



# **Hey, Shorty!: A Guide to Combating Sexual Harassment and Violence in Schools and on the Streets**

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At every stage of education, sexual harassment is common, and often considered a rite of passage for young people. It's not unusual for a girl to hear "Hey, Shorty!" on a daily basis, as she walks down the hall or comes into the school yard, followed by a sexual innuendo, insult, come-on, or assault. But when teenagers are asked whether they experience this in their own lives, most of them say it's not happening.

Girls for Gender Equity, a nonprofit organization based in New York City, has developed a model for teens to teach one another about sexual harassment. How do you define it? How does it affect your self-esteem? What do you do in response? Why is it so normalized in schools, and how can we as a society begin to address these causes? Geared toward students, parents, teachers, policy makers, and activists, this book is an excellent model for building awareness and creating change in any community.

## **Hey, Shorty!: A Guide to Combating Sexual Harassment and Violence in Schools and on the Streets Details**

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# **From Reader Review Hey, Shorty!: A Guide to Combating Sexual Harassment and Violence in Schools and on the Streets for online ebook**

**Anna says**

<http://www.harpyhness.com/2011/05/19/b...>

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**Victoria Law says**

If you're looking for a book on how to talk to your preteen/teen girl about violence and harassment in school, this is not the book for you. If you're looking for a book on how one specific group (Girls for Gender Equity) worked to address these issues in the NYC public school system, then read this. An engaging read on how the group worked to do this, involved NYC public school students, trained these students to conduct a Participatory Action Research study on the normalization of sexual harassment, and tried to force NYC's school system to actually follow its own Title IX requirement. (Before reading this, I didn't know that NY had an actual anti-bullying law.)

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**Jacquie says**

Though Title IX legally requires schools to prevent and address harassment, these resources are often missing or limited. Many students face harassment and violence at school; we are all familiar with tragic headlines announcing yet another student bullied to suicide. Many other students face depression, falling grades, and lowered confidence. Thankfully, there is hope.

In this slim, concise book, nonprofit organization Girls for Gender Equity inform readers about Title IX and recount their own struggles to see it enforced in New York public schools. Hey, Shorty! provides thorough information, helpful guides, and realistic advice for students, teachers, parents, and allies.

Along with learning some new things, I was impressed by the GGE's initiatives and stories. Having teenage women film their own documentary was a genius idea. Their documentary, Hey... Shorty!, even won an award at Roxbury Film Festival in Boston. More students and young people should be encouraged to utilize and develop their abilities in ways like this.

I think everyone in America can benefit from reading this book. All citizens with the ability to do so have the responsibility to ensure the success of our youth. Students deserve a safe learning environment in order to reach their full potential. They also deserve to be empowered in a meaningful way; students are an undervalued resource, generally only tapped as consumers and otherwise ignored. Healthy children and teens will grow to become productive, innovative adults. This is a "win" for everyone involved.

In a nutshell, Hey, Shorty! is a short read that provides a wealth of information and ideas. I hope to see it widely published and offered for students and faculty in every school across America.

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## Erin says

Amazing book. Absolutely essential for learning about the way sexual harassment and street harassment negatively impacts youth and teens and how this impairs their ability to focus and perform in schools. A must-read for anyone interested in issues of gender-based violence.

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## Ari says

Before reading this book I had thought Title IX only had to do with sports but it actually covers gender discrimination in schools period. So that's the first new thing I learned but reading this entire book was quite an experience because actions I took for granted as part of going to high school could actually be considered sexual harassment. I remember in 8th grade some guys used to throw pens at my chest to see if they would bounce off, I was a little hurt by this but also kinda flattered. Which is twisted if you think about because that's just rude but I shrugged it off, no big deal. According to Hey, Shorty! that would be sexual harassment. I think, overall, sexual harassment is a very tricky topic because for many teens it's just an accepted fact. I laugh at some jokes that feature sexual innuendos and I've gotten used to the (few) guys who make potentially lewd comments to me. Honestly, I am flattered because I used to have 0 self confidence, at the same time I've never experienced real sexual harassment (in my opinion anyway) where guys tried to actually grab me and followed me for blocks at a time. That's awful and completely unacceptable. And I do have friends who are creeped on by older men (as in 40s!) and that's just unfathomable to me as to why guys would think that's ok. I found it disgusting and annoying that when students reported cases of sexual harassment in New York City public schools nothing was done, they were ignored by the teacher and their fellow peers might accuse them of 'asking for it.' Um no one ASKS to be raped (in the most extreme case) or to be bothered all the time with gross comments.

I really liked this book wasn't a dry step-by-step explanation of how to end sexual harassment. It was fairly serious but it is a serious topic. However it was never a monotonous story because there would be excerpts from poems written by Sisters in Strength interns (an organization that is under the umbrella of GGE that offers paid experience in return for work on addressing social justice issues) or stories told, this made the statistics offered seem all the more real. I also appreciated the fact that the surveys given to students to fill out were featured so readers can see for themselves the type of questions being asked. I was also pleased that this book considered bullying of those who identified themselves as GLBT as sexual harassment. I wouldn't have initially but I totally agree now that is indeed sexual harassment.

Hey, Shorty really got me thinking and that's always a wonderful thing. The statistics are chilling and it's interesting to read how students don't sexual harassment is a big issue but incidents they describe fit the definition quite clearly. I started (much like the brave girls featured in this book) reflecting back on past events in school that could technically be considered sexual harassment. However based on my own personal experiences they are not something I would report because what's happened to me is not that serious. If on the other hand you've been touched inappropriately then that DEFINITELY needs to be reported or even if it made you uncomfortable in any way. Please do check out the great work this organization is doing and help in any way you can. They are still only based in New York but if a big enough movement begins, the Girls for Gender Equity campaign could rock the nation.

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## Holly says

Hey, Shorty! is an essential, much-needed resource for students, teachers, parents, and any community member who wants teens to be safe at school and on the streets.

I'm personally excited about it because in my book about street harassment, I note the need for more books on the topic and here is one! And I'm also excited because the book comes from one of the groups I featured in my book, the New York City-based organization Girls for Gender Equity (GGE).

Hey, Shorty! provides readers with two types of resource. First, in the main portion of the book, Smith, Van Deven, and Huppuch take readers through the 10 year history and work of GGE and their efforts to create an organization that empowers teenage girls to address issues that impact them and also to have schools address the widespread issue of sexual harassment (which, by the way, they are required to do by law under Title IX of the Educational Amendment of 1972).

The authors share personal experiences, thoughts, struggles and successes with designing programming, working with teenagers, learning from teenagers, and creating outcomes. The chapters are interesting and provide a model for action through the example of their work, in particular the model of prioritizing youth leadership on issues that relate to youth because, as Smith notes, they are the experts on these issues and they are the main stakeholders.

Two of the teen-led projects shared in the book that I have first-hand experience with are the Sisters in Strength Street Harassment Summit and Hey...Shorty documentary (available for purchase for \$20 from the GGE website). I attended the Summit in 2007 as part of my master's thesis research and I own the documentary. Both the summit and documentary were phenomenal and I was very impressed by the vision, articulation and hard work of teenage girls around the issues of street harassment.

Second, in the appendix, there are guides for students, school staff, and parents about how to prevent and also deal with sexual harassment. There is information about how to respond to harassers as the person being harassed or as a bystander and how to report harassers. Additional materials readers can use are a sexual harassment quiz and survey questions GGE used in their survey about sexual harassment in schools. These guides are easy to read and understand and are very important resources for anyone who cares about this issue. Soon you can add workshop curriculum to your list of resources, which GGE is developing with the help of 67 middle and high school students.

Lately I've been giving a lot of talks about street harassment, particularly to members of the nonprofit organization I work for, the American Association of University Women. Many of the people in attendance are current or retired teachers and are eager for information and resources they can use and they are very happy to hear about Hey, Shorty!

I hope you will read Hey, Shorty! and if you are a teenager, a parent of one, or work with teens, I hope you will consider using some of the materials in your own lives and work. GGE will celebrate 10 years this September. I look forward to seeing what they will achieve in the next 10 years!

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## Emily says

*Hey, Shorty!* is more than its subtitle suggests. It is not only about sexual harassment and violence in the schools and on the streets, it is a unique guide to youth community organizing.

Authored by Joanne Smith, Meghan Huppuch, and Mandy Van Deven, *Hey, Shorty!* begins with the Girls for Gender Equity's founder, Joanne Smith, explaining how the almost ten-year-old organization started on the premise of helping young girls, particularly in urban settings, change systems of race, class, and gender that they did not create. GGE's mission is:

"Girls for Gender Equity (GGE) is an intergenerational grassroots organization committed to the physical, psychological, social, and economic development of girls and women. Through education, organizing and physical fitness, GGE encourages communities to remove barriers and create opportunities for girls and women to live self-determined lives. A Brooklyn, New York-based coalition-building and youth development organization, GGE acts as a catalyst of change to improve gender and race relations and socioeconomic conditions for our most vulnerable youth and communities of color. Our work is a result of many gracious and courageous allies to whom GGE is forever indebted."

The book highlights their Sisters in Strength program: a group of young women in high school from New York City, banding together as interns to fight sexual harassment on the streets and in their schools. Back in 2005, the term "sexual harassment" was removed from the New York City Department of Education [NYCDOE] Citywide Standards of Discipline and Intervention Measures--a manual that all NYC public schools use to dictate appropriate student behavior. As Mandy Van Deven (former associate director of Girls for Gender Equity, Inc.) and Joanne Smith explain why the fight against sexual harassment had taken a central role in GGE's activism:

"The legitimacy of GGE's work was significantly undermined by this linguistic erasure, as students, parents, and school personnel no longer had the NYCDOE Discipline Code to back up their complaints."

Additionally, Sisters in Strength interns had chosen street harassment as the central issue of their activism because it affects the lives of girls and women daily. In 2007, they organized a Street Harassment summit and even premiered their own film, *Hey, Shorty!* about the underlying issues of street harassment--including definitions (try defining sexual harassment yourself--it's quite a difficult task) and interviews not only with victims of harassment but also people who perpetrate harassment.

The Sisters in Strength interns then took on the task of a large research project about sexual harassment in New York City schools by using the participatory action research (PAR) method, a collaborative research method with an activist approach. Meghan Huppuch, Director of Community Organizing at GGE, explains why GGE used PAR as their research method:

"We conducted PAR in order to amplify the voices of students. After data analysis and some difficult conversations, it seemed impossible that we could create the kind of change we wanted without the help of others."

Through the training, data collection, and eventual dissemination of results, GGE was able to determine that that not only does sexual harassment occur frequently (in and out of NYC schools), but youth want to know more about and how to prevent sexual harassment.

The best part about this youth community organizing guide is that it has a nontraditional approach. Instead of using the "how-to" style, Smith, Van Deven, and Huppuch tell us the story of Girls for Gender Equity, Inc. as a successful organization actively making a change in their community.

*Hey, Shorty!* is pertinent not only to those involved in community organizing but also those in the education field. As a future teacher, I plan on using this guide with my students. Why? Because Girls for Gender Equity, Inc., with their Sisters in Strength interns, show how youth community organizing is done right.

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## **Elevate Difference says**

Difficulties concentrating in school, shame, depression, guilt, fear, low self-esteem, poor body image, and powerlessness are just some of the repercussions that victims of sexual harassment at school experience, according to research conducted by Girls for Gender Equity (GGE). This Brooklyn-based nonprofit organization works to "improve gender and race relations and socioeconomic conditions for [the] most vulnerable youth and communities of color." Joanne N. Smith, Mandy Van Deven, and Megan Huppuch of GGE have collaboratively written *Hey, Shorty!*, which tells GGE's story, while providing a model for teens to teach their peers what constitutes sexual harassment and how to prevent it. The book also gives activists, educators, parents and students a hands-on guide to combat sexual harassment and violence in their schools and neighborhoods.

In September 2001, just a few months after GGE had started meeting to play basketball, an 8-year-old girl was raped on her way to school in the area. In response to the victim blaming that GGE founder Joanne Smith heard, she decided to discuss gender stereotypes and discrimination with the girls in the league. This evolved into Gender Respect Workshops, developed and facilitated by Mandy Van Deven with male and female students in the classroom. She discovered that sexual harassment was a major issue in the lives of the students, particularly girls and LGBTQ youth. Soon after, the Sisters in Strength program was born, and today it has become a paid year-long internship for teen girls of color to advocate for the enforcement of sexual harassment policies in New York City public schools through workshops and direct action.

Sisters in Strength's first task was to raise awareness about the problem in the community, which led to their making *Hey... Shorty!*, a short film that later won Best Youth Documentary at the Roxbury Film Festival. They screened their film at the Street Harassment Summit, where they shared what they had learned with other members of the community.

A second Sisters in Strength project involved hands-on participatory action research. The teen interns collected information through surveys, focus groups, and slam books, or notebooks with written prompts that students can respond to anonymously. After compiling their data, they concluded that sexual harassment was rampant and normalized. Their research results were presented at GGE's Gender Equality Festival to other community organizations. Under Meghan Huppuch's leadership, GGE went on to form the Coalition for Gender Equity in Schools with more than twenty other area organizations.

The work of GGE may well have given us the solution to bullying that we have so desperately sought. When we are sexually harassed, we believe we are alone and somehow deserve this treatment. In other words, we internalize our pain and suffer in silence. But from GGE's research and community action, we see that this pervasive problem lies not within the person being harassed, but with the external forces that perpetuate and enable sexual harassment to exist in our schools and on our streets.

GGE is an empowering initiative for teens, our future leaders, and Hey, Shorty! is an essential resource for parents, teachers and community leaders who want to take action against bullying and sexual harassment in their communities. Chock full of capacity-building activities and ideas, Hey, Shorty! is indispensable for anyone who wants to create an environment where everyone thrives.

Written by: Heather Leighton

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### **Rakisha says**

This book should be required reading for every parent and person who works with preteen and teenage children. This book opened my eyes to level of sexual harassment our children face on a day to day basis on the streets and in school. I was harassed in high school, but back then we didn't call it harassment. Now, it seems to be even more prevalent. This book will give you ideas on how to bring up sexual harassment with your children/students and your children's educators. This book is a call of action for me.

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### **Meg says**

Highly recommend high school students and the like read this.

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### **Erika says**

I read this for my Psychology and Women class. For what it was, it was good. Most of this book was just factual information about how GGE came into existence and the goals that they are trying to accomplish.

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### **Tinea says**

Not so much a "guide" to combating sexual harassment in schools as a reportback from one organization's ten year campaign on the issue so far. The book goes step-by-step through Girls for Gender Equity's empowerment-based methods for identifying the problem, conducting participatory research, and implementing strategies for change on multiple levels. Good stuff and glad to read such a detailed, philosophically-grounded account of grassroots organizing based on community feedback and participation. Not super relevant to my life & work, but: mad respect!

This book got a lot of traction on the feminist blogs I read, which is why I requested it from the library (they had to special order it!). Check The Crunk Feminist Collective, Feministing and Tiger Beatdown (& here) for more detailed reviews.

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### **Kari says**

Most of us think about sexual harassment in the context of the workplace and would be genuinely surprised



to know just how prevalent it is in the world our teens and pre-teens inhabit. Of course, there are incidents so extreme, both in the media and on episodes of Law & Order, that we sit up straight and feel the bile rise in our throats: teachers taking advantage of students, gang rape in the bathroom of a local park. But what about the pervasive, everyday climate of intimidation and pressure that exists in the hallways and locker rooms of our nation's middle schools and high schools? And what does the tacit acceptance (and/or denial) of this culture teach our children about how to interact with each other? Is this how bullying gets so bad that children choose to drop out of school and deny themselves the opportunities to thrive that they deserve? Is this how we end up with teens deciding death is easier than living with a daily regimen of taunting and overwhelming negative pressure to be something they aren't, don't want to be, and couldn't possibly live up to?

"Hey, Shorty" is the story of an extraordinary organization called Girls for Gender Equity (GGE). Ten years ago, they embarked on an ambitious mission: to uncover and define the ways sexual harassment affect New York City's public school students. Borne out of a desire to give girls equal opportunities to engage in sports and gather together to share their strengths and challenges, Joanne N. Smith started the project. Fairly quickly, she began to realize that, despite the existence of Title IX, there were formidable barriers to overcome. Despite overwhelming agreement that both gender bias and sexual harassment existed within the community, there was little acknowledgement of either of these things as a pervasive problem that prevented girls from exploring opportunities on an equal playing field with boys.

Over a period of ten years, GGE fought to define sexual harassment and help students understand the insidious ways it affected their lives in and out of school. They enlisted student ambassadors to create surveys and educate their peers, all the while empowering these teens as solution-providers. They struggled with bureaucratic obstacles and lack of funding and found ways to energize the communities around them and find partners to join their cause. The amount of light that GGE is responsible for shedding on this pervasive issue in one of the biggest school districts in the nation is astonishing and exciting. As a woman who considers herself fairly open-minded and liberal, I was nonetheless shocked to discover that my notion of what is "acceptable" or "tolerable" behavior in schools was very much colored by my unwillingness to stand out or stand up for myself as a woman.

"Hey, Shorty!" is a primer for any group intent on addressing issues of bullying and sexual harassment in their own community. With practical advice on how to find supporters and engage individuals as voices for change, this book is one of the most important things any administrator or educator can read in preparation for dealing with tough issues among their students. As one of the authors says, there is no need to reinvent the wheel. The women and girls of GGE have done it already and are happy to share the blueprint.

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## **Ileana says**

Reading Hey Shorty!: A Guide to Combating Sexual Harassment and Violence in Public Schools and on the Streets is like drinking vitamin water for activists. An immersion in how-to community organizing, movement building, and feminist activism against sexual harassment, this book is the one we've all been waiting for. Written in easy-to-read language and clearly outlined, bullet point action steps, co-authors Meghan Huppuch, Joanne N. Smith, and Mandy Van Deven make the case for feminist activism in schools in ways that will make our non-initiated colleagues understand that we need to act now.

As hard as it is for some educators and administrators to admit, all schools are sexual and sexualized spaces.

More specifically, when it comes to sexual harassment, all schools are spaces of power and submission, authority and silence.

Pervasive and destructive, sexual harassment is considered to be a “typical part” of school life by two-thirds of the 1,189 New York City public school students surveyed by Girls for Gender Equity (GGE), a Brooklyn-based girls advocacy and movement building group dedicated to gender justice.

In this new and important book, GGE co-authors Huppuch, Smith, and Van Deven, reveal urgent research that the young women in their Sisters in Strength program discovered.

Their three pivotal findings should press those of us who are educators and school leaders to respond: 1) in-school sexual harassment occurs in many ways, to many people, and in many locations; 2) sexual harassment is a “normal” part of young people’s school experience, and 3) students want and need more education about sexual harassment.

One of the most disturbing findings asserts that sexual harassment is part of “what it mean[s] to be at school,” implying that “students find sexual harassment routine and acceptable.”

Of course, it’s not acceptable. As the authors point out, members of school communities, from principals, to other administrators, to staff, to the students themselves, perpetuate sexual harassment to the point where it is so normalized that many victimized students do not report it, nor do they even know that they have a federal law, specifically Title IX, to support them.

GGE reminds us that those who are often the targets of sexual harassment, in particular, women, girls, and LGBTQ youth, are “taught to put up with violent and destructive treatment because they have ‘no choice,’” leading to fear of coming to school, depression, poor decision-making with their bodies, and even attempts at suicide.

In response to these findings, Hey Shorty offers excellent strategies for students, educators, and adult allies to stop sexual harassment. One strategy for teachers caught my attention, namely, that educators should have “anti-discrimination rules for their classroom and incorporate anti-oppression lessons into their teaching.”

I could not agree more. I believe the first thing we need to do to make that happen is make sure that teachers themselves receive anti-racism, anti-classism, anti-sexism, anti-homophobia, and anti-transphobia training as part of their professional development.

In order to reach the point that all teachers incorporate these kinds of lessons into their curricula, faculty members need to do the work of unpacking their own oppression and the oppression they have done unto others not just in school but outside of school as well. Even those of us who are committed to this work need to practice anti-oppression work with our colleagues—even when it gets frustrating and exhausting—so that we can create a healed and healing community of adult allies for our students. Only then will we be able to reach GGE’s vision for becoming the fully realized social justice educators—not just content teachers—our students deserve.

What makes reading Hey Shorty exciting is that GGE’s work is based in feminist theory, especially intersectionality and women of color feminism. The authors make these theories completely accessible to the audience they are trying to reach, namely: educators, administrators, and students.

For instance, without ever using the word, their explanation of intersectionality—or Kimberlé Crenshaw’s

theory that asserts that systems of inequality along lines of race, class, gender, sexuality, etc. overlap—makes urgent that we need to apply this theory in our leadership of schools:

Sexual harassment affects our lives in profound ways because it grows out of larger forms of individual and institutional oppression that we experience as young people, women, people of color, immigrants, and members of the LGBTQ community. Achieving social justice is not just about race or class or gender or ability or nationality or religion. It's about all of these things at once, because, as Mahatma Gandhi famously said, 'No one is free when others are oppressed.'"

I can imagine my colleagues reading this book. I can imagine my students reading this book. I can imagine teaching this book. I can imagine it on summer reading lists for years to come. I can imagine schools inviting Huppuch, Smith, and Van Deven to come speak at assemblies, delivering their most pressing message: "The world can no longer ignore that gender-based violence is a health, education, and economic-development issue that negatively affects our entire society."

From Smith's inspiring founder's story to Van Deven's search for Title IX coordinators in New York City's public schools to Huppuch's initiation into GGE's fierce advocacy culture to the poetry and testimonies of Sisters in Strength interns, *Hey Shorty* reads like the activist version of Ntozake Shange's for colored girls. After reading their book, we can rest assured that no one's walking off with all of GGE's stuff. Each woman and girl's story of community organizing and movement building bolsters the next, revealing the visioning and action steps for gender justice in schools that we desperately need.

Follow Girls for Gender Equity on Facebook and Twitter. Learn more about their book tour for "Hey Shorty!" and bring them to your school.

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## **Rebecca says**

Before I read this book I really didn't think about the definition of sexual harassment or that it affects grade school and high school children and not just adults. "People who harass others are acting in a way that communicates aggression, hostility and a desire for control. They feel powerful by making someone, who they see as inferior, feel scared or uncomfortable." And this happens to women, gay and lesbians, transgender and bisexuals.

The people who created and fought for the cause in the New York City schools are amazing. I think back to my high school experience and there are some things I can definitely define as sexual harassment and I wish I had stood up for myself.

Someday when I can afford to I would like to donate to their cause.

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