



## Bullying Among University Students: Cross-National Perspectives

Cowie, Helen; and Myers, Carrie Anne, eds.  
Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016

### Book Review

Tags: student behavior | student conflict | traumatic events

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Helen Cowrie and Carrie-Anne Myers' *Bullying Among University Students* studies bullying in universities worldwide, with contributors from educational psychology, criminology, counseling, media, and other disciplines. One insight of the volume is that we tend to address bullying as a relationship between the bully and the victim without addressing bullying's social and institutional contexts. The introduction reminds us that university students occupy an ambiguous position, neither protected children nor employees. In the university, therefore, bullied students feel lost, reporting "that they do not know of any policies, systems, or avenues to help them" (3).

The essays begin with the student experience, move to the nature of bullying, look at social context, suggest interventions and policies, and end with reflections, suggesting that universities might address bullying by coordinating communications between the students, staff, administrators, and student services and by using research on workplace bullying as a resource. The corporatization of higher education, valuing individualism and competition, may unconsciously generate a context for bullying, meaning that systems must be put in place to address bullying, including strong counseling.

The writers align bullying with what they call "laddish" behavior – indeed, boys bully more frequently than girls – which Toni Pearce defines as a "'pack' mentality evident in activities, such as sport and heavy alcohol consumption and 'banter,' which were often sexist, misogynist and homophobic" (17-18). It includes sexualizing behavior toward women and intolerance of gay and transgender students and racial ethnic students, all vulnerable, which leads to harassment and violence. The essays examine multiple forms of bullying, including stalking and cyber-aggression, which occurs as "invisible" bullying (113). Drawing lines in these cases

is a key, but difficult, act: when, for example, is online activity conversation, teasing, or bullying?

One finding is that bullies tend to bully throughout their lives (36). Osman Tolga Aricak's essay explores genetic and environmental causes of bullying and the impact on the bullies themselves. Aggression is an outward sign of complex issues like poor self- and impulse-control and narcissism. The bully *and* the victim can experience ongoing mental health disorders, including anxiety, depression, and isolation.

"The Research Student Experience" chapter is informative for those of us supervising graduate students, unveiling the sometimes unconscious bullying in the power-laden supervisor-student relationship. Graduate students also occupy an ambiguous position, being students and teachers or workers, making them vulnerable. Graduate supervisors must be mindful of power, avoiding actions like giving excessive or unauthorized work to teaching assistants and using their research as the supervisor's own.

This collection offers immense insight into an understudied subject. One article on "Cross-Cultural Comparisons" reminds American universities that we have "some of the highest rates [of bullying] among the developed world" (135). Our cultural and economic diversity, insistence on free speech, and desensitizing media violence confuse notions regarding appropriate behaviors (135). Since there is not clear data on what works against bullying, a system-wide response is necessary.

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