



Quinn, Therese & Meiners, Erica R. (2009). *Flaunt It! Queers Organizing for Public Education and Justice*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

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Flaunt It! Queers Organizing for Public Education and Justice is equal parts memoir, exposé, theoretical analysis, and call to arms. Therese Quinn and Erica R. Meiners share their experiences as queers, activists and academics, negotiating those various roles and attempting to reshape the world in which they live through deliberate organization and action. Their personal testimonies are woven together with robust theoretical explorations and sociological critique. While their work is deeply intellectual, it is simultaneously inspiring and accessible. It is difficult to read about Quinn and Meiners' passion for their cause without feeling inspired oneself. The authors couple practical suggestions with encouragement to reshape the world in which we live. The reader is thereby left with not only inspiration, but also a toolbox of sorts as Quinn and Meiners provide scaffolding and serve as models for becoming organizers and activists in one's own community.

Therese Quinn is Associate Professor, Art Education, at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She earned a PhD in 2001 from the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Erica R. Meiners is an Associate Professor of Education and Women's Studies at Northeastern Illinois University and is involved in a number of local social justice projects in Chicago, including an adult high school for formerly incarcerated men and women.

Although Quinn and Meiners focus on issues that affect queers, they also explore the intersection of sexual orientation and gender identity with racism, classism, homophobia, misogyny, and sexism. In addition, by exploring topics such as multiculturalism, shame, stigma, housing, healthcare, the free market, and the tension between public and private spheres, *Flaunt It!* provides contemporary and historical analysis of the world in which we live that makes the book pertinent for every member of society. Whether it is the introduction of a Department of Defense run high school in their Chicago neighborhood or the suggestion to remove the term “social justice” from accrediting organizations’ literature, Quinn and Meiners point out how the lives of not only queers, but also every member of the community and world at large are negatively impacted by these choices and quietly press readers to examine changes in their own worlds.

Each chapter of the book centers on a particular activism project Quinn and Meiners have engaged in during recent years. Chapter One examines the intrusion of military education at a Chicago public high school. There are many aspects of Department of Defense run schools that trouble the authors, and they organized their response to the military schools by founding Teachers Against Militarized Education (TAME). Quinn and Meiners argue that such institutions offer an inferior brand of education and there is a racial demarcation concerning which schools in which communities are targeted for military-themed high schools. The authors are also deeply concerned about linking education to the military, a compulsively anti-queer institution. From “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policies to the systematic insistence on “rigid masculinity that is both misogynist and homophobic” (p. 20) to an insidious history of rape, gender violence, and sexual assault, Quinn and Meiners assert this is not the type of institution that is appropriate for American schools or American youth. In addition to a critical examination of military high schools, Quinn and Meiners take the opportunity to address pertinent issues such as school choice, charter schools, and national “safe” schools for queer youth.

The 2006 proposal by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) to eliminate the phrase “social justice” from the Professional Standards is the primary subject of Chapter Two. In addition to removing “social justice,” the proposal sought the de facto elimination of “sexual orientation” from the Standards. Quinn and Meiners argue that the deletion of the phrase “social justice” paves the road for

ostracism and marginalization and that the exclusion of “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” sends a strong message that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) individuals do not matter to the NCATE. The authors describe their efforts to organize against NCATE’s proposal and the subsequent silence of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). Quinn and Meiners organized a RED Campaign, which called for AERA members to wear red at the next conference to protest the association’s silence on the issue. They also wrote letters and enlisted the help of Bill Ayers to help NCATE understand the grave consequences of removing crucial phrases from the Professional Standards. Quinn and Meiners describe the reaction of their peers in the face of their organizing and activist efforts, which ranged from proud solidarity to anger and the assertion that the discussion of sexual orientation and gender identity is “divisive” (p. 34). This chapter highlights Quinn and Meiners as activists and professionals, struggling against immense pressures to “challenge persistent oppression in bureaucracies” (p. 41).

Chapter Three begins with Quinn and Meiners’ experience at Evangelical College, a private college in Illinois that was the site of a meeting of the Illinois Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (IACTE). Evangelical College requires students, faculty, and all other employees to sign a “Community Covenant” that describes homosexuality as immoral and, according to the authors, equates homosexuality with “theft, murder and rape” (p. 45). Quinn and Meiners responded to Evangelical’s Covenant with an “Accredit Love Not Condemnation” campaign and asked participants at the IACTE meeting to sign a pledge that promoted “the position that teachers who condemn their students and their students’ family members on the basis of sexual identities do not belong in public education” (p. 44). Their campaign was met with a lackluster reception from fellow participants but drew a great deal of anger from leadership at Evangelical. As Quinn and Meiners explain in the remainder of the chapter, homophobic, racist, sexist, classist, and anti-Semitic policies, covenants, and restrictions are not new in this country and must continue to be challenged and fought at every turn. The authors explore America’s history of “redlining” and more recently “lavender-lining” neighborhoods to exclude individuals of varied races/ethnicities and sexual orientations, respectively. Chapter Three also tackles difficult questions about whether or

not individuals with discriminatory perspectives and beliefs should be allowed to teach in America's public schools.

Chapter Four begins with vignettes about gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and academia from Quinn and Meiners' lives. They deconstruct the notion of the "Nice White Lady" teacher who serves as a Republican Mother charged with colonizing her pupils, making them respectable, moral and obedient. The authors examine the history of the teaching profession and the economic impetus for installing women as teachers in schools across America. Most importantly, however, Quinn and Meiners argue that the lasting legacy of the Nice White Lady teacher prevents non-Nice White Ladies from entering the profession "because their lives, bodies, and politics have already been scrubbed from the profession" (p. 69). Finally, Quinn and Meiners explore what all of this means for current and prospective members of the profession and how the demands to "cover" one's sexual orientation or gender identity serve as a "conservatizing force" in the profession (p. 72).

The final chapter, Chapter Five, is a chronicle of Quinn and Meiners efforts to systematically study the inclusion of LGBTQ issues in Illinois teacher preparation programs. They named their project the Pre-Professional Preparation Project (P-Project) and examined 57 Illinois teacher education programs' websites for evidence of the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity. Along with their coalition, they organized their findings on "Visibility Matters" report cards. Seventy-two percent of the programs they examined received a grade of F- and only one university received an A, signaling a critical dearth of appropriate inclusion of LGBTQ issues in the programs they examined. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the need for "politically relevant" (p. 87) teaching as opposed to "culturally relevant" teaching. Politically relevant teaching emphasizes "the political, historical, social, as well as cultural, understandings that teachers bring to their profession" (p. 87). These teachers, according to Quinn and Meiners, are better equipped to understand power differentials and therefore seek justice on behalf of all.

In the conclusion to the book, Quinn and Meiners delve into the issue of shame and stigma, noting that the latter "works to maintain social and institutional silences" (p. 99). In response to the pervasive attempts to shame individuals into silence, Quinn and Meiners urge readers to *flaunt* who they are and what they believe. They stress, "*Flaunting it* means speaking back when queer (or other justice) issues are dismissed as too

confrontational for public dialogues, and too trivial for public institutions” (p. 103, emphasis original). The conclusion ends with a list of suggestions for ways to *flaunt it* and create change from both the inside out and outside in.

Ultimately, the book transcends classification and audience. It cannot be placed in a single category and it cannot be deemed suitable for a single audience. Every educator, administrator, policy maker and member of the community would benefit from reading *Flaunt It!* However, it is understandable that a reader with disparate political and theoretical leanings from the authors might be put off by this work. It is unabashedly “in your face” and lives up to every letter of its title from start to finish. There is no skirting around the issues or walking the road of moderation for Quinn and Meiners, but that is what makes the piece successful. Unlike so many things in life, it is direct, straightforward and unashamed. A final criticism of *Flaunt It!* might be its short length, as a longer book might have explored national and even international events that have undercut justice. Perhaps, however, Quinn and Meiners intended for the rest of us to live the rest of the book, organizing and acting out against injustice--*flaunting it*--one day at a time.

About the Reviewer

Mary Michael Pontzer is a doctoral student at The University of Georgia in the Social Foundations of Education program with an emphasis on Comparative and International Education. Her research interests include HIV/AIDS education in the United States and sub-Saharan Africa, teacher education and training and critical pedagogy.

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