desegregation issues impacting sex and gender equity. These issues may be self-identified or identified through an active school desegregation court order, an Office for Civil Rights resolution, or an investigation by a federal or state civil rights enforcement agency. Promoting sex and gender equity can help schools ensure equal access to rigorous coursework, a healthier and safe learning climate, and high-quality teaching.

Warning Signs

Types of behavior you may see in a child or adolescent who has been harassed include the following (Stop It Now, 2018).

• Has nightmares or other sleep problems without an explanation;

• Seems distracted or distant at odd times;

• Has a sudden change in eating habits;

• Sudden mood swings: rage, fear, insecurity or withdrawal;

• Leaves "clues" that seem likely to provoke a discussion about sexual issues;

• Develops new or unusual fear of certain people or places;

• Refuses to talk about a secret shared with an adult or fellow student;

• Suddenly has money, toys or other gifts without reason;

• Thinks of self or body as repulsive, dirty or bad;

• Exhibits adult-like sexual behaviors, language and knowledge;

• Self-injury (cutting, burning);

• Inadequate personal hygiene;

• Substance abuse;

• Depression, anxiety;

• Suicide attempts;

• Fear of intimacy or closeness; and

• Compulsive eating or dieting.

Creating a Safe Environment

Educators can take some key steps to create a safe environment (Shah, 2011; Yáñez, 1998).

• Set clear, detailed and visible policies and procedures that systematically and explicitly detail what constitutes sexual harassment, sexual bullying, sexual misconduct, gender-based harassment and sexual abuse.

Student Reactions to Sexual Harassment
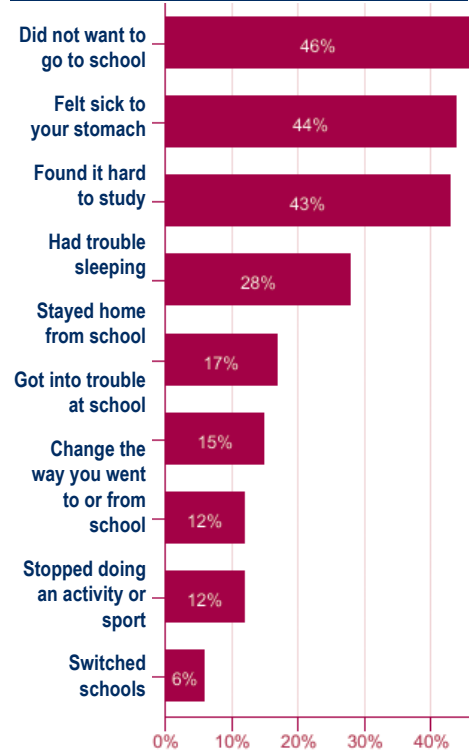
Data source: AAUW sexual harassment survey, 2011.

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Additional resources are available online at http://www.idra.org/eac-south/

funded by the U.S. Department of Education

School-Based Strategies for Supporting Girls in Technology
With Perspectives from a 14-Year-Old Coder

by Christie L. Goodman, APR

There are many reasons for schools to actively support girls in STEM, particularly in technology. Probably the most-cited reason is the growing demand in the workforce. And it is a compelling motivation. Mitch Resnick, a MIT Media Lab professor says, "Roughly two-thirds of grade school students will end up doing work that hasn't been invented yet" (Merrill, 2017).

We don't have to look at the distant future to see that the trend has already started: The number of computer-related jobs in the United States is 10 times more than the number of computer science graduates three years ago in 2015 (Kessler, 2017).

With or without a workforce demand, the foundation of our STEM focus must be equity. For example, schools must monitor participation in higher-level courses making sure there is gender balance in STEM classes, including technology and computer science. The IDRA EAC-*South* can help schools with analysis and strategies to ensure equity in student access.

Inequities in participation cannot be explained away by a supposed lack of girls' interest. A study by the Girl Scout Research Institute dispels myths about girls and STEM and examines what works for girls who show interest and engage in STEM fields (GSUSA, 2012). The study found that 74 percent of high school girls are interested in STEM subjects. Contrary to past research, this study showed that girls do not lose interest in STEM in middle school. African American and Hispanic girls have high interest in STEM and high confidence, but have fewer supports and less exposure.

While over 90 percent of parents feel opportunities to learn computer science are a good use of school resources, only 40 percent of K-12 principals say their school can offer at least one computer science course, including coding or programming (Google & Gallup, 2016).

Resnick suggests that coding is akin to literacy: "Very few people grow up to be professional writers, but we teach everyone to write because it's a way of communicating with others – of organizing your thoughts and expressing your ideas. I think the reasons for learning to code are the same... When we learn to code, we are learning how to organize, express and share ideas in new ways, in a new medium" (Merrill, 2017).

For girls like my own daughter, Leslie, the reasons are very personal: "I've always liked math. Then I fell in love with coding. When you code, you can create anything! I love seeing all these numbers and letters that don't make sense to a lot of people but make sense to you, seeing it all come together and make something really cool, is really rewarding."

Leslie became a founding member of a citywide all-girls coding club, She Code Connect, initiated by Youth Code Jam, a nonprofit in San Antonio that fosters interest in technology by introducing upper elementary through high school students to computer science. The girls came together without first knowing each other. Yet they speak of it as a group where they finally fit in. "I found my tribe," one girl told her parents. Leslie said, "All of us can work together so well because we have all been discouraged in a class, usually by a male classmate. We understand that much about each other, and we all have something in common to talk about: coding."

Despite attending schools that are deliberate in how they integrate technology into instruction and into the campus environment, like most of her coding friends, none of Leslie's introduction into coding occurred through school.

So, I asked her to share some ideas for ways schools can encourage students, especially girls, in STEM and technology. Her first response? "It's not as hard as people think." Following are her suggestions along with others.

Leslie and her fellow She Code Connect members helped younger girls use Pocket Labs to measure impact force on a surface (https://shecodeconnect.com).

"I think coding is something to start when you're young, because with your young big imagination, you can create anything that pops into your head!"

Naturally, the top strategy is to **provide computer science courses and lessons**. And there are additional strategies schools can use to support girls inside and outside of the content classroom.

Provide after-school clubs, like robotics and coding, and ask the students what they want to do. Have separate clubs for girls and boys as their approaches are so different and both need to be nourished, particularly in adolescence. Leslie described: "There was a robotics club, but I saw the picture in the yearbook, and it was all boys. So, I didn't join, because guys always try to be the head person and try to show off a little bit. And girls don't do that, especially around other girls, because they don't want to take over. We want everybody to be included." Other girls in her coding club had such stories of being pushed to the side. The collaborative and problem-solving nature of coding is key draw for girls (GSUSA, 2012).

Leslie urged, **"don't give up on an all-girls club just because on the first day nobody shows up the first day.** A couple of girls will show up and then more and more will come once they hear that girls are actually going."

It's important to note that the tendency of some students to show off and be in front has value and needs just as much nurturing and guidance. And complying with constitutional, Title IX and other regulatory requirements means schools should be wary of separating students by gender in school classrooms. If your after-school tech club is not intentionally single gender but only has participation by one group, there is a reason, and it needs attention to ensure equal access and treatment.

Recognize that there are distinct types of technology interests students may want to try out. For example, robotics is very different from coding. "The code they use in robotics

See our eBook listing coding and computer science resources for schools and communities

https://budurl.me/IDRAeBcode

See a video demonstration of a student coding project, David's Trek

https://www.budurl.me/trek

club is really simple," Leslie stated. "There need to be more coding opportunities for girls especially but also for boys. When you code, even if you are really experienced, you can't ever get the code right the first time. It's impossible… But you can make anything, whatever you want to create. That's why I love it."

And some students really like tinkering with the insides of computers. These students can practice leadership by assisting teachers with setting up equipment and troubleshooting, with guidance from a campus technology specialist.

Some students love to be on competition teams for math, science, robotics, etc. Others just want the opportunity to hang out with other self-described "nerds." Leslie's Rubik's Cube group meets twice a month with a classroom teacher who is genuinely interested. It also happens to be a good opportunity for her to hear students' perspectives about tech careers and their interests.

It's critical to make sure that there is **access to technology in the classroom** that is not dependent on students having their own devices. With this access in content classes, **give students opportunities to create technology projects** and be sure to celebrate their innovations. Recognize when they take a risk creatively. This is a great opportunity to use project based learning. Such projects promote girls' interest in the process of learning, asking questions, doing hands-on activities and problem solving (GSUSA, 2012).

For example, Leslie's eighth grade English class was given the assignment to create a project about

their literature circle novel. The options included things like poems, posters and essays. Leslie chose the "technology" box, which usually means PowerPoint. But she saw it as an opportunity to code a video game from scratch to analyze her book, *I am David*. She was thrilled that she was coding for an actual school assignment. (A screen cast of the game is online at: https://www.budurl.me/trek.)

Give students opportunities to meet and work with adults of both genders in technology careers. Look for opportunities in the community and encourage students to participate. This has to be in addition to the annual career day. The Girl Scouts study shows the critical importance of exposure to STEM careers and adult support (2012).

The study also suggests that, given that girls interested in STEM have a desire to be in careers that help people (94 percent) and make a difference in the world (92 percent), there is opportunity in making the connection between those motivations and related STEM fields (GSUSA, 2012). "In She Code Connect, we learn to code, we teach other girls to code and we meet women in technology-based careers," Leslie described.

She added, "When I started to learn coding, I could compare myself to older people who were good at this and realize, I'm really good at this too." How many more girls are poised to make such a discovery about themselves? Let's not make it hard.

Resources

Girl Scouts of the USA. (2012). *Generation STEM – What Girls Say about Science, Technology, Engineering and Math* (New York, N.Y.: Girl Scout Research Institute).

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Equity and Justice for LGBTQ Students – Teacher Responsibilities

by Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed., and Michelle Martínez Vega

Teachers inspire and protect LGBTQ students by acknowledging their assets and taking courageous action. Students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer face singular trials (educational, psychological, and health). By both supporting the intelligence and uniqueness of each student while clearly blocking and deterring harm, a teacher is more than a pedagogue. The teacher becomes mentor, counselor, advocate and cheerleader for each student's academic and social success.

Students who face daunting challenges also are strong survivors, and with the support of the educators, they can excel in school and beyond. Even as policy and practice becomes more equitable for this population, much must still be done by schools and educators. Hate-related violence against LGBTQ individuals resulting in death jumped 86 percent in 2017 over the previous year in the United States (Wilson, 2018). Schools must be safe places for all children – with respect for individual identification. Teachers are pivotal.

Teacher Actions

Without over-simplifying, we recommend critical equitable classroom actions.

- Interrupt, compassionately but firmly, any clear expression of bigotry. Question anyone who states that "these" students are outside of their social and religious norms.

- Identify and bring to light all the talents, strengths and potential in each student. Let each student know that you see this in him or her and let others know. Do this naturally as with any other child and without exaggeration or artificiality.

- Facilitate conversations and dialogues about student identification, respecting individual expressions, and furthering respectful dialogue among peers and educators.

Complexities

LGBTQ identification intersects with race, class, homelessness and other critical issues. Generalizations are damaging in the face of each unique situation, especially when several vectors of discrimination and exclusion intersect. One student may not fit any of the labels applied and yet equally needs understanding, support and caring.

Reflective Questions

As identification becomes more sensitive and nuanced to how children themselves identify and what "label" each accepts, teachers must listen carefully and read the body language.

- Is my understanding evident to this child?

- Is he or she feeling safe and ready to learn with me in my class?

Further Exploration

Education researchers identify *space* and *categorization* as areas that need further rigorous exploration. Children come to the school as a place (space) where not only can they learn, but where they can be safe and have other social needs met. The school needs policy and practice that delivers this, and teachers need the skills and support to respond to those needs. The December 2017 special issue of *Education Researcher*, "LGBTQ Issues in Education: A Multimethod Research Collection" includes feature articles and a book review that focus rigorously on these issues (AERA).

Services

IDRA's EAC-*South* carries out an important mandate for justice and equity in all our schools, including technical assistance and training for Title IX, an act that includes protections and support for LGBTQ students. Our recent project with a small school district in Georgia illustrates some of our services, as outlined below.

> *Even as policy and practice becomes more equitable for this population, much must still be done by schools and educators. Schools must be safe places for all children.*

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funded by the U.S. Department of Education

Sample IDRA EAC-*South* Assistance: Title IX Overview and Key Areas

Objectives

- Review Title IX basic information.

- Highlight the key areas of concern to K-12 school districts.

- Identify areas of concern and challenges for those responsible for overseeing Title IX and protecting all students from these forms of discrimination.

Key Title IX Areas for K-12 Staff

- Academic access and success

- Gender identification and transgender bullying and harassment

- Sexual harassment

- Sports athletics access

Resources – Sample List

- *Bullying Prevention and School Safety – Bullying* presents one of the greatest health risks to children, youth, and young adults in U.S. society today. School safety, including the prevention of bullying, is both a priority and a key area of academic research. This list compiled by AERA provides resources, some academic and others practical, for K-12 schools.

- *Considerations for School District Sexual Misconduct Policies* – The White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault is committed to supporting school districts in preventing sexual misconduct, encouraging reports of such misconduct, improving responses to reports of such misconduct, and complying with applicable federal laws. This document highlights issues that districts can consider when drafting sexual misconduct policies.

- *LGBTQ Issues in Education: Advancing a Research Agenda* – This eBook examines the current state of the knowledge on LGBTQ issues in education and addresses future research directions. The editor and authors draw on existing literature, theories, and data as they synthesize key areas of research. Readers studying LGBTQ issues or working on adjacent topics will find the book to be an invaluable tool as it sets forth major findings and recommendations for additional research.

Guidance the IDRA EAC-*South* May Provide on Transgender Issues

- The IDRA EAC-*South* doesn't provide legal advice and school districts should seek legal advice from their own lawyer on certain issues involved in the courts (e.g., whether they should construct unisex bathrooms or separate changing facilities or accommodations for transgender students).

- The IDRA EAC-*South* can provide technical assistance to districts on transgender issues. The term *transgender* is included in the definition of sex desegregation in the new federal regulations for federally-funded equity assistance centers, which were created under Title IV of the Civil Rights Acts that explicitly addresses sex.

- We can provide information on providing safe places and schools free of harassment and discrimination against transgender students.

- The U.S. Department of Education also has *nonregulatory* guidance for implementing subpart 1 of Title IV, Part A of ESSA regarding the Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants. That guidance explicitly identifies gender as one of the potential barriers impeding access.

For IDRA EAC-*South* assistance please contact us through http://www.idraeacsouth.org/ or call 210-444-1710.

The IDRA EAC-*South* provided this highly participatory session with central office and school administrators at their request. We can provide this training or similar also as professional development for teachers.

Experienced teachers know that no matter how tracked or specially selected students in any class are, each is still a unique learner. If a student happens to fall in the LGBTQ sphere, that's just another aspect of their uniqueness. Teach accordingly.

For IDRA EAC-*South* assistance please contact us through http://www.idraeacsouth.org/ or call 210-444-1710.

Resources

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White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault. (September 2016). *Considerations for School District Sexual Misconduct Policies* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice).

Wilson, T. (January 29, 2018). "Texas Is at the Epicenter of an 'Epidemic of Violence' Against LGBTQ People," *Rewire*.

Wimberly, G. (2015). *LGBTQ Issues in Education: Advancing a Research Agenda* (Washington, D.C.: American Educational Research Association).

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DOWNLOAD
See a list of resources on sex and gender equity in schools
https://budurl.me/IDRAISGE

PODCAST
Listen to our Classnotes Podcast episode: "Supporting LGBTQ Students Faced with Harassment"
https://budurl.me/IDRApod176

Second Installment of IDRA's New Parent Involvement Tools for School Districts

by Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed.

As the 20th Annual IDRA *La Semana del Niño* Parent Institute™ approaches on April 6, 2018, we re-visit materials from one of the many concurrent sessions from the April 2017 event. This month, we are highlighting the session on IDRA's Education CAFE work in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, useful for training and technical assistance to school districts. These are tools to strengthen family engagement in public schools.

IDRA's work in the lower Rio Grande Valley of south Texas goes back many years. The IDRA Family Leadership in Education approach, now called Education CAFE, has become the model for a network of community organizations under the banner of Equal Voice Network. The presentation at the parent institute last year was facilitated by Michael Seifert, project weaver, with two presenters, Vicky Santana and Eva Carranza, live-streamed from the ARISE Support Center in Alamo, Texas.

The ARISE groups, Padres Activos, take on family leadership in education projects focusing on the schools where their children attend. One key project has been to inform families about the courses students must take to be on a college track. Families communicate with schools about these issues and continually survey families to ensure that their children are prepared for college, an individual and collective vision and expectation. The materials in the new toolkit include examples from the lower Rio Grande Valley, video discussion, stories of successes by the Education CAFE groups in south Texas and the steps to form a similar local organization.

The 20th Annual IDRA *La Semana del Niño* Parent Institute will be held on Friday, April 6, at the Whitley Center in San Antonio, the same site where it has been for the last four years. It will be bilingual (English-Spanish), with some sessions live-streamed, and offer an array of concurrent presentations of interest to families, with many of the presentations led by parents. Family leadership in education is the connecting thread and overarching theme of the event.

Annual IDRA La Semana del Niño Parent Institute™

April 6 2018

Bilingual Parent Institute • April 6, 2018
Special event for families, community groups and educators

This annual institute offers families, school district personnel and community groups from across the country the opportunity to network, obtain resources and information, and receive training and bilingual materials on IDRA's nationally-recognized research based model for parent leadership in education.

Highlights
- Interactive and participatory sessions on key education topics
- Most presentations led by parents
- Practical action steps for parents
- Examples of successful family engagement
- Livestream plenaries and interviews
- Bilingual event (English-Spanish)
- Refreshments and lunch
- Exhibitors, including service providers, college and universities and non-profit agencies

" The fact that everybody was engaged, was participating; this is something I don't see in any other conference. [In other conferences], people just go and listen. Here people come to participate to be engaged – that was impressive! **"**

– previous participant

Get details:
http://www.idra.org/events/la-semana-del-nino-parent-institute

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Focus: Gender Justice

- Conduct environmental monitoring, creating a safe environment and culture that enlists everyone in assessing risk and identifying locations of potential risks.

- Establish clear, visible steps of where and who students can go to seek help and guidance, such as the Title IX campus coordinator or counselor.

- Create an environment and culture where students and educators alike will not fear retribution for speaking up.

- Educate parents and caregivers about available resources in the district.

- Train staff to ensure they know what to look for and how to respond.

Silence is the accomplice that allows sexual harassment to take its next victim. Hiding behind embarrassment, shame or fear will not help society progress. We must move forward. As indicated in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, individuals must satisfy lower level needs, such as safety, before progressing to meet higher level growth needs. If the goal is to create strong, creative, self-actualized individuals who flourish within our classrooms, it is imperative that we create learning environments that ensure their safety and well-being.

For IDRA EAC-*South* assistance please contact us through http://www.idraeacsouth.org/ or call 210-444-1710.

Resources

Lipson, J. (Ed.). (2001). *Hostile Hallways: Bullying, Teasing, and Sexual Harassment in School* (Washington, D.C.: American Association of University Women Educational Foundation).

Office for Civil Rights. (2008). Sexual Harassment: It's Not Academic, archived pamphlet (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education).

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achieving equal educational opportunity for every child
through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college