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Alt ed

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Atkins, Catherine. *Alt Ed*. G. P. Putnam's Sons/Penguin Books for Young Readers, 2003. ISBN 0399238549. \$17.99. 198 pp.

Reviewer: Elizabeth Meyers

Reading Level: Young adult

Rating: Excellent

Genre: Contemporary realistic fiction;

Subject: Behavior disorders in teenagers--Juvenile fiction; Interpersonal relations--Juvenile fiction; High schools--Juvenile fiction; Overweight persons--Juvenile fiction; Book--Reviews;

Susan Callaway goes through high school trying not to be noticed; she wears baggy sweatpants and turtlenecks and keeps her head down. The real problem is her weight-at her size, it makes her hard to go unseen, and she's sick of the teasing. Finally, she participates in an act of vandalism in retaliation against the worst of her tormentors and finds herself in a Vocational Education class, which is made up of six students whose actions could have gotten them kicked out of school. Mr. Duffy, the guidance counselor, is giving them all one last chance, but Susan isn't sure she wants that chance, especially when she finds out that the bane of her existence, Kale Krasner, is in the class with her.

Alt Ed is a surprisingly sensitive look at the painful issue of teenage ostracism. The main character, Susan Callaway, struggles with feelings of social and familial abandonment, sentiments which may be devastatingly familiar for many teens. While the ending feels a little pat, (general comeuppance and forgiveness for all), there is still some realistic resistance to clemency from the two characters who have been most trodden upon. This book will be especially moving for those teens who have braved indifference and bigotry to carve a niche for themselves.