

## WHY THE ISSUE OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS NEEDS TO BE ADDRESSED

By Debbie DeGroff  
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The very mention of having a discussion about the content of a book marketed for children brings a corporate outcry of “censorship”. Images are conjured up of Nazi book burners, religious fanatics, and intolerant, narrow-minded bigots who try to control the thinking of others.

Let's consider the issue of censorship. Budgets are limited whether by individuals or large public or private libraries. The x amount of funds allotted do not purchase all books. If both Librarian A and Librarian B receive identical funds with the purchasing power of a thousand books, the acquisitions would not be identical and possibly not even similar. Of course, the librarians did not censor all non-purchased books; they simply selected a particular thousand books for various reasons which may include personal ones.

There are numerous books marketed to children that deal with the issue of censorship. *Americus* by MK Reed was published by First Second Books in 2011. This is a graphic novel (comic book style) for 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade *interest* levels and is written on a third grade, third month (3.3) *reading* level. (By Accelerated Reader standards, *Yertle the Turtle and Other Stories* by Dr. Seuss is written on this same reading level.) The ‘Christian’ mom in this story wishes to have a fantasy series removed from the local library. She is depicted as being unattractive, unreasonable, and angry as opposed to the well-loved, intelligent, and supportive librarian. The mother points her finger at the librarian at the Library Board meeting and quotes the Bible:

“Their wine is the poison of dragons, and the cruel venom of asps.” Deut. 32:33  
You people have no concern for the well-being of your children.  
These books are disgusting! They promote everything God abhors!  
They say it takes a village to raise a child. But this village suffers from a plague of perversion and wickedness!  
You might be content to let your children grow up to be degenerates, to let them wallow in blackness and depravity. But I cannot sit idly by and watch you corrupt the innocents of this town with secular pagan filth. There are more important things in life than your freedoms and choices. The only thing that matters is living righteously!  
Excuse me, Mrs. Burns, but our freedoms allow you to practice your religion and say your piece here tonight. You may speak for a number of people, but you don't

Speak for everyone.

I—I speak for God! I speak for God.<sup>1</sup>

Amazon lists this book for those twelve to eighteen years. The child reading this now conveniently associates Christians, Christianity, and Censorship with the portrayal of Mrs. Burns.

*Memoirs of a Bookbat* by Kathryn Lasky, 1994, also has a censorship theme, but this book targets middle graders.

Harper Jessup is an avid reader, and when her parents become “migrants for God” she must keep her books secret. As Harper grows older and realizes how valuable reading is to her, she comes to understand that her parents’ radical efforts in favor of educational censorship are related to a quest for control within their own family. And so Harper finds she must make the hardest choice of all. “Sure to be controversial, prepare for a stimulating conversation.”

--*The New Advocate*<sup>2</sup>

The parents start going to church and one of the church ladies attacks two of the books Harper has just checked out---*The Three Little Pigs* and *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*.

“Goldilocks trespasses and does she get punished? No. Inappropriate punishment as it is shown in these children’s books is a real evil today. We cannot have stories in which naughty children get away with misbehaving ...”  
“Children start reading this trash and they get real stubborn, a lot of back talk.”<sup>3</sup>

Once again, the child reader associates Christians with censorship. In *The Trouble With Mothers*, The Crusade For A Clean America is contesting a historical novel that they deem pornographic. Mrs. Lester, the teacher, decides to give her middle school class a lesson about banned books. She sets up a banned book display.

“Each of these books has been removed from a library or school reading list at one time or another. Of course we all know there is no such thing as a perfect book...”

When she said that, Eddie raised his hand. “You’re wrong. The Bible’s perfect. Right?”

“But which version of the Bible?” Mrs. Lester asked.

Eddie sat up straight and pulled his long legs under his desk.

“What do you mean, version? There’s only one Bible.”

“Really?” Mrs. Lester sounded like she’d been waiting to spring this one. “Here’s a copy of the *Good News Bible*, and here’s the more traditional King James version, and this is the *New English Bible*.”

“We’re Catholic,” Bess interrupted. “I think our Bible is different from those.”

Mrs. Lester agreed. “Yes, there are several Catholic versions as well. And each religion has its own equivalent of the Bible. Here is the *Koran*, the sacred text of the Islamic religion.”

“Yeah, and my grandpa is Buddhist,” a kid near the window said, “and his book’s different, too.”

“Okay, okay,” Eddie said. “So what? There’s nothing wrong with every church having its own kind of Bible. Big deal.”  
“The fact remains that there is no one book for all people, and that’s fine,” Mrs. Lester said. “We ought to be able to choose what we want to read.”  
...Mrs. Lester held up her hand. “Do you think perhaps books are banned as a way of controlling what people think?”<sup>4</sup>

There seems to be a push to educate children about censorship. Even lower grade children are not exempt. In *Arthur and The-Scare-Your-Pants-Off Club*, a small chapter book, the children rush to the library to check out a new book in their favorite series, only to find that all the books in that series have been removed from the shelves.<sup>5</sup>

Taking a quick look at all the Banned Book Week celebrations and displays, one can deduce that many of these books that would have died a quick death on their own, now have their own personal marketing team with no out-of-pocket expenses.

Elsie V. Aidinoff was interviewed by Michelle Pauli for the article, “Up the Garden Path” in *The Guardian*. Aidinoff, “...jokingly suggests that she wishes the state of Texas would ban her book, for the publicity benefits it would bring.”

She is speaking of her book, *The Garden*, 2004, in which the God of the Bible is vilified and the serpent is glorified. Eve has several dreams in this book. In the first one, Adam is raping her and she is telling him to stop.

Adam’s eyes brimmed with tears... “I don’t want to hurt you,” he said. “But God told me to do this, and I must do what God says.”<sup>6</sup>

The fourth dream is about a great flood. In this dream Eve has a daughter and is trying to protect her from the rising waters. A great ark appears and a rope is hanging down its side. She lifts her daughter so she can climb up the rope.

A man...leans over the side with a broom and begins to strike her ... “She can’t come up...We have a full contingent, all our two’s. We’re not allowed to save anyone else!” “Who says so?” I shout. “God,” comes the answer. It’s God’s command.” The broom handle strikes my daughter full in the face.<sup>7</sup>

This book retells the Garden of Eden from Eve's point of view, as Serpent teaches her everything from her own name to why she should eat the forbidden fruit, and then leaves her with Adam and the knowledge that her choice has made mankind free. (Accelerated Reader)<sup>8</sup>

HarperTempest, the publisher of *The Garden*, should have been pleased with the book’s reception. It received a YALSA Top Ten Award, as well as an ALA Best Book for Young Adults.

*Freak Show*, by James St. James was selected as one of the School Library Journals Best Book of the Year titles for 2007. It was also chosen as a 2008 YALSA (Young Adult

Library Services Association, a division of the American Library Association) Quick Pick for Reluctant Young Adult Readers, as well as the YALSA Best Books for Young Adults, 2008.

In an interview with Cazwell from Gay Action News, James St. James talks about his new book:

My new book is called *Freak Show*. It's um, the first drag queen character in young adult history. I started getting a lot of e-mails from 14,15,16 year old little gay boys, little drag queens and um who sort of like glamorized what the Club Kids were and what Michael Alig was about and everything... but it's not something that I felt comfortable telling kids to go out and be drug addicts and things like that...so when *Dutton approached me about doing something for teens* I thought, well, this was a chance for me to do something that celebrated a, the things that Disco Bloodbath and all that stuff was about, ya know, personal empowerment and radical style and breaking boundaries and all that-- being subversive and being rebellious, but not glamorizing the drug use and not glamorizing the murder and things like that...so it was a chance for me to do something for the *children* and um, so, it was sort of a positive thing for me.<sup>9</sup>

Dutton approached James St. James to write something for teens. Why? Was it because Dutton saw St. James, a drag queen, as a role model for kids? His adult book *Disco Bloodbath* (later made into the movie *Party Monster*) was about the Club Kids and the Club Kid Michael Alig's murder of his drug pusher.

The back bookflap of *Freak Show* states that "James manages to find time to contribute to the World of Wonder Website." Some kids might just look up that website. With today's technology, they can be on the site in the blink of an eye. World of Wonder is made up of the WOW Report and the World of Wonder Production Company. On the WOW Report website, the children can read informative articles by St. James such as "Jenna Jameson is VERY Upset that a Transwoman is a Playboy Playmate"<sup>10</sup>. Jameson is a former pornographic film star sometimes referred to as the Queen of Porn.

A simple Google search will also direct them to the Daily Freak Show episodes if they haven't already found the links and references at the World of Wonder website. There are one hundred eighty-one episodes of St. James's Daily Freak Show available on YouTube in which most episodes feature his kiddie book at the end. These episodes feature drag queens in various clubs and events. I have no words to describe these.<sup>11</sup>

Yes, James St. James took this opportunity to do *something* for the children. The protagonist, Billy Bloom, is the drag queen in the story who runs for homecoming queen. Billy Bloom has a boyfriend and is eventually raped by a different boy. But in the midst of all this necessary-reading for the well-being of our youth, St. James also enlightens his young readers about God and Christianity.

The biggest turnout, however, seemed to be of Bible Belles, those overly scrubbed Christian girls... who obviously picked this class for its Puritan studies...Hester Prynne, Cotton Mather, "Sinners at [sic] the Hands of An Angry God"--nothing

like a bit of hellfire to chase away those impure thoughts. But don't be fooled by the crosses around their necks; these girls are the coldest of all the cold-blooded killers here today. The worst of the bunch. Because when they're being hateful, they're being hateful for God.<sup>12</sup>

I think about the orphaned children who survived the great Afghani earthquake a few years ago. They were sent, of all places, to San Francisco. And after the last big earthquake there, those poor kids have become convinced that God is after them. Trying to kill them. And who's to say he isn't?<sup>13</sup>

Recently, *Freak Show* was made into a movie starring Bette Midler. The kids will now watch the movie, and then flock to buy the book. Maybe they will even peruse the World of Wonder site and watch some episodes of his *Daily Freak Show*.

Although *Freak Show* is listed as a book for young adults, it is written on a fourth grade, second month reading level, which is a lower level than *Charlotte's Web*. This 4.2 reading level is taken from the Accelerated Reader site. Many schools utilize the Accelerated Reader program. After the children read a book, they can take an AR test on the computer. With a certain percentage of correct answers, they receive points. As individuals or as a class, they will receive awards such as a pizza or ice cream party, etc. for reaching a certain number of points. There are ten points earned from reading this book and passing the test. Without access to the purchased software, a parent has no way of even knowing what types of questions are being asked.

It's certainly understandable that there may be a parent or two concerned about some of the content in children's books. However, voicing an unfavorable comment to a librarian, teacher, or school administrator could unleash enough wrath to virtually silence any further attempts for others to object to anything. Should the characters of these concerned individuals be defamed for simply addressing the subject matter?

Are objectors allowed? Of course! If objecting to the number of books representing a heteronormative representation, there is no backlash. These books are quietly weeded out and replaced with non-heteronormative children's books. Too many books about white protagonists, traditional homes, conservative ideas or Christianity? Simply keep weeding and replacing. Silence. No one is called names. *They* are not trying to control the thinking of others. *They* are not Nazi book burners. *They* are the enlightened ones that know best what your children need to read. *They* are the book selectors.

Is there another side to this? Let's look at how Scholastic handled the situation when some people objected to their book, *A Birthday Cake for George Washington*, 2016. The slaves in the book appeared to be happy, complete with smiling faces. Scholastic made the decision to stop distributing the book.

In a statement it said it respected the "integrity and scholarship of the author, illustrator, and editor" but without more context on the "evils of slavery," the book may leave kids with "a false impression of the reality of the lives of slaves."<sup>14</sup>

It's great to see a publisher have such a concern for not leaving children with false impressions. Scholastic self-censored, taking a financial loss, so that the children could be protected from this false impression. Where is that same concern shown for false impressions about any other issue? Was this a real concern by the publishing company, or a pocketbook decision?

We must also be cognizant that this isn't just about libraries or librarians. Authors, of course, wrote these books, but agents, editors, and publishers were also involved. Ursula Nordstrom was a children's editor at Harper and Row for over three decades.

Hailed as an innovator in young people's literature, she spurned the moralistic teachings of earlier works in favor of characters and situations that reflected the experiences of her young audience. She once remarked: "We don't publish books for adults; we do them for children, *and sometimes it's a problem to get books through adults to the children.*"<sup>15</sup> [emphasis mine]

What types of children's books would have caused such a dilemma? John Donovan, the executive director of the Children's Book Council wrote a book called *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip* which Harper published in 1969. Ursula Nordstrom was the editor. The book was the first children's book that addressed homosexuality. Nordstrom was a lesbian and Donovan was a homosexual.

It shattered a taboo as the first novel for young readers to contain a scene sympathetically describing a homoerotic encounter between boys and the complex feelings surrounding the experience. (p 257) ...I have been waiting a long time for a manuscript that includes "buddy-love problems" and it will be fine if you are the one to do it successfully.<sup>16</sup>

August 5, 1968...As I said at luncheon, we're going to meet a lot of resistance to this book and we will be eager to fight that resistance as intelligently and gracefully as possible...But I am very glad you wanted to write this book, and I am glad that we have the opportunity to publish it. I think it is going to mean a lot to a lot of young readers, *if we can just get it past the adults who buy their books!*<sup>17</sup> [emphasis mine]

I do not need to tell you that the book will meet with considerable resistance with certain influential persons in the children's book field. Yet surely this is an experience many boys have, and one that worries and frightens them badly. It seems strange that a curtain has been drawn over this entire subject in fiction for young readers. Our book will be the first. And of course I want to do everything we can to get it past the adults and to some young readers who may read it with some recognition and some relief.<sup>18</sup>

Nordstrom's means of getting the book past the adults was to solicit a quote from Dr. Ilg from the Gesell Institute which she received and used. Mary Calderone, the head of SIECUS (Sex Information and Education Council of the United States) was also considered.

Just as we examine the children's books being published today, it would also be interesting to know the content of manuscripts rejected by these publishing houses. What types of manuscripts are they accepting or soliciting, and which ones never see the light of day?

Book reviewers are also an integral part of the marketing process. There are so many books available today with no real means of vetting apart from available book reviews. But how reliable are these reviews? The following is a review from Booklist of Coe Booth's, *Tyrell*. This is a book that, according to Accelerated Reader, is written on a fourth grade, fourth month reading level, but intended for upper grade *interest* levels. By comparison, *Charlotte's Web* is also written on the same fourth grade, fourth month reading level, but would primarily interest middle graders.

From Booklist: \*Starred Review\* "You don't hardly get to have no kinda childhood in the hood." At 15, Tyrell is trying to keep his little brother in school and safe in their roach-infested shelter in the Bronx. He has dropped out of school, and Moms wants him to sell drugs to make money. But Tyrell is too smart. He doesn't want to end up in prison like his dad, so he tries to organize a neighborhood party to raise money. His girlfriend, Novisha, isn't happy that Tyrell has dropped out. She loves him, and they make out, but he respects her wish to remain a virgin. Booth, who was born and raised in the Bronx, is now a social worker there, and her first novel is heartbreakingly realistic...  
Hazel Rochman Copyright © American Library Association.<sup>19</sup>

So, in summary, Moms wants her son to sell drugs to make money, but Tyrell doesn't want to go to prison like his father, so he decides to organize a neighborhood party to raise money. He respects his girlfriend's wish to remain a virgin, even though they make out--which could mean anything, by the way. Who would object to a book like that?

Does the content of the book match up with the review? On point one, yes. Tyrell's mother does want him to sell drugs to make money. Point two is a tad iffy. Certainly Tyrell does not wish to go to prison like his father, and I agree whole-heartedly that he decides to organize a neighborhood party to raise money. Where this becomes troublesome is the implication that Tyrell wants to do the right thing, so he decides to throw a neighborhood party instead of selling drugs on the street. On pages 51-52, Tyrell describes the reason his father was sent to prison the first time.

He a DJ and he be throwing these wild, off-the-hook parties. The first time he got locked up was for selling drugs at his parties.<sup>20</sup>

A couple years later he was locked up again. This time the police was callin' him a pimp, which he ain't and never was. He just threw some real wild parties, and hos would show up just so they could work the men in the crowd. He said they would make more money at one of his parties than they did in two or three days on the streets. And the men ain't had no problem with them being there. But the police did. They got my pops for selling drugs, selling alcohol without a liquor license, running numbers, and pimping girls. He had to serve three years of a five-year sentence.<sup>21</sup>

My pops was making some good money, and he was taking care of us. Matter of fact, I was real f—kin’ happy ‘cause me and him was hanging out all the time. I was at most of his parties, and I would help him DJ sometimes and just chill sometimes.<sup>22</sup>

I remember that party ‘cause we had to do the whole thing, even the setup and break down, between the time the night shift left at 9:00 and the day shift got there at 6:00. It was wild. At ‘bout 5:30 in the morning, we was ...breaking down the equipment like we was crazy. The whole factory was tore up. Machines was broke, garbage was all over the place, the bathroom was flooded, but we ain’t care ‘bout that. We just ain’t wanna get caught.<sup>23</sup>

First time a girl ever blew me was at that first party. Girl was, like, eighteen or nineteen, and she ain’t care that I was only thirteen. She pulled me behind one of them big speakers and got down on her knees. She ain’t want no money or nothin’. She told me she was doing it just ‘cause I was Tyrone kid. I had a smile on my face for two f—kin’ weeks after that.<sup>24</sup>

So now Tyrell decides to throw his own neighborhood party with the help of his dad’s friend Leon.

‘Bout a hundred yellow buses is parked in front... “They got some buses inside, too,” Leon say. “But there’s gonna be enough floor space in there for your party.” ...“How you get in a place like this?” I finally ask him. “You don’t gotta worry about that. I’m gonna have all that took care of.” I wanna ask him how. Like, do he just break in, or do he pay someone off that work there? But something tell me I don’t wanna know the answer.<sup>25</sup>

The party don’t end ‘til ‘bout five in the morning...Regg give Leon his money so he can take his hos and get outta there, then Regg sit on the cooler so he can count out all the money. Meanwhile, me and Patrick unplug all the cables and wires while Wayne and Rafael load the speakers and crates in Patrick uncle truck. Patrick all happy ‘cause he made some good money, and he already talkin’ ‘bout the next party...<sup>26</sup>

The place is f—ked. Right before I decided to end the party, some drunk dude went ‘round breaking windows on the buses for no reason, so there’s glass all over the floor, not to mention all the cigarette butts and beer cans. And a lot of kids musta threw up ‘cause there’s all kinds of vomit puddles on the floor. The bathroom is a whole ‘notha story. It’s just plain nasty. But we ain’t get caught, everybody had fun, and I got rent money. Far as I’m concerned, that’s all that count.<sup>27</sup>

Yes, the Booklist reviewer is correct. Rather than selling drugs on the street for his friend, Tyrell throws a neighborhood party that was complete with drug selling, prostitution, pirated CD sales, alcoholic beverages sold to underage kids, and



destruction of property... but “everybody had fun, and I got rent money. Far as I’m concerned, that’s all that count.”

Can you even fathom how much money it would take to clean up this warehouse and the numerous buses used for prostitution purposes---not to mention all the broken windows in the buses inside the building? From an economic standpoint, all the money earned by the various criminals involved would not be enough to pay for the damages incurred.

And yet, this book is promoted by the American Library Association as a YALSA Quick Pick for Reluctant Readers in 2007. According to their website, “The Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers list identifies titles aimed at encouraging reading among teens who dislike to read for whatever reason.”

And what about point three-- Tyrell’s respect for his girlfriend’s desire to remain a virgin?

Two seconds later she pulling her T-shirt over her head and I’m kissing her and feeling her up. Then she go over to this little tiny statue of St. Mary she got on the shelf over her bed and turn it ‘round so it face the wall. She do this every time she ‘bout to do some nasty sh-t, so St. Mary can’t see her...Novisha is still a virgin and she ain’t giving it up ‘til she married. She don’t even let me put my hand in her panties or nothing. But she do like blowing me. I’m the only guy she ever did it to, but she real good at it. She know how to take care of me.<sup>28</sup>

Yes indeed! Tyrell is very considerate of Novisha’s desires to remain chaste! At the final neighborhood party, however, Tyrell learns that Novisha isn’t even a virgin. Oh, and just where did she lose her virginity? At a *Bible* Camp her mother made her go to when she was thirteen.

Now, go back and re-read the Booklist Review. We can agree that Moms wanted him to sell drugs, but he throws a neighborhood party instead, and that he thinks Novisha is a virgin, but the review is still misleading. Oftentimes a too trusting parent or librarian would infer from this review that Tyrell decides to do the right thing and thinks that perhaps Tyrell would be a good role model for other children living in similar circumstances. This doesn’t line up with the facts, however. Tyrell does not get caught or arrested for this, and let’s call it what it is--criminal activity.

Perhaps one could use this book to teach an economic lesson. Just how much would it cost to repair and restore all the property destroyed? Is that inconsequential because Tyrell can now pay his rent, the pimp increased his income, his friend profited from the pirating of music CDs and the other guy made money selling marked-up-in-price booze to minors? Additionally, a good discussion question would be to inquire just who will pay for these damages. In broadening the scope of this lesson, the teacher could point out that taxpayer money is not synonymous with money trees growing on the Capitol lawn.

Then again, people promoting books such as these are considered the enlightened, intellectual ones, and those questioning these choices are branded mainly with being a censor. That somehow, objectors are trying to remove free speech from the land and control the thoughts of all, while forgetting that the same argument could be hurled at those selecting these books for children.

Many librarians, teachers and parents rely on book descriptions from Accelerated Reader, Amazon, Barnes and Noble, et al. Here is an Accelerated Reader description of *Nick & Norah's Infinite Playlist*:

High school student Nick O'Leary, member of a rock band, meets college-bound Norah Silverberg and asks her to be his girlfriend for five minutes in order to avoid his ex-sweetheart. The coauthor is David Levithan.<sup>29</sup>

There are 278 F-Words and their variations in this book. Strangely, there is no mention of profanity in this book description. David Levithan, by the way, is an editor for Scholastic.

The AR Huckleberry Finn description warns of profanity and racial slurs. The word 'hell' is used two times. [The usage of the n-word would be covered under the "racial slurs" description.] It is interesting that the two "hells" would warrant a profanity warning, but 278 F-Words –in addition to all the other swear words – do not. Moreover, there is no mention of the sexual situations in *Nick & Norah's Infinite Playlist*. Who writes these descriptions?

Certainly, book descriptions are meant to help parents or children determine which books would interest them the most. That is why that it is so important for the reviews and descriptions to be accurate.

Books are promoted that are supposed to influence good character traits such as kindness, honesty, and loyalty. There are lists of books available that are supposed to teach and encourage such behaviors. In other words, these books are written in hopes that the children will emulate these good qualities. Antithetically, when parents object to unacceptable behaviors presented in children's books, they are told that the children will not mirror the activities presented, but they will learn lessons from these examples. Just what lessons will be learned is anyone's guess.

Books marketed to children depicting sexual activity have come a long way since Donovan's *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip*. The publishing companies are churning out children's books that demonstrate heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual relationships, as well as sadomasochism, incest, fisting, multiple partners, sex with teachers, pedophilia, and transgenderism.

The majority of these books are listed for the young adult age group, but interestingly, most of these are written on very low reading levels making them accessible to children of any age.

In the name of diversity, books are published to make all children feel included. *Grandpa has Four Wives* for a three to six year old target audience was recently published in Sweden. Children with same-sex parents have to be presented with books about protagonists in the same situation. *Between Mom and Jo* by Julie Anne Peters quips the infamous line:

“Do you know who my father is?” I know I have to have one. ...Jo clears her throat and says, “Uh, yeah. He’s a syringe full of sperm.”<sup>30</sup>

Want to compare notes with others who have lost their virginity? How about *Losing It*, edited by Keith Gray?

Covering everything from purity rings to honor killings, these ten stories about teens losing their virginity are funny, moving, haunting, and harrowing, but they all have one thing in common: the first time. The plots contain sexual language.<sup>31</sup>

Thank you, Accelerated Reader! Who would have ever thought that a book with ten stories about teens losing their virginity would contain sexual language? And it’s good to know that anyone who can read on a fourth grade, fifth month reading level can master this one.

Intersex? Just read *Golden Boy* by Abigail Tartellin. Max, an intersex youth, has lived his life as a boy. Hunter, another boy, has known Max’s secret since they were very young. Hunter rapes Max and Max gets pregnant. After a great deal of deliberation, Max has an abortion.

Has the child been sexually abused by a teacher? How about Barry Lyga’s *Boy Toy*? This is a step-by-step guide as to how the teacher groomed Josh beginning when Josh was just twelve.

Do you menstruate? How about *Don’t Cramp My Style: Stories About That Time of the Month*, edited by Lisa Rowe Fraustino? The following was taken from the afterword on pages 290-291.

Michelle H. Martin is Assistant Professor of English at Clemson University. She wrote her Ph.D. dissertation on menstruation in children's literature and was invited to write the Introduction to this volume because of her knowledge about the topic.<sup>32</sup>

*Losing It*,<sup>33</sup> a story from this important work about that time of the month, by Julie Stockler, begins on page 242. The girl, a virgin, is on a bike trip with friends and meets a stranger; minutes later, they are making out. But, sadly, there is a problem. She remembers she is on her period and has a tampon in. She can't tell a *stranger*; so they do it anyway, and later it takes her about a half hour and much effort to remove the tampon.

This next story is about a girl who didn't get her period. *Maroon*<sup>34</sup> by Han Nolan is a story told from an eight year old girl's point of view about a teenage girl that came to live with her family because she was pregnant. The eight year old wasn't aware of the pregnancy...The teenager ends up getting a coat hanger and going into the bathroom. She dies, and the eight year old watches her mother and the neighbor clean the large volume of blood from the bathroom. Of course, they missed a few spots. The eight year old decides she never wants to have a period and becomes anorexic. Oh, and guess when this one supposedly took place? 1969. Goodness, if this could have just happened in 1973 after Roe v. Wade, Candy Sue could have just had an abortion and she'd still be alive today...Isn't that the conclusion some readers will come to after reading this?

Are you a ten year old trapped in the wrong body? How about *George*<sup>35</sup> by Alex Gino? Gino identifies as neither a girl or boy, but genderqueer and non-binary. The pronoun Gino uses is "they". *George* is about a ten year old fourth grade boy who by the end of this story is called Melissa.

"George's success has already far surpassed anything I could have imagined," says Gino in the paperback edition of his book. In an article from August 27, 2015, Neda Ulaby writes:

...Scholastic believes the book is for *everyone*...With *George*, it settled on an initial press run of 50,000 copies. Editorial director David Levithan puts that number in perspective.

"Fifty thousand is pretty amazing for a debut author writing a middle grade book that isn't part of a series," he says. "No wizards, no Greek myths, no action adventure. It's just one girl's story."

...The trick was getting *George* into as many readers' hands as possible. The company sent it to 10,000 teachers, to children's librarians and took Gino around to major book fairs, including Winter Institute, run by the American Booksellers Association.<sup>36</sup>

There are numerous non-fiction sex books marketed for children. One such book---*Sex: A Book for Teens*<sup>37</sup> by Nikol Hasler, 2010 was endorsed by the former Surgeon General of the United States, Jocelyn Elders. It was also recommended as an American Library Association selection for reluctant readers.

"What a clever, well-written and creatively illustrated book that speaks to teens and their parents about teenage sexuality! This book should be on all school library shelves and makes an excellent birthday present from parents to adolescents. Both the content and form are superb."

--M. Joycelyn Elders, MD<sup>38</sup>

It is also endorsed by Betty Dodson:

“I love Nikol’s fabulous sense of humor as she delivers straightforward and accurate sex information. Where was she when I was a teen growing up in Wichita, Kansas?” --Betty Dodson, PhD, author of *Sex for One*<sup>39</sup>

**Betty Dodson** (born August 24, 1929) is an American sex educator, author, and artist. Dodson held the first one-woman show of erotic art at the Wickersham Gallery in New York City in 1968. She left the art world to teach sex to women. She is widely known as a pioneer in women's, and to a somewhat lesser extent men's, sexual liberation, having sold more than 1 million copies of her first book, *Sex for One*.

Much of her fame has come from her work not only advocating masturbation, but conducting workshops for more than 30 years in which groups of about 10 or more women (and at least once a group of men) would talk, explore their own bodies, and masturbate together.

She hosted a Public-access television cable television program in New York City in the early 80's, and conducted her workshop – a dozen or so nude women discussing and practicing masturbation – on TV. Her website called "Betty Dodson's Genital Gallery" shows many films of masturbation and intercourse, with close-up views of genitals.<sup>40</sup>

Although this book states on the back cover that it is for children 15 and up, I found this book in the *juvenile* section of a local library. I wonder how many juveniles may have read this book since the library is located on the Elementary/Middle School property?

Due to the concern for the well-being of children everywhere, Hasler describes the art of vaginal fisting:

“It does involve putting a whole hand in a vagina (or anus), but the fingers are typically straight, with fingertips touching—not curled up in a fist shape. The person doing the fisting will (using lubrication and a rubber glove for safety) start with one finger, and then, with the other person’s permission, gradually add another, and another...” She states that it does carry a significant amount of risk and “has to be approached with extreme gentleness.”<sup>41</sup>

And anal sex...

On page 98 she suggests going in stages by trying one lubricated finger at a time “into the other person’s butt...Three fingers is about the width of the average penis, so if you can slide your fingers back and forth easily enough, chances are your partner is ready for the real thing.”<sup>42</sup>

Hasler cautions about the dangers of “crisis pregnancy centers”:

You can also go to a doctor, clinic, or place like Planned Parenthood to be tested. It will probably cost more, but the advantage is that if you are pregnant you’ll have a professional there to calmly lay out your options for you. Be wary, however, of suspicious phone book ads for places called “crisis pregnancy

centers” that offer free pregnancy tests. These places can sometimes be really creepy, and your “free” pregnancy test may come along with a two-hour lecture and video about aborted babies. Many women describe being harassed, intimidated, and given blatantly false information at these places---hardly what you need at such a sensitive time.<sup>43</sup>

Safety is of the utmost importance:

Q. My girlfriend says she wants me to tie her up during sex. Why does she want me to do that? And what should I do?

A...If you decide you are up for it, remember that safety is the primary concern above all else. To keep it safe, one should use magician’s rope or hemp rope, either of which is stretchy, unties easily, and is less likely to give rope burn...<sup>44</sup>

There is even an entire chapter devoted to Kinks, Fantasies and Fetishes. This includes watersports, scat, and golden showers. In case all of the child’s questions still aren’t answered, Hasler lists two pages of further resources including Planned Parenthood, Kinsey Confidential, Advocates for Youth, San Francisco Sex Information and Scarleteen.

This book has been revised and the new one is titled *Sex: An Uncensored Introduction*. I have the original paperback edition of *Sex A Book for Teens* and the Kindle version of the newer one. Many libraries have the books and the ebooks available. Something to consider is the fact that these digital resources are hyperlinked so the child can immediately navigate to these aforementioned websites. I noticed that the Midwest Teen Sex Show link was still hyperlinked, although Hasler’s former show is no longer up and running. (Most of the episodes are still available from other venues, however.) I clicked the link wondering if it would just be a dead link. The link sent me to a porn site. How many children have already clicked on that link and then explored the site?

This made me wonder about fictional books. If a website was mentioned within a fictional text, would it be hyperlinked? I ruefully paid the money for a Kindle edition of a young adult book I had read recently. There were two porn sites complete with web addresses woven into the storyline. Both appeared in the same paragraph. What was the verdict? One was hyperlinked and the other was not. It was probably an oversight that the other link wasn’t hyperlinked, too. Clicking on the hyperlink directed me to a real porn site, the one mentioned in the storyline. How many minors have already done this?

Shouldn’t this have been eliminated by the stroke of an editor’s pen? Why wasn’t it? This young adult author mentions several other porn stars in this book, but the minors would have to Google the names of the ‘stars’ to get to their sites. This would take them an extra few seconds. A follow up question would be, “Why were real porn stars and sites mentioned by name?” After all, if this is a fictional book, couldn’t the porn stars also be fictitious?

Simon and Schuster is the publisher of this book. The copyright page of this book, *Exit Here*,<sup>45</sup> by Jason Myers says, “Simon Pulse: An Imprint of Simon & Schuster Children’s Publishing Division.” This book was published in 2007.

In addition to the near 450 F-Words, there are few depravities not mentioned or described:

- explicit sex between a stepson and stepmother (85-86)
- a father and his twenty-something secretary has sex on the living room floor (68)
- a girl that ‘gets trained’ by twenty dudes at some party (74)
- masturbating to porn (215-216)
- a guy placing a cat in a microwave and cooking it at a party (306)  
listening to *A Prayer to God* by Shellac on YouTube; this is about a guy praying to God to kill his ex-girlfriend and her new boyfriend (314-315)
- a girl gives another guy a blow job while the boyfriend is passed out on the floor beside the bed (317)
- a girl is upset about throwing up in someone’s bedroom at a party; another guy wants to make her feel better, so he forces himself to puke, too---all over her (322)
- continual drug usage (throughout the book)
- plans for two guys to tag team a girl and two of her friends (333)
- Not to mention a girl telling her boyfriend that if he f@#ked a particular girl singer, he would be even more desirable to her. (368)

A girl spurned:

“F@#k you,” she snaps. “You have no idea who I am.”

Who are you?

“You f@#ked my ass in a bathroom at the Speedwagon Warehouse during that Lightning Bolt and 400 Blows show last summer.”

Christina?

“Lila,” she snorts. “You piece of sh@t. You choked me and slammed my head against the wall and came on my face, then gave me a fake phone number.”<sup>46</sup>

Travis has a lot of drugs in his system and can’t seem to perform for Maggie. Then she asks him to eat her out, but he doesn’t do that to her satisfaction, either. Finally, she takes care of the situation herself:

... “Do not say another word,” she sneers. Then she squirts some lotion onto her dildo and starts f@#king herself with it and I sit there and watch her. She gets off four times in like twenty minutes and when she’s through, she throws the dildo on the ground, turns so that her back is facing me, and shuts her lamp off.<sup>47</sup>

How could this book be complete without incorporating a scene about autoerotic asphyxiation?

“I got something I bought.” He pulls a black DVD case out. “We have to watch this.”

“What is it?” Michael asks.

“I don’t know, but that dude Marco told me I had to go home and watch it. He said I wouldn’t be disappointed.”

...But then the screen flashes and a kid, probably our age, appears on it, hanging from a ceiling beam with a rope tied around his neck, masturbating.

Think asphyxiation.

Dave tells Michael to turn the volume up, so Michael does, and with clarity, I can hear the kid moaning as he jacks his piece really hard.

And Michael’s like, “I wonder what he’s thinking about,” right as the kid shoots off this monster f@#king load. I mean, it f@#king sprays.

Just think about mayonnaise bursting out of a garden hose.

Both Michael and Dave start clapping until the kid tries to untie himself, but can’t do it. At first he puts both his hands around the rope and tries to pull himself up to the beam, but then one of his hands, the one with all the come on it, slips, and the kid’s neck snaps back.

He regroups for a moment, then tries to loosen the rope by tugging at it, but nothing is giving and then he really starts to panic. He starts ripping at the rope, like over and over and over again, but it’s just not working.

His face turns all red.

His tongue is hanging out.

His legs are shaking violently.

And probably five seconds later, the kid stops moving altogether. The noises he was making quit coming.

He’s totally dead.

And Dave goes, “Michael, play it again.”

“I’m already there,” Michael says.

Why? I ask.

“Cause that was awesome,” Dave says.

No it wasn’t, man. Michael, don’t play it again.

“Screw you, Trav. It was awesome.” He does two more lines.

It was f@#ked up...

“I’ve never seen anything this cool,” I hear Dave say.<sup>48</sup>

There are two references to *The Brown Bunny* film. If the kids Google this, they will find a trailer of the below mentioned scene that they can watch repeatedly—just like Travis did in the book.

And a poster for the Vincent Gallo movie *The Brown Bunny*, with a shot of Chloe Sevigny about ready to suck Gallo’s cock.<sup>49</sup>

All morning I lie in bed, smoking cigarettes...watching over and over the part in the Vincent Gallo movie *The Brown Bunny* where Gallo gets head from Chloe Sevigny.<sup>50</sup>

This next excerpt is from *The Mission*<sup>51</sup> by Jason Myers.



“Do something for me, Kaden.”

“Kay,” I stammer.

She grabs my right hand, takes my index finger and dips it into the coke, and says, “One of the things I love to do before I take the stage is get my pussy real numb.”

...”So will you do it? Will you get my pussy numb, Kaden?”

“Yeah.”

“Good,” she says, then lifts her right leg and slams it against the sink, directing my finger between her legs, against her pussy. “Move it around,” she snaps.

(284)

And I do. I run my finger up and down and in circles and inside of her while she moans and licks her lips.

“Do you like feeling my pussy?” she asks.

“I do.”

“I know it,” she says. She grabs my hand and yanks it from her pussy and shoves my own finger into my mouth. “Taste me,” she says. “Taste my pussy mixed with cocaine. Does it taste good?”

“Huh-huh,” I groan, the words muffled, slobber running down my chin.

“How good does it taste?”

“Great.” More drool.

She pulls my finger out and lets go of my hand. “G@dd#mn,” she moans, looking in the mirror and fixing her hair. “Time to play a show.” She leans in and kisses me on the cheek. “Thank you for that,” she says. “I appreciate your help.”

“You’re welcome.”

She kisses me again and leaves the bathroom...

...I can’t really comprehend what the hell just actually happened. How Ally, one of the hottest girls I’ve ever laid eyes on, just let me stick my finger in her pussy with cocaine on it and then taste it. It’s remarkable. What can actually transpire in this city. Easily the best place ever.<sup>52</sup>

Kaden is 15. He loses his virginity to a 21 year old who is his cousin’s girlfriend. Kaden is the protagonist in *The Mission*, by Jason Myers.

The following is from *Run the Game*<sup>53</sup> by Jason Myers:

Sh@t’s going down in the living room though.

There’s a girl getting DP’d on the floor by Luke and Jimmy.

Luke’s on his back, his dick in this girl’s twat, and Jimmy’s on top of the girl, his dick in her ass.

There’re syringes and an empty thirty-pack and two pints of Wild Turkey lying around.

...As I walk past the scene, I smack Jimmy’s ass and high-five Luke.

The girl looks up. Know I’ve seen her before.

Think she might be in high school.

When she looks, Luke grabs her hair and says, “Look at me, Amy. Eyes here. On me. Never leave my eyes, Amy.”

...As we head back to my room, the slut getting DP'd yells, "I want both of your dicks in my ass." And then there's the sound of a high five.<sup>54</sup>

This, too is from *Run the Game*.

We f@#ked like g@dd#mn animals... She let me f@#k her in her ass, and then she'd suck it and have me put it back in, and do it all over again. One time she demanded I blow my load on the floor. I did, and then she licked it up, spit it into a cup and drank it, and then we f@#ked again.<sup>55</sup>

Why include these examples in this paper? Most parents--and many teachers and librarians--have no idea of the content of children's literature today. The children are being commended for reading--regardless of the content or reading level of the books. Is anyone considering the consequences of this type of sexual behavior? Shouldn't librarians, school personnel, and parents be alarmed that these are the types of books being published and then subsequently purchased to line young adult shelves? Does anyone really believe that children imitating these behaviors will end up unscathed? Is the mom bringing this to the attention of the community the dangerous one or the ones selecting such materials for our youth?

How is Simon & Schuster getting away with publishing and then marketing these books to teens? Would the public--or law enforcement be as tolerant and merciful to an old man in a park teaching little children these things and providing them with web addresses of porn sites? Are parents remaining silent because they are tired of being portrayed as simpletons for voicing their objections? Are parents fed up with trying to express their concerns, only to have the ACLU or other such groups being brought in to silence their voices?

Myers's books targeting teens are depicting hardcore porn sex as normal behavior. Choking the girl during sex is common in these books. Spitting in each other's mouths and swallowing it is another. Does anyone reading this want to suggest that any of these examples listed are healthy behaviors for adults---not to mention for the kids Simon & Schuster is trying to target?

These are books that the Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division markets to kids. I'd sure like to know which types of manuscripts they turn down.

Libraries and schools hide under the umbrella of Obscenity Exemption laws. That simply means they are not prosecuted for these obscenities that an individual citizen would be. Providing these materials in a school or library situation is considered educational. Go figure.

It still doesn't explain which umbrella Simon & Schuster—or any other publisher of children's books pandering such perversions, is cowering under that is seemingly giving them license to corrupt or harm minors.

I do not wish to leave the impression that only Simon & Schuster publishes inappropriate books for children. Unfortunately, they do not stand alone.

Before leaving the topic of these Jason Myers's books, I would like to address the level of profanity in these books. These are approximate numbers.

<i>Exit Here</i>	2007	447	F-Words
<i>The Mission</i>	2010	544	F-Words
<i>Dead End</i>	2011	185	F-Words
<i>Run the Game</i>	2012	1,320	F-Words
<i>Blazed</i>	2014	654	F-Words

Many, if not most, schools prohibit the students' usage of profanity. Consider once again that books about empathy and kindness are supposed to cause children to be more empathetic and kind. Would it not stand to reason that a child reading books with pervasive profanity might start talking this way?

In most schools, verbally expressing profanity is discouraged, but silently reading materials such as these is indirectly encouraged. After all, children are lauded for reading books regardless of the content or the reading levels. Also, what if the child is *listening* to these books via audio books?

The majority of the children's books with sexual situations are written on very low reading levels. According to Accelerated Reader, *Exit Here*, *Dead End*, and *The Mission* are written at 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3 reading levels. [Note: *Run the Game* and *Blazed* are listed on the Lexile site, but are not found on the Accelerated Reader one.]

I have been documenting Accelerated Reader Upper Grade Interest levels for five years. Entering Fiction Only, English Only, and Upper Grade Interest Levels (9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades), I have found that only 1% of these books are written on a 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade reading level. This has been consistent for all five years, although the 1% is a weaker 1% than in 2013. 77% of these books are written between a 1.6 and 5.9 RL. 67% are written between a 4.0-5.9 RL.

Something is definitely amiss. It's rather amusing that these defenders of our freedom of speech are afraid to discuss such things.

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<sup>1</sup> MK Reed, *Americus*, First Second Books, 2011, pages 188-189

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- <sup>2</sup> <https://www.fantasticfiction.com/l/kathryn-lasky/memoirs-of-bookbat.htm>, accessed October 22, 2017
- <sup>3</sup> Kathryn Lasky, *Memoirs of a Bookbat*, Harcourt Brace, 1996 ed., pages 30-31
- <sup>4</sup> Margery Facklam, *The Trouble With Mothers*, Clarion Books, 1989, pages 93-96
- <sup>5</sup> Marc Brown, *Arthur and The Scare-Your-Pants-Off Club*, Turtleback Books, 1998
- <sup>6</sup> Elsie V. Aidinoff, *The Garden*, HarperTempest, 2004, page 107
- <sup>7</sup> Elsie V. Aidinoff, *The Garden*, HarperTempest, 2004, page 338
- <sup>8</sup> Accelerated Reader Bookfinder, Renaissance Learning, Inc., 2017
- <sup>9</sup> YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jSGXdLnKYDs&t=29s>, interview with James St. James and Cazwell, Gay Action News, accessed October 22, 2017
- <sup>10</sup> World of Wonder, <http://worldofwonder.net/author/jsjworldofwonder-net/>, Jenna Jameson is VERY Upset that a Transwoman is a Playboy Playmate, October 20, October 2017, accessed October 22, 2017
- <sup>11</sup> YouTube, Daily Freak Show episodes, <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLD59E2DDA6247D2EE>, accessed October 22, 2017
- <sup>12</sup> James St. James, *Daily Freak Show*, Dutton, 2007, page 36
- <sup>13</sup> James St. James, *Daily Freak Show*, Dutton, 2007, page 44
- <sup>14</sup> NPR, the two-way, "Amid Controversy, Scholastic Pulls Picture Book About Washington's Slave", January 2016, <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwoway/2016/01/18/463488364/amid-controversy-scholastic-pulls-picture-book-about-washingtons-slave>
- <sup>15</sup> *Something About the Author*, Volume 57, Ursula Nordstrom, page 146  
Gale Publishers
- <sup>16</sup> Leonard Marcus, *Dear Genius: The Letters of Ursula Nordstrom*, Harper Collins, 1998, page 258
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, page 259
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, pages 261-262
- <sup>19</sup> Amazon, Editorial Review for Tyrell book by Coe Booth, [https://www.amazon.com/Tyrell-Coe-Booth/dp/0439838800/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1508687181&sr=8-1&keywords=tyrell](https://www.amazon.com/Tyrell-Coe-Booth/dp/0439838800/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1508687181&sr=8-1&keywords=tyrell)
- <sup>20</sup> Coe Booth, *Tyrell*, Push/Scholastic, 2006, pages 51-52
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, page 52
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, page 96
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, page 110
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, page 53
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, page 134
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, page 290-291
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, page 292
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, pages 3-4
- <sup>29</sup> Rachel Cohn and David Levithan, *Nick & Norah's Infinite Playlist*, Knopf, 2006
- <sup>30</sup> Julie Anne Peters, *Between Mom and Jo*, Little, Brown & Co., 2006, pg 81
- <sup>31</sup> Accelerated Reader Bookfinder, Renaissance Learning, Inc., 2017
- <sup>32</sup> Lisa Rowe Fraustino, *Don't Cramp My Style: Stories About That Time of the Month*, Simon & Schuster, 2004, pages 290-291
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, *Losing It* by Julie Stockler, pages 242-264
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, *Maroon* by Han Nolan, pages 182-208
- <sup>35</sup> Alex Gino, *George*, Scholastic, 2015
- <sup>36</sup> NPR News in Milwaukee, WUWM Milwaukee Public Radio, 'George' Wants You To Know: She's Really Melissa by Neda Ulaby, August 27, 2015, <http://wuwm.com/post/george-wants-you-know-shes-really-melissa#stream/0>, accessed October 22, 2017

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- <sup>37</sup> Nikol Hasler, *Sex A Book for Teens*, Zest Books, 2010
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, back cover
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, back cover
- <sup>40</sup> Wikipedia, Betty Dodson, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Betty\\_Dodson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Betty_Dodson), accessed October 22, 2017
- <sup>41</sup> Nikol Hasler, *Sex A Book for Teens*, Zest Books, 2010, page 96
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, page 98
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, page 144
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, page 166
- <sup>45</sup> Jason Myers, *Exit Here*, Simon Pulse, a division of Simon & Schuster's Children's Publishing Division, 2007
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, page 93
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, pages 331-333
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, pages 412-413
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, page 34
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, page 274
- <sup>51</sup> Jason Myers, *The Mission*, Simon Pulse, a division of Simon & Schuster's Children's Publishing Division, 2010
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, pages 284-285
- <sup>53</sup> Jason Myers, *Run The Game*, Simon Pulse, a division of Simon & Schuster's Children's Publishing Division, 2012
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, pages 233-236
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, pages 182-183

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