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THE MAINE QUEER-Y:
AN ANALYSIS OF A *GENDER QUEER* BOOK CHALLENGE IN MAINE

by
Antyna Gould

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for a Degree with Honors
(Anthropology)

The Honors College
University of Maine

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ABSTRACT

Beneath the idyllic scenery of Midcoast Maine lives a monster. This monster does not have a preference for where it lives, in fact its siblings reside all over the country. It is not a physical being, but a rising trend gaining national attention, book bans. Across the nation groups and individuals are attempting to censor information contained within books due to their allegedly inappropriate nature for a designated age range. For the last year one book in particular has received much scorn. *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe is a graphic novel memoir with a focus on the author's journey as a non-binary person. Many schools have removed the book for its supposedly pornographic content. In October of 2020 the RSU #40 School District was asked by a group of community members to do the same. One book triggered a year-long discussion and battle to remove the book from student access. Since the COVID-19 pandemic was in full swing at the time, people could not congregate in person to voice their opinions. Instead, they opted to use social media. In particular, there was one group that hosted an interesting chain of comments on the topic. This thesis looks at the comments made on the Facebook group against the backdrop of the national trend on book banning to see what driving forces are behind the groups. A discourse analysis of the comments paired with personal experience uncovered three driving forces behind the book bans. One, is the sexualization of LGBTQIA+ relationships. Two, is the harmful notion that the LGBTQIA+ agenda involves grooming children through exposure to literature. Finally, there is the attempt to control minorities via suppressing freedom of speech. These subjects are analyzed and discussed at length in the following paper and concludes with a discussion of the harm the conversation can have on the queer community.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the members of the Midcoast community who sought to remove Gender Queer from the shelves of Medomak. If you hadn't voiced your dislike, I never would have found the validation to be my most authentic self.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people to acknowledge for making this thesis possible. Firstly, I need to acknowledge the amount of love and patience I have given myself. From my first attempt at a thesis back in 2020 to now, I have faced many obstacles and overcome them. This thesis, while topically important, is created out of a love and pride in the queer community. My identity is a topic that I have faced verbal assault and harassment on many times and will continue to face in the future. This paper is just the beginning of the storm. I am here, I am queer, and I will not back down because of others. I hope this research helps others to do the same.

I would like to thank each member of my committee for the invaluable role they have played in the research. Thank you, Cynthia, for being my first advisor and then again as a committee member. Your classes were some of the most memorable ones of my time at UMaine, and the lessons you've taught me stay with me today. Thank you, Melissa, for your unwavering support and kindness. You have always made me feel welcome in the Honors College. Without you, I would not have been able to create such a strong reading list that represents me for who I am. Finally, a huge thank you to Darren. Thank you for taking on the role of advisor from a student you have never interacted with before, on a topic that sits outside your usual area of study. I have had a wonderful time getting to work with you as a professional and to know you as a person. Were it not for the unavailability of other professors I never would have had the chance to interact with you. Most importantly, thank you for taking my discombobulated ramblings and synthesizing it into a coherent, intelligent sentence.

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Thank you again and again to everyone who has been part of the process of this thesis. It concludes my time as an undergraduate as well as the beginning of the next chapter. I am so very thankful for the part you have played in this one. May I find you still in the next chapter.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
LITERATURE REVIEW	12
Banned in the USA: The Growing Movement to Censor Books in Schools	12
Library Bill of Rights and Interpretations	17
Queer Temporality and Literary Representation	21
METHODOLOGY	25
Autoethnography	25
Poststructuralism	27
Discourse Analysis	30
Applying Discourse Analysis to the Primary Source	34
ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION	37
Pornography	38
Grooming	46
Freedom of Speech	50
CONCLUSION	54
WORKS CITED	63
APPENDICES	66
Appendix A: Library Bill of Rights	66
Appendix B: WHATS NEW WALDOBORO Transcript	68
AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY	82

INTRODUCTION

When searching for an idyllic American scene look no further than the towns of mid-coast Maine. The summer wind is filled with the salty ocean air blowing off the Atlantic in Friendship and Union is home to a thriving farmers market, known in the summer for its jerk-chicken community cookouts, and elaborate corn mazes in the fall. Autumn brings in a burst of color perfect for the locals and leaf-peepers out for a Sunday drive. When winter forces everyone inside, Moody's Diner in Waldoboro is never lacking in good food and company. Here, everyone knows everyone and becomes a friend at first sight. Bustling with tourists and hard-working locals, mid-coast Maine is filled with communities straight from a Hollywood film. Except, what looks like a postcard town is harboring a monster below the surface. The monster is dividing the community and harming the LGBTQIIA+, and it seeks to silence them. A monster slumbers beneath the streets and everything changes the day it wakes up.

The date was October 7, 2021, a quiet, unmemorable night. Dried leaves skittered across the pavement searching for a safe place to hide for the night. On this fateful night, community members of Friendship, Union, Waldoboro, Warren, and Washington logged onto the monthly Zoom call hosting the Regional School Unit #40 (RSU #40) board meeting. All was going according to plan, budgets were approved, achievements were acknowledged. Overall, the event was turning out to be less entertaining than watching beige paint dry. Towards the end, during the portion where board members hear the comments of the public, a group of women spoke up. Karen Wellman, a resident from Waldoboro, was concerned when she heard rumors of sex books located in the Medomak Valley high school library. The books Wellman was referring to are *Lawn Boy* by

Johnathan Evison and *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe (Dunkle 2021). *Lawn Boy* is a fictional, coming-of-age story following Mike Muñoz as he struggles with poverty and his sexuality (Evison 2019). *Gender Queer* is an autobiographical graphic novel following the author's living life as a non-binary person (Kobabe 2022). Within the written complaints submitted by Wellman, concerns over the subject stem from the books promoting pedophilia and including pornographic content (Dunkle 2021).

Following district policy regarding challenged library material, RSU #40 superintendent Steve Nolan passed the complaint back to the building administrators in the high school. Principle, Vice Principals, and select staff members come together as a committee to review the complaint and the materials. The material in question is then compared against the district's policy for material selection. If the material is found not to be in violation of the selection policy, then the book remains available to students (Regional School Unit #40 2021). By the end of the meeting, the committee decided both books were in compliance with school policies and would therefore remain in the library (Miller 2022). Whether it was due to the oncoming winter, or if the original group was satisfied with their work, no one complained with the decision. Snow came over the town like a white blanket silencing the monster.

Peace reigned across the land till the snow melted away revealing the issue that still slumbered beneath ice and snow. While people emerged from a long, winter nap ready for summer cookouts and gardening, I was packing up and moving back home. Senior year of college was nothing like in the books on my shelf. Sitting at a computer watching pixelated lectures from August to May of 2020 was taxing to my mind and body. Yearning for human connection and the time to heal, I dropped out of college and

moved back home to my loving community. There I found food, company, and a warm bed to heal body, mind and soul.

One of the best parts of coming home is mum's home cooking and the side of piping hot gossip next to it. Sitting at the kitchen table listening to mum and dad relay the local news, mum handed me her phone with the screen projecting the news article titled, "RSU 40 reviews challenged books again" (Miller 2022). Again? A faded memory of an article detailing Wellman's complaints rose to the surface of my mind. Wellman filed her complaint with the board in October 2021, the new article was published in May 2022. This issue was not fully resolved. Another group had come forward to voice their complaints regarding the same two books. What made this time different from the others was the collection of colorful quotes included by the reporter of the article. Reporter Zack Miller quotes Steve Karp of Waldoboro in the article saying, "...the books contained pornographic material, and supplying pornography to minors is the definition of grooming. Karp also commented in the article that society has come to this point through a lack of prayer." (Miller 2022). Another community member of Waldoboro, Bill Moody, voiced his concern for the books. Moody's concern stems from the committee and school board keeping the book because it includes diversity topics, which is part of the policy selection of the district (Regional School Unit #40 2021, 4). Moody is reported in the article as saying, "...while the district wants to support inclusion, he wondered if that included the devil. 'Is that who we're working for?' Moody asked." (Miller 2022). Sitting at the kitchen table reading the article, the comments of the community seemed surreal. These quotes were laughable to me and my family. The quotes show a side of the community that begins to crack the picture-perfect image of mid-coast Maine.

As stated in the article, the decision of the committee in October 2021 was no longer satisfactory to certain community members. Another material challenge was formally placed in May 2022, and the review process began all-over again. Since this is the second time the books have been challenged in the district, the committee expanded to include all members of the RSU #40 Board of Directors, Vice Superintendent, and Superintendent. Given the large number of people responsible for obtaining a copy of the book, reading, and scheduling a meeting to come to a decision, the issue would take more time to reach a conclusion. The first challenge took a few weeks for the committee to reach a decision. There is no recorded date of when the decision was made to the public. However, having experience with a book challenge in my place of work, I could guess that the matter took 2 weeks for the committee to decide. The May 2022 complaint would take five months to come to a conclusion.

October 20, 2022, was an ideal autumn night. A slight chill was in the air, but not so cold as to require bulk winter jackets. People could sport a thick sweater or flannel and survive fine outside, even in the evening hours. The sun was setting at 4:00 PM. but people were not ready to sleep yet. Instead, the community flocked to the Medomak Middle School gymnasium to witness the climactic conclusion to the book challenge from May. By the time the May challenge was filed by Steve Karp, he was only concerned over the material within *Gender Queer*, so all the attention would be on that book during the meeting.

Walking into the gym at this time, I was well into my first year as the middle school librarian. Having five years of public and academic library experience under my belt, it was a dream to be offered a place of work in the school I graduated from back in

2012. It was satisfying to come full circle in the community I grew up in. However, the person I was upon graduating 8th grade was vastly different from the person I am now. Then, I was firm in the belief that I was female inside and out who occasionally had a crush on someone of the same sex. Now, I was openly non-binary and pansexual. Two very different people exist within the halls of Medomak Middle school, which is why I felt strongly about attending the meeting. The current superintendent was the same one who bought me lunch my senior year of high school as a reward for making the Honor roll. The vice superintendent gave me my first paying job as a photographer. There were personal connections in the gymnasium that night, but they did little to ease the tension as the meeting came to order. Walking to the front door, I was blocked by a group of people holding a prayer circle. The preacher loudly asked for God to provide protection to them as they went into the mouth of Satan's den to defend the youth from impure books. Suddenly, the May 2022 article filled with its interesting quotes on the devil and God became real people in my community, not just a faceless name on a screen.

The whole purpose of the meeting was to hear the opinions of the community regarding *Gender Queer*. Anyone and everyone inside or outside of the community were free to talk for three minutes without interruption. At the end of their time, they would move aside for the next person in line. While three minutes is not a lot of time, with forty-five speakers in total, the time amounted to a little over four hours, including time for the board to deliberate and decide (Simmonds 2022). After all that time, at 11:00 PM on October 20, 2022, and a school night, the RSU #40 Board of Directors decided that *Gender Queer* was not in violation of district policy and is age appropriate for high schoolers. Therefore, the book would remain in the library for students to check-out

(Simmonds 2022). A year-long battle had come to its final conclusion, the matter was settled, but the monster remained. A schism was created in the community that day, changing how I see the community I have known and love my whole life.

The monster is censorship, and it seeks to silence *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe. *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe is a graphic novel autobiography. First published in 2019, the book follows Kobabe through eirs journey of gender identity while also facing the horrors of puberty. Kobabe struggled to dress comfortably, opting for sports bras that were three sizes too small to hide eir’s breasts (Kobabe 2022, 88). What made the situation worse for Kobabe, was a lack of representation within eir community. Limited to a small group known as a Gay-Straight Alliance, it wasn’t always easy to feel as though e belonged. When attending college, Kobabe found a larger group of people in which e could identify and explore more about eir gender. At the end of the book, Kobabe is significantly more comfortable in eir gender identity, however, e are still searching for answers they may never find. In the afterword of *Gender Queer* Kobabe takes a moment to reflect on all the love and support e has received since the first printing. Despite the pushback e has received, “...I think it was one of the best decisions I’ve ever made in my life” (Kobabe 2022, 247). In the same section, Kobabe shares how the book has been used as a tool for therapists. A way for children to discuss gender identity with their parents and, “...that the book makes them feel less alone, which in turn made [Kobabe] feel less alone.” (Kobabe 2022, 246). In 2020, *Gender Queer* was awarded an Alex Award by the American Library Association (ALA) for “books written for adults that have special appeal to young adults ages 12 through 18.” and a Stonewall Honor Book for non-fiction (Alter 2022). The following year the book would earn more

recognition from the ALA for being the most challenged or banned book in the United States (Admin 2023). From there, the demand for the book's removal has only increased. PEN America reports that Kobabe's book has been removed from 41 school districts across the country due to "pornographic content" (Friedman 2022). However, this does not account for the number of times the book has been challenged and unsuccessfully banned. Before going into further detail about Kobabe's book and how it all connects back to a rural school district, one must first learn a few more concepts regarding the book-banning movement and the people behind it.

All banned books are challenged books, but not all challenged books are banned books. That is an important difference to know in order to fully understand the book banning movement sweeping the nation. PEN America defines "school book ban" as:

"Any action taken against a book based on its content and as a result of parent or community challenges, administrative decisions, or in response to direct or threatened actioned by lawmakers or other government officials, that leads to a previously accessible book being either completely removed from availability to students, or where access to books is restricted or diminished." (Friedman 2022).

This is not to be confused with a "book challenge" which the ALA defines as, "an attempt to remove or restrict materials based upon the objectification of a person or group." that usually does not result in the book's removal (About Banned & Challenged Books 2012). Both instances are vastly different from a librarian's selection process of materials. This process is done to appeal to the demographic of patrons and is limited by the budget. Librarians select books that will be popular among students while also providing educational opportunities. When an outside person or group attempts to

override the decision of the librarian, it enters into the territory of censorship. Book bans and challenges do not apply to the practice of weeding. This is a technique to maintain a library's collection of books. Librarians are taught that books have to pay rent to stay on the shelves, rent is paid in the form of checkouts. Books that do not consistently get checked out are "weeded" from the collection and taken out of circulation. This is to make room for books that do interest patrons. Weeded books are also meant to keep the collection filled with the most updated information on a subject. One topic that faces heavy weeding is medical books. As new procedures are tested and approved, the library's collection must reflect as such. Librarians follow guidelines that keep weeding a neutral process, books are not removed because of personal preferences. A final term that is pertinent to book bans is censorship. Merriam-Webster defines the action of censoring as, "to examine to suppress or delete anything considered objectionable." (Merriam-Webster 2023). This concludes the necessary terminology regarding book bans. The following paragraph will contain terminology and definitions pertinent to *Gender Queer*.

As a member of the queer community reading *Gender Queer* for the first time, many terms require a trip to the dictionary. The first, and most vague, is "queer." For a long time, the term has been used as an insult towards homosexual people for, "differing in some way from what is usual or normal" (Merriam-Webster 2023). In the last 5 years the term queer has come to mean, "of, relating to, or being a person, whose sexual orientation is not heterosexual and/or whose gender identity is not cisgender" (Merriam-Webster 2023). This is related to the trend of marginalized groups reclaiming words or sections of a language that have been used to offend and hurt them in the past. Cisgender is a relatively new word entering mainstream vernacular and refers to, "a person whose

gender identity corresponds with the sex that person was identified as having at birth” (Merriam-Webster 2023). Finally, as will become evident later in this discussion. Readers debate if *Gender Queer* belongs best in the genre of “young adult” (YA) or to be considered adult non-fiction. The ALA defines the YA genre as books that appeal to the ages of 12 to 18. This covers a large range of ages and developmental processes. While the books within the genre are often written for audiences still in elementary schools, 50% of adults consistently read YA books so it is not surprising that YA books are the most targeted genre of banned books (Friedman 2022). But who exactly is vocalizing their dislike of such books?

For RSU # 40, much of the concerns were voiced in a private Facebook group by the name WHAT’S NEW IN WALDOBORO. The group was created and maintained by members of Waldoboro, Maine. Members of the group are not required to live within the town, just have some affiliation. Community members had a platform to ask for assistance or opinions. This group is often used by staff of the schools in the RSU #40 districts to spread the news of events such as sports and musical productions. This means members of the group could be a part of Washington, Union, Waldoboro, Warren, or Friendship. It is an excellent means of bringing a large community together to feel connected and unified. However, what had good intentions to start quickly turned into a political minefield.

On September 19, 2022, Rebecca Waddell Smith shared a local news article covering the current book challenge. The article informed readers that the Board of Directors would meet in the Medomak Middle School gymnasium on October 20th to hear the public comments on the matter before making a decision on the challenge. Smith

shared the article information and contact information of board members to give everyone an opportunity to share their voice. This is evident based on the last sentence of the post when Smith says, “Typically people who are upset reach out, not the ones who aren't bothered by the content. All voices matter” (Appendix D). Underneath the post, community members used the opportunity to discuss the matter among themselves. To them, it was another Facebook comment debate, but to the aspiring anthropologist lurking in the background, it's a candy store of valuable data.

One person's Facebook comment is an anthropologist's primary source for their autoethnography. The various conversations that took place in the comments are the foundation of this thesis as they help to provide contextual information regarding the growing trend of book banning and the effects it is having on queer community members. A discourse analysis of the comments paired with personal experience will uncover three driving forces behind the book bans. Community members who seek to ban *Gender Queer* are using the book as political fodder to push other agendas and using discourses that seek to control a marginalized group. These agendas pertain to the notion that books with LGBTQIA+ themes are pornographic, a means of grooming young children. The aforementioned notion in turn violates the first amendment rights of community members, or so they believe. As evidence from the comment section and scholarly articles will show, community members are seeking to reaffirm harmful stereotypes of a marginalized group as a means of removing the group's first amendment rights, which would give people outside the group an easier way to control how the targeted group is represented and how people see it.

Before I fully present evidence of this claim about control, it is important to have a strong foundation related to the nature and impacts of book challenges and bans. Therefore, the next section will highlight key pieces of literature that define the national trend of book challenges and bans, as well as the effect they are having on LGBTQIA+ people across the nation. Once the national picture has been painted, it is important to understand the method in which the primary source, personal memories, and scholarly articles are viewed so that readers can understand how the claim is reached. Finally, the conclusion portion of the paper will take a deep dive into the harmful effects the community and their agendas are presently having on the LGBTQIA+ community members. While the conclusion will discuss the harm caused locally, sources supporting the evidence of harm can also be applied to the harm being caused at a national level. These conversations in tandem with the continuing trend of banning books has the potential to cause major harm to the LGBTQIA+ community, as this paper seeks to discuss. It's time to knock down the white-picket fence of the idyllic American community and face the monster for what it is.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The content and format of this literature review is non-traditional in comparison to others. For the purpose of this thesis, the literature review is being structured to provide background information on the national trend of book bans and challenges in recent years. Once a big picture is painted, the minute brush strokes of localized areas can be analyzed. Fortunately, there is a cornucopia of material that could serve the above purpose. As enjoyable as it would be to sit back and read twenty plus pages of information, I have chosen a selection of pertinent resources that best summarize the trend and its elements. The first, authored by PEN American and Jonathan Friedman, is an incredibly detailed account of the book banning trend across the entire United States. This article also provides historical context of the trend, and more modern information such as current variables pushing the trend today. Another piece of scholarship provides necessary information regarding the rights of readers as determined by the American Library Association. To fully understand what is being threatened by book bans, one needs to understand what is already a given right. Finally, the last paper will take the two previous forms of literature and situate them into the LGBTQIA+ community in a doctoral dissertation on queer representation in the media that provides excellent context. The literature review portion for the purpose of this paper is to act as a continuation of the introduction. It serves to provide more foundational information before moving onto the methodology and analysis portion.

Banned in the USA: The Growing Movement to Censor Books in the Schools

When focusing on the state level, the trend of banning books does not seem to be operating on a large scale, assuming one never reads the news. For ease of education and

to really observe the scale to which groups are attempting to censor material, look no further than *Banned in the USA: The Growing Movement to Censor Books in Schools* with information compiled and written by Jonathan Friedman Ph.D. Published in September of 2022, the article provides a snapshot on the statistics of the trend before going into a detailed account. The data covers bans and challenges occurring between July 2021 to June 2022. During that time frame, PEN America compiled the number of instances regarding censorship and breaks down the reasons for the trend. Within the 11-month period, there were 2,532 recorded instances of material being formally challenged. These instances affected 1,648 unique titles. A considerable amount of the challenges occurred in Texas and Florida, with a range of 500-1000 bans. On the other hand, Maine had 1-10 bans. (Friedman 2022). While Maine does not have a large amount of instances regarding book bans, the state is not completely removed from the growing trend of banning books. Since 2021, there has been a huge increase in the number of instances involving a challenge or ban of a book. Nearly 3,000 instances have resulted in books being removed from school and public libraries across the country. One book in particular was the target of 41% of such instances. PEN America recorded 2,532 instances involving a book being challenged or banned. Of those recorded instances, 41% of them were specifically *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe. Overall, the book has been banned from multiple schools and public libraries across the country. Kobabe has secured the #1 spot in the ALA's list of most challenged books for 2021 and 2022 (Admin 2023). This begs the question, who are the people responsible for putting *Gender Queer* in the number one spot two years running?

PEN America determined there are two forces at work. First, there is the work of politicians. Many of them are the elected representatives of the community who speak on their behalf, and in this instance, it is for the censorship of certain books. On the other hand, politicians are always facing social pressures from voters to act in a manner that would win the support of certain demographics. While voters use their time and energy to sway the local legislation, they also have power on their own when it comes to book bans and challenges. In the last 3 years, 50 groups have been recognized nationwide in the campaign to remove “offensive” material from libraries. These groups are recognized nationally but have also established local chapters in individual states and towns. Such a level of organization is possible, and greatly aided, by the use of social media. Some groups have chosen to operate entirely online rather than setting up a physical headquarters. A majority of the groups such as Moms for Liberty, and No Left Turn in Education were formed in 2021 which is 37 of the 50 groups (73% of groups). While the groups have an explicit mission of protecting children from exposure to “harmful content,” many of the groups follow a Christian Nationalist ideology. Aligning with such a mindset makes it easy for outsiders to determine the values of the individuals that make up the group. With an aligned mindset, the groups are able to unify and target specific institutions.

Topics such as gender and sexuality are not an issue limited to the pages of a book. In 2022, there were multiple laws at the state level that were signed into action aiming to limit exposure and discussion of such topics in an educational setting. These acts across the nation have been defined as an “Ed scare,” a campaign that aims to censor freedom of expression in education. The most popular example of such a campaign was

signed by Governor DeSantis in March 2022. Formally known as the “Parental Rights In Education, ” the initiative mandates that educators not expose children in grades K-3 to anything on the topic of sexual orientation or gender identity. Because of its harsh restrictions placed on educators, informally the bill is known as the “Don’t Say Gay” law. In the same vein, Governor DeSantis signed HB1467, which requires teachers and librarians in school districts to provide an easy to navigate list of all the materials, which invites the public to question and scrutinize such material. Florida is not the only state to issue such harsh legislation, but the “Don’t Say Gay Bill” is one of the most reported actions. News outlets such as CNN, Fox News, The New York Times, and others reported on the bill. With the bill gaining national attention, it has prompted other harmful actions in other states regarding restricting material. Politicians are not the only factors at work in pushing for censorship, specific groups have formed with the intention of pushing the movement further along.

Book banning as a trend is nothing new, but the rate at which challenges are being filed is. This is due to an uptick in the number of organized groups, referenced above. A majority of them were formed in 2021. Currently, 50 groups have been recognized nationally as actively working to remove “inappropriate” materials from libraries. Each group can have multiple state and local level organizations as well which greatly increases the numbers. What is unique about these groups is that despite being spread across the country, they can appear as a unified front through the use of social media. Some groups have opted to not have a physical headquarters and operate solely from social media platforms such as Meta, Instagram, and Twitter (Friedman 2022). This allows the groups to target the same materials at the same time. Groups have been using

social media, specifically twitter, to tag accounts of authors, librarians, and public officials who oppose the group's mission. This makes it easy for members of the group to harass the tagged individual. This has resulted in librarians and public officials formally resigning from their positions due to harassment from groups. Not all groups are as vicious as this, but they do make their intentions clear to the public. One group that is often named in headlines goes by the name "Mom's for Liberty." Formed on January 1, 2021, and based in Melbourne, Florida, the group's mission is, "...dedicated to fighting for the survival of America by unifying, educating and empowering parents to defend their parental rights at all levels of government" (Who We Are). Similarly, the group No Left Turn in Education is a unified force protecting children in public schools from their learning being "tainted by historical revisionism, political correctness, and the outright rejection of values which have long been at the core of the American experience" (Noleftturn 2021). These groups and more are the driving force behind the rising trend in book bans. They are thriving with the help of social media, as well as public supporters including politicians with similar political ideals as the groups. Armed with a keyboard and a mission, these groups spread out across the nation can feel like a mob to librarians.

In fear of facing an angry mob, many librarians have opted for alternative book banning means that aim to remove the potential heat from themselves. One example is preemptive banning, which involves withdrawing books that have been challenged or banned in other states, but not necessarily in their own library. Other libraries are opting to "tag" their books which identifies them as containing sensitive information which may not be suitable for certain ages or groups. Book "tagging" has also been given the name of "silent book banning" (Friedman 2022). Tagging is not to be confused with

genrefication. Genrefication, also known as dynamic shelving, as a recent trend among librarians to shelve books in alternative manners. One of the most notable means of shelf organization is by fiction genres. This makes it easier for patrons to find books they like. Speaking from personal experience, patrons often come in asking for a “mystery” or “fantasy” book, rather than asking for a specific author. Such means of organization does not attempt to dissuade patrons from reading books and aims to make it more accessible. Preemptive actions are just as harmful as traditional book banning as it continues to support the stigma and intensity surrounding challenged material.

When looking for a cohesive article to become situated in the national trend of book banning, PEN America provides an excellent foundation. The article opens with snapshot statistics to briefly educate readers without having to dive into the details of the situation. From there the authors of the article put names to the groups pushing to ban books from schools and libraries. Referencing the statistics at the start of the article, authors break down what topics in books the groups are claiming to have removed from books, and a noticeable theme of those books also containing LGBTQIA+ themes, characters, or authors/illustrators. This is an exhaustive piece of scholarship that is providing foundational information for this thesis.

The Library Bill of Rights and Interpretations

In reference to the previous text, PEN America often refers to groups and incidents that alter the Library Bill of Rights. This is a collection of seven principles first adopted by a council of the American Library Association (ALA) in June 1939. Since then, the principles serve as a guidance and foundation for all libraries across the country to base their policies on. Despite the council’s attempt to make the wording as

unambiguous as possible, questions regarding the meaning arise. As a result, the ALA has provided multiple interpretations of the text as a whole (see Appendix A), and its individual principles. This helps to provide clarification regarding the different environments of the three main types of libraries- public, academic, and school. The following principles apply to all types of libraries.

Before proceeding with the meaning of each principle, first there needs to be some clarification on the language. Firstly, while libraries are commonly assumed to hold only books, this is no longer that case in the 21st century. Libraries can house anything from books and other reading materials, to video games, equipment, and seeds. To accommodate for that, when the ALA uses the term “materials” to cover anything that patrons have access to through the institution. Secondly, in the Bill of Rights, and its interpretations, the terms “child / children”, “adolescent / teens”, “young adult”, and “adult” are used frequently. The National Institution of Health (NIH) and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) have provided age ranges for the aforementioned terms: Children (1-12 years of age), Adolescent/Teen (13-17 years of age), Young Adults (18-25 years of age), Adults (18 years of age or older).

When the ALA is using the above-mentioned terms, they are referring to an individual in its corresponding age range. With all the contextual information provided regarding the language of the Bill of Rights, the contents are the following.

Principle one states that all materials within a library are there for the purpose of educating and enlightening the whole community. Nothing should be excluded from being added to the library due to origin, background, and views. This is not to be confused with not adding materials due to a lack of interest. Each library serves a

community that is unique, and its collection reflects as thus. Due to limited space within the library, decisions need to be made to maximize its usefulness to the community. One such example would be not purchasing books for the library by Stephen King. If the library has previously purchased books by this author, only to have little to no circulations, it is pointless to purchase more books that will take up space when the space could be used to hold titles that the patrons will be interested in checking out. Not purchasing titles by Stephen King because the library disagrees with his political standpoint would violate the first principle.

Similarly, principle two states that all materials and information provided through the library should cover a diverse range of views: Books, items, or technology should not be removed or limited due to partisan or doctrinal disapproval. This is a particularly valuable principle when it comes to school libraries. Many of the material challenges start in school libraries. However, in an interpretation of the ALA's Bill of Rights, that is approved by the ALA itself, there is clarification on the roles libraries and parents/guardians play in granting access to materials. For no reason, such as age, apparent maturity, skills, or legal status, should access not be granted to children and young adults. Libraries do not possess the right to make such decisions, although courts and parents/guardians do. Courts can determine whether material is constitutionally protected for children and young adults, as determined by a 1975 case *Erznoznik v. City of Jacksonville*. Parents/guardians have the right to limit access to material for their children, and only their children. Such a responsibility falls to the parent/guardian to inform the child of their limited access, not the libraries.

The third principle of the ALA's Bill of Rights encourages libraries to fight back against all challenges and attempts to remove or limit access to materials within the library. All libraries do not have the same access to funding, materials, and resources, and therefore cannot respond to each challenge the same. To acknowledge this, the ALA specifies that each library must respond to an attack to the best of their abilities and to report incidents to the ALA. Although the fourth principle is very similar to the third, it is its own statement. The fourth principle urges libraries to cooperate with people or groups that resist the fight to abridge or remove freedom of access and the freedom of expression. It is important to have a community when it comes to fighting for a cause. Just as those who seek to ban books have unified, so should libraries and its supporters. Regardless of where people stand on the issue, the libraries continue to provide equal access to materials.

Principle five protects patrons' right to access the library, and the materials housed within, regardless of the origin, age, background, or views of the patron. This includes children and young adults.

Principle six pertains to the physical space within the library, or locations that fall under the jurisdiction of said library. Such spaces include exhibits for art, display cases, or meeting rooms available for the public to use. All such locations must be provided on an equal basis, there can be no means of exclusion due to the beliefs or affiliations of the patrons interested in utilizing the space. While an important principle, it does little pertaining to the concerns of books bans in school libraries. However, it does reiterate a key theme of the Bill of Rights. This theme is that for no reason, should materials, people, or space be excluded from use or access.

Finally, principle seven seeks to provide protection to patrons using the library, and the information attached to said person. One fantastic benefit of libraries is that it provides access to technology and internet that might not be available at the patron's house. Many libraries offer assistance with matters such as taxes, insurance, and healthcare paperwork. While the resource is invaluable to patrons, it comes with issues regarding the personally identifiable information (PII). PII is a social security number, telephone numbers, street address, email address, credit card information, or a driver's license number. Libraries are responsible for protecting and advocating for the privacy of patrons regarding PII. While PII is a big concern when it comes to privacy, confidentiality also extends to the patrons' use of materials. Many children use the materials within a library to explore and educate themselves on various topics. One such topic is gender identity. Not all patrons have a support team that would help them on their enlightenment, this is where the privacy provided by libraries is useful. Students have the freedom and right to explore all topics through the use of their library, and the seventh principle requires libraries to protect said rights. However, such a principle does not supersede federal laws regarding obscene material or anything illegal. This is where many groups base their argument on a book being appropriate for a child in the library. Many of them claim that a specific section or the text as a whole is pornographic in nature, and therefore illegal for children to have access to. The next entry within the literature review will go into further detail regarding the claim mentioned above.

Queer Temporality and Literary Representation

“Queer Temporality and Literary Representation: A Study on Censorship, Identity, and Book Bans in Contemporary America” by Ninna Timmermann and Rebecca

Strunge Mortensen is a dissertation that focuses on two books, *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobbae and *All Boys Aren't Blue* by George M. Johnson and how they are being represented in media outlets. Timmermann and Mortensen chose popular, left-leaning and centrist outlets such as the New York Times and CNN to perform a discourse analysis on their portrayal of the previously mentioned books. Timmermann and Mortensen came to the conclusion that despite taking a perspective that is overall supportive of the memoirs, underneath is the harmful promotion of a queer stereotype. When searching for articles on either of the memoirs, any article is bound to discuss the inclusion of sexual content. For *Gender Queer*, articles almost always focus on pages 126 and 168 of the book. Here is where the intent of the author and the underlying message of the media begin to differ.

A memoir is a deeply personal creation, and to ensure readers feel that personal connection, authors employ various techniques to achieve the desired effect. One such technique is sharing personal and intimate experiences. This creates a private sphere between the reader and the author, allowing readers to draw personal connections to the content (Timmermann 2022). For Kobabe, this was done by sharing moments regarding their experiences with masturbation and sex toys. Including these graphics is meant to be one aspect of the memoir's theme of the complex journey that is the queer identity. However, the media tends to make that the focus of the text. By focusing on 2 pages out of the 240, the media is contributing to the hypersexual stereotype within the LGBTQIA+ community. Authors of articles found in the New York Times, CNN, etc. present information in support of the author's and their text. However, Timmerman and Mortensen concluded that the articles present information in a manner that does not allow

readers to draw their own conclusions on the subject. Forcing the hand of the readers further promotes the harmful stereotype of hypersexuality, especially when it comes into the hands of far-right conservatives.

Books bans are on the rise, and data from this dissertation and other sources confirms that the rising movement is being orchestrated by right-leaning political groups. Timmerman and Mortensen have gone further in detail on the groups and specifically attribute the rising trend to groups with a Protestant-Puritan foundation. Such religious affiliations have a strict ideation of what consists of a “normal” identity and relationship to others. This is commonly known as the heteronormative. When the United States was just gaining independence, the two aforementioned religious denominations had a large presence in the culture of the time. As a result, a significant amount of cultural norms can be traced back to either Protestant or Puritan affiliations. In turn, these ideals are referred to as the “backbone” of America by Timmerman and Mortensen. When Kobabe published their memoir in 2019, it was very clearly discussing ideas and lifestyles that do not adhere to the heteronormative. Kobabe’s intention in the text is to contribute accurate representation of queer identities. Since such representation would change the idea of “normal” for many Protestant-Puritan adhering Americans, the book becomes a threat to them. In turn, groups who find comfort in the heteronormative have banned together with the intention of removing access to said material. By removing access to books that are against the normative standard, right-wing conservatives can remain in control of the culturally accepted ways of life the nation was built on.

Hypersexuality is a prevalent theme in the argument in favor of banning books such as *Gender Queer*, and in turn will be discussed in detail later in this thesis. Including

the research done by Timmerman and Mortensen provides a snapshot of the research that has already been conducted regarding *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe and the public's reaction to said text. The focus of their work is primarily the book's perception in the media, however their conclusion of discrepancies between the media and author directly correlates to the rising trend of book bans. They further discuss the foundations in American culture the right-wing groups are unified under when it comes to pushing for removal of the books.

METHODOLOGY

Autoethnography

For the etymology expert, an autoethnography is self-explanatory. However, on the off chance such an expert is unavailable, allow the following information to provide a basis for understanding.

In the late 1800s, anthropologists were leaving the comfort of their armchairs and taking the world by storm. When coming face to face with such “exotic”, and “savage” cultures, anthropologists sought a means to sterilize and categorize the various cultures for further study. Since it’s not possible to relocate an entire culture back to someone’s study, another means of study came to be. Ethnography started as a way to observe the cultures from an outsider’s perspective looking in (Conceptual Foundations of Autoethnography, 6). Researchers would assume the role of a fly on the wall to learn everything about the subject. Weeks, months, and even years of observation occurred with the purpose of creating a systematic account of a culture different from the researchers. Preserving the accounts and using them to draw interpretations helped to create a deeper understanding of both the subject and the world both observer and subject exist in (Conceptual Foundations of Autoethnography, 6).

In theory, ethnography was a fantastic means of collecting data. In the field though, it was less so. Astute observers quickly discovered that despite their best efforts, it was impossible to observe a culture without the subjects observing them in return. Naturally, when a subject such as humans learns they are being observed, their behavior is inherently changed making it impossible to gather a completely in situ picture of a culture. Granted, this did not stop the field of ethnography from flourishing and spreading

into other academic fields such as sociology and communications (Conceptual Foundations of Autoethnography, 6). Now, the nature of the observer being observed is a noted flaw of the study and is kept in mind when gathering data and drawing conclusions based on ethnographic data.

Acknowledging the fault of the study but still utilizing the data turned out to be only one solution to the field. Another led to the subfield of autoethnography. Drawing inspiration from the philosopher Gilbert Ryle and his concept of *thick description*— “a way of observing and describing human action and interaction that dug beneath the surface-level observation of human actor’s behaviors (or thin description) and insert commentary on, the context for, and interpretation of these behaviors into the text” (Conceptual Foundations of Autoethnography, 7). Through time, the thick description and ethnography blended together to become what is known today as autoethnography.

Autoethnography in its earlier days was vastly different from what it is today. As with anything involving humans, change is inevitable. Since humans are always growing and changing, so are the products of the species. Today, autoethnography is defined by the American Psychological Association (APA) as a “genre of academic writing that draws on and analyzes or interprets the lived experience of the author and connects researcher insights to self-identity, cultural rules and resources, communication practices, traditions, premises, symbols, rules, shared meanings, emotion, values, and larger social, cultural, and political issues” (Conceptual Foundations of Autoethnography, 4). To deconstruct the lengthy definition, autoethnography takes the researcher and puts them in the middle of the spotlight. No longer do personal connections to the data seem irrelevant. This field seeks to integrate both the data and personal experiences into one

legitimate experience. However, this does not serve as a way for one person to serve as a voice for a whole community. Instead, the contribution of personal experience is meant to serve as an example of a trend happening on a larger scale.

Because autoethnography allows the research to center on the experiences of the researcher, utilizing the study for this thesis fits in like the final piece of a jigsaw puzzle. However, no study is ever complete with just one practice. It just so happens that autoethnography itself tends to draw upon multiple practices and methods of data collection to provide a well-rounded interpretation of the research (Conceptual Foundations of Autoethnography, 11). Therefore, it is time to move on and explore the other key aspects of the methods of this research paper.

Poststructuralism

A conclusion was drawn after conducting a discourse analysis on the primary source. The concept of a discourse analysis is based on the 1950s concept of poststructuralism as a response to another theory by the name of structuralism. Structuralism seeks to find a logical explanation to abstract concepts such as art, mythology, and social organizations (Mascia-Lees 2017, 73). Claude Lévi-Strauss is the poster child of the structuralist mindset. He operated under the notion that because the mind works the same for everyone, it is therefore structured the same way for everyone. The brain as structured by Lévi-Strauss is one rooted in an opposing binary. This binary consists of opposite but related words that provide a broad organized structure to the society. As the brain grows it assigns meanings to opposing binaries that then allow a society to properly function. A modern example of the theory can be found in traffic lights. In America, when a light is red, that indicates to the driver that they must stop

moving their car and wait for the signal to change. When the light changes to green it indicates to the driver that they are allowed to move their vehicle forward (Mascia-Lees 2017, 74). Two different colored lights that have two different meanings are opposing binaries in which society functions. Because a specific meaning has been assigned in the mind of the person observing traffic lights, they create a structure for safely driving. Tomorrow, if the colors were to change it would cause chaos on the roads. If red lights were suddenly changed to purple and green to blue the meaning of traffic lights would be erased. The brain operates under the knowledge that green means go, and red means stop, changing the colors removes the structure the brain has created. This is how structuralism has uncovered hidden structures within a society.

Other hidden structures related to culture include power dynamics between race and class, or notions such as gender and sexual orientations. A fault of the theory that led to the development of post-structuralism was that the hidden structures of a society are rooted in a binary. Post-structural theorists see binaries such as male/female, mind/body, and Self/Other, as Western cultural constructs, not a universally applicable thought. (Mascia-Lees 2017, 83). Referring back to the traffic light example previously mentioned, it can be found everywhere in the United States, a Western based society, however just because it is found in the United States does not mean it will be found everywhere in the world. Bhutan, for example, is a country located in South Asia that does not have traffic lights. The binary mindset of American traffic lights would not be applicable to residents of Bhutan. Putting up a set of traffic lights overnight for them would cause confusion. Their brains have not developed with the association of green

means go and red means stop. Such faults of structuralism and the limitations of binary thinking have led to post-structuralism thinking thanks to the work of Michel Foucault.

Poststructuralism emerged in the 1960s in France as a critique of structuralism. One of the most influential thinkers of the poststructural movement is French philosopher, and modern day LGBTQIA+ icon, Michel Foucault. His work with language is so closely tied to poststructuralism that he has been unofficially appointed the father of poststructuralism. Today, his works still have a huge impact on the field of anthropology and in turn, this thesis project.

Foucault was interested in language and how it contributed to the development of the self, specifically through the creation of discourses. Discourses are a set of ideas and/or knowledge that is supported by an institution to be used as a means to educate the masses on right and wrong. An example is the notion that the family is the foundation of a successful society. Anything that threatens the idea of family is a threat to society. Abortion can be viewed as a threat as it would prevent women from having children and a family. In a broader sense, women having control over their own bodies can be seen as a threat to society as a whole (Mascia-Lees 2017, 84). Foucault saw accepted discourse as a means of control through the production of knowledge. If a group does not want women to have bodily autonomy, they could create a discourse that makes family the foundation of society and autonomy would threaten to cause the downfall of society. Societal notions of the normal and the abnormal allow anthropologists to analyze the formation and language of norms to see how and where power sits in a society. This is a discourse analysis. Observing the language of what is accepted in a society to seek out the relationships between people and power.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is a qualitative analysis technique of language being used in this thesis. Within discourse analysis, there are two main methods of approaching data. First is a linguistics approach. Linguistics will observe the grammatical structure and syntax of the language in order to find underlying meanings. An example is vernacular versus specialized language. Observe the following sentences:

1. Boy that turtle sure is moving pretty fast.
2. The turtle exhibited an advanced rate of movement for its species.

At first glance, the sentences may vary in size but say the same thing; the turtle is moving fast. However, linguistic discourse analysis shows there is more than meets the eye. Sentence 1 is structured in the vernacular language, or the dialect of an ordinary person. Whereas sentence 2 is structured using specialized language such as those found in lab reports and scholarly articles. The same sentence can be formed two different ways and perceived differently (Gee 2014, 9). The intention of using language syntax is to find deeper meanings to the language than what is seen on the surface and to provide explanation as to why the meaning of the sentence is being formatted in one way rather than another. Such explanations are found within the context of the language's origin.

Context in the case of this research is the social, cultural, political, or historical circumstances that can provide greater insight to the language. There are many different methods of discourse analysis. Depending on the hypothesis, researchers focus on the technical make-up of the language, such as the use of grammar and syntax. It is also equally valuable to assess how the language is used in a corpus, or body of data, specifically if the corpus contains multiple points of views (Sud 2014).

For a discourse analysis to be successful, it is important to understand that it operates on the basis of social constructs within a culture that provide meaning to the language. Meaning is constructed when the corpus is observed within the context of the situation from which it originates. This includes looking into the background of the source, and the sociocultural views it stems from. Knowing what information is available to the source, and how said information could be contributing to the corpus allows for meaning to be created. It is also important to consider the context and meaning of the audience as well. Understanding the audience's social, political, and historical background will provide meaning to the language and how it will be received after being shared by the source.

When language is being transferred from a source to an audience, it can illuminate power and any imbalances within it. When finding such imbalances, there are a few variables to consider when applying any discourse analysis. One way to identify imbalances is by inequality between source and audience. Inequalities can come in many shapes and forms. Some include financial standing, access to education and information, geographical location and conditions, and even mental/physical health. When one party has more of, or better quality, of the variables given, this creates an inequality. Similar to inequalities, a variable to consider is the ideology of the source. The ideology refers to a system of ideas, particularly ones that form the basis of economic and political theory (Sud 2014). How these ideals are shared via language can reveal the overall goal. Depending on the source and the audience, the goal of communication could be to maintain a relationship, educate, or navigate a conflict. Applying discourse analysis will help to reveal said goals. Another variable to consider is how the language is being

communicated and to whom it is being communicated. How one addressed colleagues varies greatly from how one addressed close friends or family members. For example, when sending an email to a colleague and writer includes a greeting, introduction, the body of the email, and a sign off. All of which is grammatically correct. On the other hand, when emailing a friend or family member, proper formatting and grammar is not as important. While the means of communication remains the same, the communication itself changes. This can be referred to as code switching, or when one person alternates between two or more languages or varieties of language within a conversation. Once all the variables have been taken into account, it is possible to move forward with the methodology and apply the analysis to a source.

Socio-Political Discourse Analysis

When approaching a corpus with a socio-political discourse analysis, the focus of the analysis is on the influence of language within its social context. Often during a discourse analysis the language is observed without the context of the social situation from which it was born. Without considering the social influence on language, the meaning can vary drastically. For example, in the Maine dialect one often hears the phrase “Wicked!”. A quick dictionary search of the term results in a definition meaning “morally bad, evil” (Merriam-Webster 2022). Someone analyzing the language of Mainers could draw the conclusion of the use of wicked to mean that found in the dictionary. However, if the person were to analyze the phrase again placed within the context of Maine’s community and dialect, the term would actually mean the opposite. Both interpretations of the meaning are correct, yet one holds greater relevance to analyzing culturally situated discourses. The relationship between language and society

can be found as far back as the times of ancient Greece and Rome. Both Aristotle and Cicero acknowledge and praise the power of language when applied to social and political situations (Dunmire 2012). From there, the approach to analysis has developed into a modern-day technique. Sociolinguistics observe the relationship language can have on social situations and the influence social situations have on language. Within the socio-political discourse approach there are other, more specific means of analysis, the most popular being critical discourse analysis.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis is a popular method of conducting socio-political discourse analysis. The difference between the two is that the focus of the critical discourse analysis is on power structures and how the discourse surrounding the language is influenced by society and culture (Jensen 2023). This means of analysis was born from philosopher Michel Foucault's earlier work on power, particularly the theory of normalized power. Normalized power are subtle clues given by the environment on what is considered appropriate or inappropriate behavior. Such appropriate behavior is known as social norms and are important to learn in order to properly enter a society. An example of normalized power can be observed in a convenient store. When queuing up at the checkout counter, there are no signs to indicate that customers have to form a line, yet people do. An observer could view the environment and deduce that in order to be serviced, one must enter the line to the counter. Despite this not being directly taught, it is considered a social norm within the context of that society. The opposite of normalized power is repressive power. Repressive power is power that is actively asserted over another party (Jensen 2023). If a student is being disruptive in a classroom, the teacher

can give detention for misbehavior. In the social hierarchy of the school system, the teacher is above the student and therefore possesses the power to implement and enforce certain rules. In both normalized and repressive power, language is operating power at work. When one analyzes the language, one can subsequently analyze the social context of the situation. The road goes both ways for this analysis. Just as language allows researchers to examine social context, social context allows for further analysis of the language.

Applying Discourse Analysis to the Primary Source

When it comes to conducting any sort of research paper it is always recommended to start at the beginning. In this case, the beginning is deciding which quotes to discuss in the paper and which to exclude. When the post was originally made by Smith it accumulated 58 total comments, which is a lot of material. Ideally, each one could be stripped apart for its underlying meaning, but that would make for a lot of repetitive information and an unnecessarily long paper. So, only a few comments would serve as the data for the analysis and discussion portion of the paper. The trick is to analyze each comment quickly to determine if there is enough to perform a deep dive on without having to deconstruct each comment. Fortunately, keywords are a quick way to do just that. Reading through the post and its comments it was easy to flag comments that mentioned *porn, grooming, and freedom of speech*. This resulted in a select few comments that would fit the bill, but it was not enough to support the claim. From there the list of keywords was expanded to include harm, LGBT, abuse, gender, queer, and curse words.

Curse words seem irrelevant; however, of the comments contained in the primary source those that are in favor of banning the book use curse words while those against banning refrain from using them. That pattern alone is worthy of its own analysis but is best saved for a separate project. For now, this pattern is helpful in finding connections to other themes.

Expanding the list of keywords created a wider selection of comments to use for analysis. From there, comments were whittled down based on what vernacular language would describe as, "gut feelings" ', but in actuality was a recognition of patterns based on personal information and cultural context. A benefit of being a part of the community serving as the subject of the research project is that my mind is structured with social norms of community members. This is not the case for every single thing within a community, there are many other factors that contribute to cultural and social understandings within a community. Being aware of some of the implications within the community does not guarantee awareness of every single one. It is likely that in performing the discourse analysis certain norms are missed due to lack of involvement in that subset of the community. One example that comes to mind is amid the debate of whether *Gender Queer* belongs in a school library, two people have a mini conversation regarding the availability of hunting and fishing books in school libraries. Personally, as someone who has never gone hunting or fishing, this importance of this conversation is overlooked as it does not seem relevant to the theme of the paper. However, the two people who had the conversation felt the topic was relevant enough to bring into the discussion regarding books. To see the comments firsthand, refer to Appendix D located at the end of the paper.

On the other hand, while being part of the only certain aspects of the community creates a disadvantage, it also has advantages. Referring again to Appendix D, one person mentions “furbies”. To someone outside the community, the person is referring to the popular toy from the 1990s / 2000s that looked like a bird and used batteries to make various noises and movements. However, having experience and knowledge of the community, would lead to a different conclusion that the person made a spelling mistake when referring to a rumor that a few years back high school students were dressing up as animals and identifying as the animal they dressed up as. A person who does this is known as a furry. There are no newspaper articles reporting on the instance, however a personal connection such as parents working in the school or siblings attending the high school would allow for the information to be passed among community members.

Similar instances of community knowledge allowed for certain quotes to be selected as they best supported the claims of this paper. While the knowledge can be beneficial, it can also potentially allow for information to go unnoticed due to not being involved in every faction of a community. However, combining quantitative search methods, such as key words, with insider information has led to the following comments being selected as they best support the claims being made. To preserve all context surrounding the primary source, the Facebook post and comments have been provided in situ at the end of the paper in Appendix D. This allows for any reader who possesses different insights to observe the conversation and draw their own conclusions on the data just as this next section will do regarding the major themes of the source.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

When the book challenge of Gender Queer was in full swing in the RSU #40 district, social media was buzzing with opinions and thoughts on the matter. The intention of WHAT'S NEW IN WALDOBORO is to provide an accessible community for people to seek help, spread news of events, and support local businesses. Discussing political issues was not the intended purpose of the group, however it is a tricky subject as it can easily relate to local news events. This group seemed to have a new post every day on the matter. However, all but one of those posts has been removed due to behaviors due to harassment and bullying between members. Group members who felt the book should be removed would accuse people on the opposing side of being pedophiles. Members who wanted the book to stay in the library claimed people who oppose were pushing kids to the brink of suicide. Both sides of the debate were tense and cruel things were being thrown around. Fortunately, page administrators have cleaned up the page and removed all members who were disregarding the group's rules. After the deep cleaning of the group, one post remained that talked about Gender Queer. On September 19, 2022, group admin Rebecca Smith Waddell posted the following in the group:

When I originally saw this article, I wasn't going to share it here because sometimes things that trigger strong emotions make people behave less kindly toward others -- which is something we don't want to see on this page. I went to a couple of school board meetings last year where banning some books was discussed. The issue is coming up across the state right now, including here in Waldoboro. If you have any interest, I suggest you consider contacting school board members via phone or email, as I doubt they are here reading comments. I will post a link to how to reach school board members in the comments. By interest, I mean whether you support the ban or not. Typically people who are upset reach out, not the ones who aren't bothered by the content. All voices matter.

Attached to the post was a link to an article in the local newspaper, The Village Soup, informing the public that school board members were going to read Gender Queer before making a decision regarding the book challenge on October 20, 2022. Waddell also provided links to the contact information of the school board members on the district's website and PDFs of the district's policies. Underneath Waddell's post are 58 comments containing a mix of opinions. Those in favor and against the book challenge spoke out to share their thoughts on the matter. These comments serve as the primary source of information regarding the following discourse analysis as they provide snapshot insights into harmful effects the situation has on queer students in the RSU #40 district. Of all the comments, three themes stood out among the opinions. First, there is the assumption that any form of queer sexual imagery is inherently pornographic. Secondly, the harmful notion that literature intends to educate people on the various aspects of the queer community is done so with the intention of grooming minors. Finally, the paradoxical argument regarding people's rights by the first amendment. Community members argue that they have the right to control what books are in school districts because of their financial contribution i.e. taxes. In actuality, they are pressing for censorship and oppression of free speech. Each analysis is performed on 2-3 quotes pulled from the comment section of Waddell's post and, if necessary, has supporting information from secondary sources to assist with the analysis.

Pornography

If a time-traveling anthropologist were to visit the United Kingdom during 1775, the policing of free speech and pornography would be vastly different compared to today. People could say nearly whatever they wanted, so long as it did not go against the

Church. There were a few cases of arrest due to the distribution of racy content that was disturbing the King and his subjects, however, the cases were acquitted. The French Revolution was on the horizon. Activists Thomas Paine and Richard Price spread the word about independence from the government and universal freedoms. Word of activism and revolution was coming across the Channel and causing elites of the UK to grow uneasy at the thought of rebellion on their own land. The logical solution born from an elite mind is to crush any sense of freedom and agency among the lower class before they can organize and revolt. The lower class still had gotten the silly notion that they could demand equal rights and began circulating pamphlets similar to those of Paine and Price across the water. These papers were published and distributed on Holywell Street, where a majority of pornographic material was also created and sold. In the eyes of the elite, activism, and pornography became one and the same due to their physical proximity. One way elites sought to control the masses was through laws, specifically sodomy and obscenity laws. High-up officials created a press hysteria about the dangers of mass-produced pornography masquerading as educational information for rebellion. This was particularly alarming to a group of women and elders who called themselves the Society for the Suppression of Vice. Their mission was to gain the support, and funding, of other elite members of the U.K. to purchase and then burn pornography. The group's concern was the material would fall into the hands of children and give them inappropriate ideas such as pleasurable sex and equal education. Legislation was further developed to bring about punishments for the publishers of pornographic material. This puts the responsibility of a society's purity into the government. It became the official's responsibility to listen to the concerns of the public regarding inappropriate sexual

material and issue consequences for such material. These laws created in the U.K. followed pilgrims across the seas into the newborn colonies. As the colonies grew into modern-day America, the laws remained largely unchanged to this day.

Back in the present day, the brief history of the relationship between pornography and free speech is still impacting people today. Pornography is still widely viewed as dangerous and has resulted in many specialists studying the potential development of pornography addiction, or the risks of consuming too much pornography. Also, pornographic material is agreed to be bad for minors. This is demonstrated by the large percentage of books being challenged and banned in the United States due to pornographic topics. It is also illegal for children to view, receive, or send porn under the Federal Department of Justice. These laws and studies are done with the intention of protecting people from suffering harm. However, one group is overlooked, the LGBTQIA+ community.

Pornography is a means for people to explore various attractions and fetishes. Sometimes those fetishes objectify and dehumanize a person. A fetish is when a sexual desire develops in relation to a specific object, activity, or body part other than sexual organs (Timmerman, 12). To be sexually objectified is to be seen by a person as an object used to bring sexual gratification to the person (Timmerman, 20). A study explored the effects of fetish pornography and in-person interactions between a cisgendered and transgendered/nonbinary person (TGNB). Results of the studies showed that a large number of TGNB participants were victims of prolonged exposure objectification. Outside of illuminating the harmful effects pornography can have on the queer

community, it also supports the discourse of members of the LGBTQIAP+ community existing purely for the gratification of cisgendered, heterosexual people.

How does all this context apply to *Gender Queer*? There is evidence of the discourse in the comments of the Facebook post. The first example of the accepted discourse comes from a comment made by Bob Pease, “Not one child need any of this information contained in the porno, this is child abuse!” No titles are mentioned except in the original post, since Pease did not clarify or state that he is referring to a different title, the book is being reduced to “porno” in this instance. The porno in reference could be page 139. Kobabe is explaining eir early instances with masturbation. In one panel, Kobabe is laying on a bed with a dream cloud over their head showing a depiction of heavenly love from Plato’s Symposium. The other instance where people cite “pornographic content” is on page 168 of *Gender Queer*. At that point in the memoir, Kobabe is in college and beginning to explore sex with a partner. In one panel, the reader sees Kobabe’s partner giving a strap-on dildo a blow-job. In the next panel, Kobabe shares eir discomfort with the situation and suggests doing something else instead. With the context behind the “porno” being clarified, let’s dissect the rest of the comment.

Pease’s post does not say that the book is inappropriate for older people, just children. This can be connected back to the group in 1879 who spread the idea that pornography is harmful to children due to potential corrupting their minds. Similar to concerns of the group, the language of the comment suggests that while the imminent concern is protecting children from pornography, it could also be a concern of protecting children from new ideas. The group was concerned that since pornographic and activism pamphlets were being printed and distributed together, that the pornography would

implant corrupt ideas in their mind. Breaking down the language of Pease's comment suggests the same thing. While Pease does not state this directly, a research paper by Timmerman collected statistics showing that books being banned or challenged had themes of both pornography and LGBTQIA+ than books with isolated themes. It was easy for British elites to suppress new ideas by creating laws against pornography, perhaps this could be history repeating itself. Language of the comment does not inherently state that what is wrong with the book is that it is pornographic.

Another point of interest regarding the language of Pease's comment is that it does not say explicitly that the book is inappropriate for older people, just children. This implies that as long as the contents of the book, which he refers to only as a "porno" are appropriate for adults. Simple choices in words reduces the book to porn perpetuating the harmful stereotype that queer people exist as a sexual fetish / fantasy for people, not as individuals. This use of language can be supported by the study "I feel like a sex toy.", which demonstrates that people within the heteronormative tend to view people outside of that as a sexual object, which dehumanizes them. Gender Queer can only be described as pornographic for someone who has never experienced porn before in their life. However, when the scenes are observed out of context of the rest of the story and through the lens of a heteronormative society people sing a different tune. Since the 1970s, homosexual people have been fetishized when portrayed in the media. At that time in history, the largest consumers of media were those who conformed to the heteronormative discourse. Therefore, when queer people were portrayed, it was to appeal to said heteronormative gaze. In mainstream media it is common for heteronormative individuals to see lesbians during their college years or use this time to

“experiment” with other women. If a character is bisexual, there is always mention of having a threesome with another woman and a man. For example, in the TV show *Gossip Girl*, women drunkenly make out on screen with other women for the purpose of arousing sexual feelings in men. Today, the most popular category of pornography is gay porn, specifically lesbian porn (Court 2022). This is not a new trend though. Although the term “pornography” was not used until the early 1900s, that has not stopped material being created with the intention of causing arousal for as long as there has been a written language. When it comes to anything pornographic, gay or otherwise in Western culture, it is portrayed to be done so in secret or in shame. This can be attributed to the heavy influence of the Church and their interpretation of the Bible and sin (Jenkins 2023). These perceptions of sexual relationships, particularly queer ones, have been the accepted discourse well into the modern day. Although there are movements aiming to change the discourse, however, those movements have yet to have a large impact on the midcoast Maine community. How can one tell those perceptions have not changed? Because it is clearly stated in the comments.

When Kobabe illustrated the two instances mentioned in the previously mentioned, the intention was not to cause sexual excitement. By definition, pornography is “material (such as books or a photograph) that depicts erotic behavior and is intended to cause sexual excitement.” (Merriam-Webster 2022). Authors face the challenge of creating scenes that allow readers to make a connection to both the story and the author. To do so the book contains interactions, reflections, scenes, etc. that the reader can relate through their own personal experiences or connection (Timmermann 2022). For Kobabe, *eir* creates said connection by sharing two instances of intimacy. By providing insight to

their personal life, this shows the readers that Kobabe trusts them. Also, by including experiences with sex and masturbation, Kobabe is touching on a subject that all readers can relate to through their own instances. For many readers, their experiences are remarkably similar to the ones Kobabe has experienced (Kobabe 2022, 246). Sharing such instances are vital as they help readers feel less isolated in life and their own bodies. Neither instance of Kobabe's experience with masturbation or sex are intended to cause arousal to readers. In the scene where Kobabe is masturbating to a fantasy inspired by Plato's Symposium, the panel is prefaced by Kobabe at eir desk doing homework (Kobabe 2022, 136). The surrounding text is Kobabe reflecting on eir similar experiences in masturbation compared to the main character in the book Fun Home. At the time in Kobabe's, Fun Home was one of the few books that realistically portrayed a queer character in which Kobabe could relate to. Kobabe includes the connection to show readers that Gender Queer is meant to be a resource available for people to connect to as eir did with Fun Home. Nothing in the language or depiction of the scenes are structured in a way to elicit sexual feelings. In fact, Kobabe is fully clothed the entire time. The nudity included in the book is significantly less detailed than textbooks used in Health class by the district. Basically, the fantasy of Plato's Symposium is more benign than the district approved textbooks used to educate 5th graders.

Similarly, later in the book when Kobabe shares eir early experience of sex with a partner, despite being a little more graphic and detailed, the intention of the scene is not to bring about feelings of arousal. The scene is another example of Kobabe providing personal examples to create intimacy and connection with the readers. At this point in the memoir, Kobabe is in college and starting to date. When e has a partner e is comfortable

with, e experiments with sex. From reading the book, the audience knows that Kobabe tends to stay away from sexual situations, especially if it means interacting with eir body. At one point in the book, Kobabe shares that e went almost a whole year without masturbating (Kobabe 2022, 67). Sex is not something e seems to enjoy, so the fact they e is willing to try with eir partner tells the reader that it was a rare occurrence. During the scene, Kobabe is wearing a strap-on dildo, meant to imitate Kobabe having a penis. Eir partner proceeds to give the toy a blow job. Kobabe quickly becomes uncomfortable and dysphoric at the experience due to eir lack of ability to feel the sensation. Kobabe communicates this to eir partner, and the pair go to bed. Kobabe spends the rest of the night tossing and turning, overthinking the night's events (Kobabe 2022, 171-172). This is not sexy. It is Kobabe's personal experience of a situation that is uncomfortable and dysphoric for em. Kobabe is employing narrative techniques to create a connection and intimacy between the content of the book and the reader (Timmermann 2022, PAGE #). Sex is awkward for everyone, despite what movies claim, the first time is not rose petals and soft mood lighting. It's awkward and often ends sooner than expected for a variety of reasons. Sharing the reality of the situation is meant to create the connection and help readers feel less isolated. It would be a stretch to call the scene pornographic because it's bad sex. There is no foreplay, no nudity, and it ends awkwardly. Such sex scenes are not often found in the latest best-selling romance series.

Reinforcing the discourse of sexualizing queer relationships also enforces the accepted social norms of the community. The problem with such norms is that they create the binary of "us" and "them". "Us" being members of the community that comfortably conform to the accepted discourse (Timmermann 2022). In this case a heterosexual

relationship between cisgendered people. Therefore, “them” becomes the community members who do not find an identity within the accepted norms. While the intention of the discourse is to create a sense of unity among people who cover a large geographical area, it's equally harmful for the individuals who do not fit with the label. Without a term to connect someone to the community, it creates a sense of isolation. As Kobabe explains in his memoir and interviews, the book's purpose is to remove said feelings of isolation. When community members reduce others around them to only sexual actions and continue with such a mindset, they are undoing the work of people like Kobabe. When a reader sees the intimate images of Kobabe's exploration of masturbation and sex it gives them something to connect to. However, learning that the community member views their genuine feelings as something unacceptable to their discourse, they begin to ingrain such notions in the readers. As the reader grows up, they reinforce the discourse as queer relationships are inherently for sexual arousal to the heteronormative and it will then affect how they conduct their relationships.

Grooming

Sitting in the crowded gymnasium scanning the crowd, an older woman hoists a cardboard sign high above the seats. The sign reads, in all caps, “GROOMERS LOVE THIS BOOK!”. Child grooming is when an adult creates a trusting relationship with a minor with the intent to take advantage of them, often sexually. Since 2020 there has been a sharp increase in accusing members of the LGBTQIA+ community and allies of grooming children. In the months following HB 1557– the “Don't Say Gay” Bill among left-wing groups – being passed by Governor DeSantis, the Human Rights Campaign recorded a 406% increase in social media posts accusing the LGBTQIA+ of grooming

(American Library Association 2022). Right-wing politicians are hurling the accusations today left and right, but they are the most recent development in a long, tense history.

Stigma has surrounded the LGBTQ+ community since the 1970s and before. It was illegal to marry someone of the same sex, and doctors could evaluate patients afflicted with sexual complications (Lorenz, 2019). Being gay, or around a gay person, was a big fear for many people then, but that did not stop the community from making themselves known. A year after the Stonewall Riots in 1969, the modern era of gay rights was well underway, changing the world one day at a time. Change is always scary, especially when it's something unknown and unwanted by some, such as in the case of singer and activist Anita Bryant. Bryant today is best known for starting the conspiracy theory that gay people were grooming children to be gay during a speech for the "Save Our Children" campaign in 1977 (Harry 2007). The group intended to "save" children from homosexuals by seeking to pass legislation that would bar openly gay people from working in California schools. Bryant's logic was that since gay people could not biologically produce children of their own, they were seeking out school children to recruit them into their community (Harry 2007). Fortunately, the legislation did not pass, but that did remove the stigma surrounding the gay community. During the 1970s, Bryant's target was gay men, this was because gay men were one of the few sexual identities in mainstream conversation. Other identities existed at the time but are not as well-known as gay men. As a result, they appear to be the only target of the attempted ban. As the language expands around the LGBTQIA+ community, so does the scope of groups being targeted by grooming accusations.

The concept of gender identity and variations thereof was formalized in the 1960s, but it largely went unacknowledged in the public eye. Moving into the 21st century when gender identity moves to the forefront of public conversations, history begins to repeat itself. In 2020, gender non-conforming people face an onslaught of grooming accusations from right-wing politicians and supporters. Thanks to the help of organized groups such as Libs of Tik Tok and supporters of conservative activist Christopher Rufo. Libs of TikTok is run by Chaya Raichik, a former real estate agent. Raichik shares videos containing queer or liberal content wishing them well as they recover from their gender ideology illness (Libs of TikTok 2022). The account can be found on multiple platforms and has become popular among right-wing channels for spreading misinformation surrounding the queer community. Christopher Rufo is a conservative activist who rose to popularity for opposing critical race theory in educational institutions (Jones 2021). One could consider him a modern-day Anita Bryant. Although he gained popularity through seeking to remove critical race theory teachings, in 2022 he turned his attention towards gender and sexuality identities being taught in schools. Seeking the assistance of his Twitter supporters, Rufo asks for "...documents, PDFs, audio-video, and training materials related to gender, grooming, and trans ideology in schools," (Rufo 2021). Today, Rufo and his supporters are one of the driving forces behind the grooming narrative being directed at TGNB people.

As a lifelong member of the LGBTQ+ community, I was unaware of the grooming narrative until *Gender Queer* became a heated topic within the community. Seeing the sign "GROOMERS LOVE THIS BOOK" in person at a school board meeting, the sign elicited a chuckle and my sneaky attempt to snap a picture. Because I had no

prior knowledge of the narrative, and there was only one sign, I took the accusation to be an anomaly. However, looking within the lines of the post and comments of WHATS NEW WALDOBORO has shown me that the narrative is present although it hides behind false concerns. Through a discourse analysis of the primary source and some secondary sources, the narrative will be brought to the front of the conversation.

Members of the Facebook group do not want books kept in the library for fear of what the material adults are exposing children to. The first person to voice their concern on the matter was Chris Young when he posted, "...[whether] it's a book or not Stop Forcing BS on Children" (Waddell 2022).

Prior to the October 20, 2022, meeting, community concerns over the book and its connection to grooming was made clear. A Courier-Gazette article reports on a concerned community member:

Mike Kee also told the board the plus sign in the LGBTQ+ community was "for the pedophiles," and supporting one part of that community meant supporting pedophiles as well. Voting in favor of "Gender Queer" would be voting in favor of pedophiles, Kee said, and the board would face judgment "in this world or the next one.

Given that the newspaper article provides evidence of the community's concern, this shines a new light on the previously mentioned comments from the Facebook group. On the outside, Young is concerned for the well-being of students in MVHS, however he wishes that would "stop forcing this BS on children." Kee and Young are both concerned about the same things, of the book being forced on kids and exposing them to inappropriate concepts while putting them at harm. Group member Michelle Marie Collamore has similar concerns considering the book is "forced" upon students.

“And to those saying kids are not FORCED to read books in school - WHAT PLANET ARE YOU ON?!? Yes they are!! Then they write reports on the books they are “forced” to read....”

Collamore is operating firmly under the belief that Gender Queer is a required text in the schools’ curriculum and students must write a report on the book. Such reports are on topics that Collamore deems appropriate for students to be learning about. Just as Kee is concerned exposure to the book will push kids towards pedophiles, Collamore and Young are worried about the threats the book poses for being forced upon kids. While the fear may be real to these members of the community, it is not based in truth. The book is in no way attached to pedophiles, nor is such a lesson being ingrained in students. However, this notion is instilling a sense of moral panic among community members. Moral panic is the notion that a community unifies under a perceived threat, often a nonexistent one. Regardless of the threat’s legitimacy, the panic is real and results in actions being taken to remedy said threat. In the case of Gender Queer, community members are seeking the removal of the text and its potential exposure to being groomed by the LGBTQIA+ community. However, such protective measures being taken by these people are creating a sense of isolation among the queer students. Such effects will be later discussed in the conclusion portion of the paper. Moral panic has been used throughout history as a tool to maintain power dynamics and control, however there is more than one way to achieve the same results.

Freedom of Speech

When parents want to protect their children, one way to do that is by limiting what they have access to. In the case of Gender Queer, it translates into attempts at

ensorship. People justify their reasoning of control by pointing out that they pay taxes to support the schools in the community, which in turn violates the rights of the first amendment. Within the comments of the facebook post, one argument is more popular than others. Community members feel that because of the tax money they pay into the government and in turn public schools, they get to monitor what material is within the building. In other comments, people state that their money puts the books on the shelf of the school library. Commentor Susan Moody is a good example of that thought process when she said,

I don't pay for their phones, but my taxes pay for their school books, library books and other things. I would like my tax dollars to pay for education for children to have knowledge needed to become responsible working adults. A book with blatant pictures of oral sex being performed is not the education I want my dollars to pay for.

Community members are under the impression that they still possess control over the money which they hand it over to the government. Just as money used to buy groceries is no longer money possessed by the person, so it is with taxes. The point of paying taxes is for the government to build up funds and revenue to fund essential services such as the police, highways, etc.. People do not show up at the doors of the Department of Transportation to tell employees how they need to maintain the roads, so why do people try to do that with public libraries and schools? Simply put, control over access.

In the age of the internet, anything one could possibly want to know is at a person's fingertips. It is a wonderful resource that has drastically changed how people learn and access information. However, there is always a dark side to something so good. Stanford University released a study in 2022 showing that 75% of kids had their first phone by 12 years old (Digital 2022). This means a considerable amount of minors have

access to information people would consider inappropriate for their age. Fortunately, many companies have worked to develop software that restricts access to inappropriate information, many of which parents use. Programs such as Net Nanny or Norton Family help prevent minors from having unrestricted access to the internet and therefore ending up on sites they should not be on (Digital 2022). As helpful as those filters are, they are not foolproof. With a little elbow grease and creative thinking, there are ways to work around information filters such as the programs mentioned above. The problem this causes for parents is extreme difficulty in limiting access to information at the parent's discretion. As a parent, it is their responsibility to expose their children to information as they grow up when they deem it appropriate. Regardless of whether others agree it is appropriate or not, the decision falls to the parent on certain topics. With tangible objects, this is easy enough to do. If parents don't want their kids to read something they think is inappropriate for their age, then don't bring the books into the house. This is not as easily done on the internet, even with the help of filters such as Norton Family. A lack of tangible objects or means of preventing access to them leaves community members feeling as though they do not have control. When there is nothing for them to control, they latch onto something else. Take the quote mentioned above as an example. The person who posted the comment infers they have more control over books in a school library than they do over the phones their children have because they give money to one and not the other. However, as was just discussed, it is easier to remove information in the form of a physical object than it is to police something as large and intangible as the internet.

While the intentions of the community claim they are trying to remove books as a means of protecting their children, it's still a form of censorship that violates the first amendment. The First Amendment provides that Congress make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting its free exercise. It protects freedom of speech, the press, assembly, and the right to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. Removing books is a violation of the first amendment as it is removing access to speech and the press. The irony of the situation is that the concerned community members who are seeking protection of their children by exercising their first amendment rights of free speech are indirectly threatening the free speech they are so fond of. Removing information prevents people from learning about other ways of life. In terms of people of the queer community, removing information on said community would prevent people from finding other people they could relate to. Again, this could create feelings of isolation as well as prevent the ability of people to express their true identity. Furthermore, removing information or attempting to remove information regarding the queer community will further emphasize the distrust surrounding the queer community. While people think they are doing something good by trying to remove certain books from school libraries, they are doing harm and violating the first amendment.

CONCLUSION

Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me. The insults never come from a person directly, instead they come in anonymous messages on social media. Without a face or a voice, the insults find one, and I'm the closest host. Anonymous messages are read in my own voice and the blurred-out profile picture looks a lot like me. Sticks and stones will break my bones, but messages break my heart.

Whether the book challenges are successful or not, a significant amount of harm is caused towards the target audience. In the case of *Gender Queer* in the RSU #40 the harm maintains a discourse that negatively affects the LGBTQIA+ community nationally. While the book is victorious and remains in the library, the course of events stirred up conversations that negatively created the assumptions surrounding the queer community. Such conversations cause violent outlashes at queer people, affect the LGBTQIA+ mental health, and even affect legislation. Creating a strong discourse of the LGBTQIA+ as groomers causes harm in three major ways: it is dehumanizing, creates a moral panic, and insults sexual assault survivors. Challenging books create a space for conversations that hold both good and bad information. Such information found in the conversation around *Gender Queer* include the discourse of grooming, pornography, and the freedom of speech previously discussed in this paper. Each discourse that is maintained within a society has harmful effects on the LGBTQIA+ community, allies, and people outside of the community altogether.

Instances of book challenges and bans have been on the rise within the last five years. Despite the local community's attempts to remove *Gender Queer* from the Medomak Valley High School library being unsuccessful, they still caused significant

damage. A socio-political discourse analysis on a popular community forum, WHATS NEW IN WALDOBORO, in tandem with local news articles provided a source of data. This data served as code to be deciphered by an anthropologist with a keen eye for reading between the lines. Buried between the lines of messages and emojis a secret, darker meaning lives. Rooted in misinformation, scare tactics, and moral panic, small town community members reflect the national trend of seeking to control the LGBTQIA+ agenda to serve the heteronormative discourse. The data seeks to maintain the normative standard by encouraging common discourses regarding the queer community. Such discourses have been shown to harm the queer community on a national level. The details and extent of the harm these discourses cause is to be discussed in the following section. Going forward, the scope of the data will come from national research sources, rather than locally. The question that remains to be answered is what negative effects will occur among queer students in MVHS. Although I am one person who cannot accurately represent the local queer community, as a single individual these discourses have caused harm to me. I find it hard to imagine I am the only one affected by the events surrounding *Gender Queer*.

Pornography is a taboo subject in many different cultures around the world. In just as many cultures, the subject is not taboo. Unfortunately, evidence in the WHAT'S NEW IN WALDOBORO comment sections suggests their alignment with the first statement, specifically when the topic could be potentially exposed to minors. It is understandable that parents do not want their beloved children to be exposed to harmful information, or information that is better consumed with a fully developed brain. In an attempt to protect children, it can cause harm to others in the community.

Throughout the battle of the books *Gender Queer* was often referred to as pornographic, specifically because of the two pages, 126 and 168. These pages include exploration of one's identity through masturbation and sex toys. These instances allowed the author to learn more about themselves and their gender identity by learning if the situations were enjoyable and validating. Nothing in the pages was graphic, nor was the vulnerable, intimate experiences of the author included with the intention of arousing readers. Instead, they were supplied in the hopes of providing experiences that readers can relate too, and in turn feel less isolated.

This brings up the first harm that is caused by normalizing the discourse surrounding pornography. Maintaining the discourse that anything relating to genitals exists purely for arousal purposes can also isolate people within the LGBTQIAP+ community. Drawing on a personal experience, a patron came into the library seeking out materials on the topic of gender identity. After providing a selection of titles, they chose *Gender Queer*. Partially because they recognized the title through the many news articles being released at the time, and because of the description. A week later the patron returned with the book and tears in their eyes. Having just finished the book that morning, they began to cry tears of happiness. Finally, after so much strife and worry about being abnormal, one book gave them peace of mind. Much of the experiences within the book were also experienced by the reader. Of course, it's easy to say that is just one person's experience and in no way could relate to others. However, such an assumption would be wrong. Looking no further than the comments and reviews of *Gender Queer* on Goodreads, there are thousands of reviews proclaiming how much validation the book provided for them. Granted, there are just as many reviews criticizing

the book, but that is not relevant to this story. These positive reviews had comments of their own, people sharing their stories and connecting with other members of their community. One book was able to validate and bring together thousands of people across the nation.

When people in a community seek to remove Gender Queer they are removing these connections and causing harm. Studies conducted by various accredited facilities, such as Yale School of Public Health, have shown that transgender people are, “Six times more likely to have a mood or anxiety disorder than the general population. Three times as likely to be prescribed antidepressants and anti-anxiety medications. More than six times as likely to attempt suicide resulting in hospitalization.” when compared to studies of their cisgendered counterparts (Reduction, 2019). While there are many variables that can contribute to the need for medical attention regarding one’s mental health, a lack of access to gender validating materials-- such as books, is one of them (Reduction 2019). A strong sense of loneliness is not the only harm that can be caused through the normalized discourse relating to pornography and *Gender Queer*. In fact, it's just the beginning.

When people begin to associate a group with the characteristics of stereotypes and only those characteristics, it becomes hard to change how others perceive the community. Reducing such complex dynamics to superficial characteristics forces those in the group to conform or risk being further ostracized from the community. The LGBTQIA+ community already has to deal with unaccepting people and discrimination in the form of legislation or cultural norms. To minimize potential harm, members of the community will conform themselves to stereotypes as a means of protection within the heteronormative. This action in turn limits the amount of growth possible for members in

the community as well. The perception of Gender Queer as pornographic also encourages the idea that the queer community exists purely for sexual reasons. When any and all forms of queer relationships are reduced down to something meant to be perceived as arousing, that is how young people will grow up and conduct their relationships. However, taking the time to understand the context of the images will help readers understand the complexity and reality of queer relationships, as well as how to handle them in a healthy way. Consider a hypothetical example. If young members of the LGBTQIA+ community are taught by older members such as those commenting in the WHAT'S NEW IN WALDOBORO group that their relationships only exist to serve as pornographic material, they will grow up to accept that as true. In turn, the people who made the comment in the group turn out to be right, but by their own creation. That is how dominant powers in the community work to remain the dominant. Removing accurate representations of queer people and instead educating them on false perceptions can cause young queer folk to grow up and conform to the stereotype. Kobabe's book serves as a tool to change the box in which young queer people are being shoved into by their community. The longer a group conforms to a stereotype, the harder it will be to change. Any attempts to change will lead to contrasting ideas of what is the correct behavior within said group (Hall 1997). On their own, these actions have negative consequences towards the LGBTQIA+ community further dividing people on an already tense political matter. The farther the divide grows the more rigid the stereotype becomes and therefore removing the possibility of growth on both sides of the argument (Hall 1997). Harmful stereotypes are not the only means of maintaining normalized power

structures within a community. Another example is prominent in the comment chains of the facebook post.

Similar to pornography, the notion of the idea that queer people aim to groom minors causes a moral panic among the dominant power. With today's modern technology, stirring up a sense of moral panic is easier than ever, the facebook group being a great example. In a Courier-Gazette article posted after the September meeting, community Mike Kee shared his notion of the LGBTQIA+ community being supportive of pedophiles based on the community's use of the "+" symbol (Staff 2021). The language of certain comments supports Kee's statement when community members claim the LGBTQIA+ agenda is being "forced" onto unsuspecting children and then made to write reports on it as a means of ingraining the information into their minds. Just as the threat in a moral panic is false, so is the conspiracy theory that the queer community seeks to groom children as a means of "recruiting new members" (Benton 2022, PAGE #?). While the accusations are false, the harm the comments cause is not.

Moral panic is a quick and easy way to promote harmful notions of a community. Similar to blood libels stealing children in the Middle Ages, queer people seek to groom children. Social media spreads the panic easily due to a lack of fact-checking and follow up on statements (Timmermann). Claims seem credible when a commenter says the information comes from a trusted community member. Even more so, the political tension of topics presented through social media have immense power of the perception of groups (Cohen 2011). When comments on social media continue to spread the threat, those suffering from the moral panic seek means of removing the threat. Community members commenting in the WHAT'S NEW WALDOBORO group want to remove the

threat by removing the book. Removing the book removes realistic representation of queer people. Without the accurate representation, the feel of panic will persist and the LGBTQIA+ community becomes the enemy. This in turn creates a divide in the community of an “us” and “them” (Hall 1997). Panic is a means of control utilized by conspiracy theorists and politicians to maintain power dynamics. As community members fear an invisible enemy, politicians can use said fear to progress their agenda towards limiting and removing the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community. An example of this is the “Don’t Say Gay Law” that has been set into motion in Florida by Governor DeSantis (Friedman 2022). The law claims to be a way for parents to protect children over the threat of exposure to inappropriate material. However, it has caused librarians and teachers to lose their jobs because parents have deemed material inappropriate. Removing the material from classrooms and libraries removes the representation of communities that need those materials and reinforces the “us” and “them” notion with “them” being an imagined enemy. This will put young LGBTQIA+ members at risk of harm by community members who see them as a threat. Although the potential harm of moral panic is scary, the really terrifying threat comes with community members attempting to remove their first amendment rights.

Adults are attempting to police the books of libraries and schools as a means to “protect” children, when in fact they are violating their first amendment rights. The first amendment gives Americans the right to freedom of expression and press. That means each individual has the right to collect information on any subject matter from all perspectives before forming an opinion. Limiting access or removing books in turn removes access to ideas and information to form said opinions (American Library

Association 2008). The tricky part of that right comes in the details. As a government, they cannot remove access to information due to the content of the information, however a private business or individual can. Therefore, that gives parents and guardians the right to determine what books their children can read in libraries. What it does not grant individuals the right to do is to determine what information an entire school can have access to through their libraries. In the instance of RSU #40 and Gender Queer the first amendment rights were protected, but that doesn't mean it is without consequences. Any attempt to remove someone's freedom to access information creates tensions over the information itself. Gender Queer being perceived as inappropriate materials makes it difficult for students to explore various forms of gender expression. Expression means having the space and ability to explore their gender identity. Community members claim that the material is dangerous, when actually they are taking away the space students need. School is meant to be a safe environment for students to explore and learn about themselves and other people. Attempting to remove resources will prevent the students from exploring and learning. Rather than preparing for them to enter the real world after graduation, they will leave with a limited understanding of the world. The best way to protect everyone's first amendment rights is to find means of communication that help all sides of an argument understand differences in values and beliefs without forcing one group to be silent (American Library Association 2008). Forcing a group to become silent through material censorship will maintain the normalized power dynamics in a community and further marginalized students seeking information on gender identity, as well as the tools to express themselves.

Book bans have been on the rise for the past three years and they won't be slowing down anytime soon. A majority of the books being targeted have themes regarding the LGBTQIA+ community. Gender Queer by Maia Kobabe has been the number one challenged book for two years running. Across the nation, people cry out in concern over the "pornographic" content of the book. In actuality, the imagery is meant to provide a sense of connection between the author and reader, as well as to each other in the community. Kobabe has provided a wonderful resource for the community that other members are trying to remove due to the book being outside of the accepted norm. In the RSU #in 40 school districts, a group voiced their dislike for being in their school district. They claimed the book was pornographic, a tool for grooming, and a violation of the first amendment. In actuality, a socio-political discourse analysis of the comments in the Facebook group show that they are attempting to maintain the cultural norm and causing harm to the LGBTQIA+ students in the district. Fortunately, the book remains on the shelves of the library and available for others to read. Despite certain members of the community attempting to maintain the status quo, change is happening. No matter where they are, marginalized groups in the community are taking up space. That is why the book banning trend will not go down anytime soon. The more books out there portraying real queer people the harder it will be to silence the community. Let the people take up space in the world, and let their books take up space on the shelves.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A - LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS

The American Library Association affirms that all libraries are forums for information and ideas, and that the following basic policies should guide their services.

- I. Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.
- II. Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.
- III. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.
- IV. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.
- V. A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.
- VI. Libraries which make exhibit spaces and meeting rooms available to the public they serve should make such facilities available on an equitable basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use.
- VII. All people, regardless of origin, age, background, or views, possess a right to privacy and confidentiality in their library use. Libraries should advocate for,

educate about, and protect people's privacy, safeguarding all library use data,
including personally identifiable information.

Adopted June 19, 1939, by the ALA Council; amended October 14, 1944; June 18, 1948;

February 2, 1961; June 27, 1967; January 23, 1980; January 29, 2019.

Inclusion of "age" reaffirmed January 23, 1996.

APPENDIX B - WHATS NEW IN WALDOBORO TRANSCRIPT

Original Post: Rebecca Smith Waddell

Date: September 19, 2022

When I originally saw this article, I wasn't going to share it here because sometimes things that trigger strong emotions make people behave less kindly toward others -- which is something we don't want to see on this page. I went to a couple of school board meetings last year where banning some books were discussed. The issue is coming up across the state right now, including here in Waldoboro. If you have any interest, I suggest you consider contacting school board members via phone or email, as I doubt they are here reading comments. I will post a link to how to reach school board members in the comments. By interest, I mean whether you support the ban or not. Typically people who are upset reach out, not the ones who aren't bothered by the content. All voices matter.

Link Shared with the post: https://knox.villagesoup.com/2022/09/16/school-board-to-read-gender-queer-before-vote-on-whether-to-remove-book-from-mvhs-library/?fbclid=IwAR03ZzItkGIMWufdCeSqZ-_Cay3n4l-ncfVnLtfkkmkVt08chygnpD-ubd4

Comments

- Rebecca Smith Waddell (Author)(Group Admin): School board members email, phone, and mailing addresses: <https://rsu40.org/board-committees/>
- Rebecca Smith Waddell (Author)(Group Admin): This is a link to district policies: <https://rsu40.org/policies-draft/>

- Susan Moody: please look at the book and the pictures before you make a decision
- Kristina DeRaps: Just let kids be kids! Stop filling their young minds with all this crap!
- Bob Pease: Not one child need any of this information contained in the porno, this is child abuse!
 - ◆ (Edited)Rachel Genthner: Bob Pease you better study about Gender dysphoria it's a silent killer I know I've been dead four times and brought back because I hid my truth if I have that book when I was seven or eight to take home and sit and talk with my parents it would save me all the heartache and sickness I deal with today because it would help me try to understand how I was feeling stop making the book out something that it's not
- (Edited)Robyn Baker-Sykes (Admin): It is information that young people need. Times change, and time moves on. I want to see happy well adjusted thriving kids. ANY kinds of kids, ALL of them. Also not really banning anything except a safe place to see it. Has no one heard or seen the internet?? TONS of far more horrible things there and I dont see many policing that with this much worry as I see over a BOOK.
 - ◆ Tim Simmons: 11 generations here,and never imagined this would happen.teachers are suppose to teach,reading,writing, math,history and such.not this.and the insane (furbie ?) thing either.

- Robyn Baker-Sykes (Admin): Tim Simmons as a society, we do expect far more than just the basics from today's teachers.
 - Trisha Demers: Robyn Baker-Sykes but why?
 - Robyn Baker-Sykes: Trisha Demers why to what part?
 - Trisha Demers: Robyn Baker-Sykes I wonder why so much burden is on the teachers now.
 - Robyn Baker-Sykes: Trisha Demers administrative requirements, babysitting, policing cell phones, following so many rules, being a safe adult, trying to be a role model, being a parent, trying to navigate any actual learning, having to buy their own class supplies, low pay, high expectations, little support from a variety of places, being bullied by parents, yelled at by parents, little respect for the work they are trying to do, having their hands tied when a kid really needs some kind of support that teachers can't give... the list is endless. Daily wonderful teachers are leaving the profession...when we get it together it may be too late. All while making sure kids actually learn something and can go on in life and be a successful adult.
- Jeffrey Parent: Tim Simmons well said Tim agree 100 percent , this should not be in our school also being insulted about many of us who can't be a parent to these standards

- Tim Simmons: Jeffery Parent ya Jeff.you know some folk,read replies the wrong way.when I spoke about taxes : I was simply saying us property owners pay tax,which 90% of the pie goes to local schools.there for we have say over what teachers,teach.other words we are paying for their services (job).even if your kids are grown, or you don't even have kids.

→ Chris Young: There is a time n place if a child wants to know about this type of conduct and it ain't about the school ok'ing it that is definitely a parents job to say yes or no wether it's a book or not Stop Forcing BS on Children

◆ Tim Simmons: Chris Young I agree 100%

◆ Kimberly Alyson: Chris Young no one forces high school students to read specific library books. People need to see themselves in the books that they read and see people who have gone (or are going) through similar struggles. Should we say there shouldn't be any books about war in the library because we don't want our kids to go to war?

- Chris Young: Kimberly Alyson we'll let me put it this way if ANY of my children want to go to War I would say Hell Yeah because My family Loves this Country and to compare these two is absolutely Ludacris and and that is my opinion

- Rebecca Smith Waddell (Author) (Admin): Chris Young I love this country too, but part of what I love is the First Amendment. I have read the book and I do understand why it might make some

people uncomfortable, but it in no way meets the definition of pornography. Pornography, by legal definition, includes being titillating, which the book is not, and having no redeeming social value, which it has. I don't feel it would be appropriate in an elementary school setting, but it is for high school. Nobody has "turned gay" or "gender queer" based on a book, but many have struggled and we have lost young lives of those who feel unable to be themselves. No one has to take it out and read it, so there is no more force behind this than there is in having someone take out a book on baseball. I really think it is a case where if parents don't want their kids to read it, talk to them. As I said, it won't turn anyone queer, but it may help a student understand a queer friend, or perhaps feel less alone. I think the primary issue that people have with a book is that it is a tangible item. Any student who owns a phone likely sees far worse on a daily basis, often from their friends. The graphics in the book are no more revealing than the graffiti that was painted on the road a couple of years back.

- Chris Young: Rebecca Smith Waddell I mean u brought up Pornography not me and yes First Amendment ...like my opinion it is mine and I just said I dnt feel this bs should be around school
- Tim Simmons: Chris Young Chris I don't want to get in the middle of what you two got going on here.but I'm curious if there is any hunting /trapping books at the school library these days.I can asked

the grandkids tho ,to check.hopefully we haven't lost that around here.

- Chris Young: Tim Simmons oh no your ok you are right I have 4 kids in the middle school n elementary schools I definitely will have to check that out and a great question I shall let you know and vice versa I would love to know
- Susan Moody: Rebecca Smith Waddell in regard to kids seeing things on their phones I am sorry I am going to comment. I don't pay for their phones, but my taxes pay for their schoolbooks, library books and other things. I would like my tax dollars to pay for education for children to have knowledge needed to become responsible working adults. A book with blatant pictures of oral sex being performed is not the education I want my dollars to pay for. And kids don't have to take out a book from the library to look at it. That said again before deciding look at its pictures etc before deciding. then contact the school board
- Tim Simmons: Kimberly Alyson the largest part of the tax pie,goes to the schools.even after yours/our kids are grown,we still pay.
- Kimberly Alyson: Tim Simmons I am happy to pay my taxes because we need an educated citizenry. I don't understand anyone who complains about ensuring the financial future of our community and country.

- Melissa Lynn Backus: I don't believe in banning books. I believe in kids having access to age appropriate books and high school age children should have the option to select these books from the library if they choose. This is not something being taught. This is something that kids struggle with or have friends struggling with and a lot of family members are not open enough for them to find the answers outside of the books. When kids don't have a book and they don't feel like their family is open enough to discuss it, they look to other adults for answers and that is how kids get set up to be groomed. Also, the controversial images in the book are based on ancient Greek art that they have access to similar images in history or art class. There are worse images in advertising and how many of those screaming to ban this book allow their children on Snapchat, Tik Tok, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, etc. with little or no restrictions? If your child is on snapchat, some perverted stranger has likely already sent them a picture of their penis in private messages and your child is too afraid to tell you and that is way more concerning than some graphic novel geared towards their own age group.
- Robyn Baker-Sykes (Admin): Nothing is "forced" at all. It is not part of any "class" it is simply a book in the library. That kids can check out on their own, NO ONE is forcing anything. As for parents parenting their own kids, well that is part of the problem, a large majority are not doing it at all.
- Charlene Jackens: I bought and read the book yesterday. It is not, by any stretch of the imagination, pornography. If I were a young adult struggling with gender identity this book would be a lifesaver. I'm against banning books in general and to ban this one is ridiculous.

◆ Bill Jones: Charlene Jackens gender identity is made up thing gender is whether you are male or female biologically not how you feel that's the problem

- Charlene Jackens: Bill Jones science disagrees
- Bill Jones: H as hahh h a

→ Robyn Baker-Sykes (Admins): I would suggest all who are interested in this matter to show up at the next school board meeting, or zoom in and let your voice be heard.

→ Rachel Genthner: There nothing wrong with the book making big deal over nothing

→ Michelle Marie Collamore: I'm not for banning books, but certain books do not belong in a school environment, this is one of those books. And to those saying kids are not FORCED to read books in school - WHAT PLANET ARE YOU ON?!? Yes they are!! Then they write reports on the books they are "forced" to read.... 🙄 I don't agree with choosing your gender, but I am tolerant and kind to those that have.. but that doesn't mean the books belong in a school setting.. 🙄

◆ Tracy Crowell: Michelle Marie Collamore This book isn't part of the classroom curriculum. We are talking about a book being available to read if interested. Parents can ask that their child not check out certain books & I believe most Teachers try to work with Parents if they personally object to a book to be read for a report. Most would allow the Family to choose something else. If not I would be in the office having a meeting. Like

when some kids don't attend Holiday party's @ school because of religious beliefs. That's allowed. Choices!

- ◆ Rebecca Smith Waddell (Author) (Admin): Michelle Marie Collamore this book is in the library, not in the classroom. There is one copy and it was taken out once. No one will be forced to get it from the library and write a book report. It is the high school, where half the "kids" are driving and most own cell phones and see more on a daily basis. The presence of this book won't turn anyone transgender, but it could save a life. No one actually chooses to be transgender -- the process is extremely challenging and no one would choose to put themselves through it. I know the book makes people uncomfortable, but having read it, it is really pretty tame and doesn't push anything. I guess I just feel like I don't have to fully understand everyone to be want everyone to feel supportive and have access to something that may make them feel less alone. We have too many suicides in our small town to risk it, in my opinion.
 - Michelle Marie Collamore: Rebecca Smith Waddell I am aware of that, I was simply saying that there ARE books that are required reading. I don't, personally, feel books regarding sexuality or gender assignment belong in a school library... maybe a "public" library, but not a school one.. and I feel the same about heterosexuality genre too, not just transgender or homosexuality... none of it belongs IN school.. and please don't put words in my mouth by implying anything about it "turning" anyone anything.. I

simply don't believe sexuality should be taught in the school system.

- Rebecca Smith Waddell: Michelle Marie Collamore my point is that it isn't being taught, it's simply available. I wasn't trying to put words in your mouth at all, but you did say "choosing gender" so I responded to that by saying that a book won't cause someone to make that choice -- in part because I really don't believe it is a choice. There are organic reasons related to brain development that can create this body dysmorphia. Anyway, the big point is that access to this book could save a life, and suicide is a huge issue in Maine, and here in Waldoboro. As far as sex and gender discussions, they are everywhere and much of it I don't "like." I don't like slavery. I don't like that slave owners raped their slaves. I don't like war, and again, how much rape happens there. I don't like human trafficking. These kids will leave high school and go out and vote, so they need exposure to history. I feel by the same token they should have access to books that help them understand themselves and each other. The book was reviewed by a committee who felt it was fine to be in the high school. It has now been reviewed by other school boards in Maine who have voted to keep it accessible. I just wish people would understand that this could save a life. That, to me, is the most important thing.

- Michelle Marie Collamore: Rebecca Smith Waddell it is a choice to change your gender due to the organic reasons you refer to... and yes, there should be access to books like this, but I do not feel school is the place it should be available. It's not about not understanding it could save a life, but about whether school is an appropriate place for information on ANY sexuality.
- Terry Soule Gifford: Michelle Marie Collamore It's ambiguous genitalia, intersex are just a few examples of gender complications. As for sex education being taught in schools, it wouldn't be needed if all parents taught it at home. Can we agree that probably many of them don't?
- Michelle Marie Collamore: Terry Soule Gifford I understand the complications, I still do not believe school is the place for it, regardless of gender or sexuality... I do agree it isn't taught in all homes, which is sad and a whole other subject, however, I don't feel that makes it the right place to provide information regarding sex or sexuality in a school. Just like I don't think that teachers should share their political views with students. Teach them about politics, history and hot topics, but the opinions of teachers should not be taught or discussed as any part of curriculum.
- Terry Soule Gifford: Michelle Marie Collamore Just curious, where do you believe kids should be taught about sex? I hope we

can agree from experimenting doesn't work. Information is empowering.

- Robyn Baker-Sykes: Michelle Marie Collamore school is hopefully for learning, all aspects of life, I would like to see our kids prepared for things we like as well as the things we dont.
- Terry Soule Gifford: Robyn Baker-Sykes I've said this many times but I think it's worth repeating. Factual information is empowering.
- Robyn Baker-Sykes: Michelle Marie Collamore where else should information come from if not from parents or school? Todays young people have more thrown at them than ever before and frankly some of it us older folks will just never understand. I want kids to see representation. In all its forms, facts, and information, what better place than school? Or at least high school level.
- Michelle Marie Collamore: Parents should be held far more accountable than they are, pediatricians where they can get actual facts and again, I'm not against books being about it, just not in school. And as you've pointed out, the internet provides far more than kids need access to as well.. if it passes, it passes, but I am entitled to my educated opinion even if it conflicts with yours or anyone else's 🙄

- Robyn Baker-Sykes: Michelle Marie Collamore very true. We are certainly all allowed an opinion. Educated or not, everyone gets an opinion.
- Michelle Marie Collamore: Robyn Baker-Sykes too bad opinions don't come without snarkiness
- Terry Soule Gifford: Michelle Marie Collamore Your correct in that there's a need for accountability. Accountability begins with facts. As long as a book is factual it belongs in the school. They deserve to know the truth and I don't believe many of them are getting it at home. Who the heck is going to teach the kids if the parents don't? Lol the internet is full of propaganda.
- Michelle Marie Collamore: Terry Soule Gifford life is full of propaganda.. the internet just puts EVERYTHING, good and bad, in one place. So fiction doesn't belong in school because not all fiction is factual? That doesn't make sense, nor does saying simply because it is factual, that books on sexuality belong in our schools. Parents are let off from parental responsibility far too easily and it's thrown onto teachers to teach things they shouldn't be.
- Terry Soule Gifford: Michelle Marie Collamore I never mentioned fiction.
- Robyn Baker-Sykes: Michelle Marie Collamore I think all the boards and teachers etc that have an educated opinion, as we pay them for, have already decided this book was ok for the library in

high school. Not to be taught in any setting but simply available in the library. So why are we now questioning them?

- Michelle Marie Collamore: Why is anything that has been allowed in the past been questioned? We'll just have to agree to disagree on our opinions regarding books for this nature being in schools. I'm not going to go any further on this, I've said my piece and I don't care who agrees or disagrees.

→ Martha Bush: It's been a while since most of us have experienced high school. I imagine it is full of pressures that we can't know about. With access to computers and cell phones there is a whole world of unacceptable influences that young people can be drawn into. And parents would never be the wiser. Children are committing suicide because of bullying and gender confusion. Maybe a book in the library would be helpful and comforting to someone looking for questions and answers about their identity.

→ Rebecca Smith Waddell: https://www.penbaypilot.com/article/medomak-valley-high-school-senior-circulates-petition-keep-book-gender-queer-library-166250?fbclid=IwAR24nw7Ha_B2vnPpeddftvUrvs8m_oSVeN2HN76RmPJyal4MB7MgPzVF8ZE

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Born in the dark ages of 1999 in the far-flung lands of Plymouth, New Hampshire Antyna has dedicated their lives to gaining the approximate knowledge of as many things as possible. Naturally this comes in the form of consuming as many books as possible. Should their criminal record become unsealed you will find they were busted continuously for reading past their bedtime, during class, and even in the shower that one time. They learned their lesson that time..the loss was tragic.

Such a passion for learning led them down the path to academia and lifelong education. First stop on the journey was undergraduate studies in Anthropology at the University of Maine Honors College. It has been a wonderful experience that has set them up for a lifetime of success.

To encourage similar passions in others, Antyna has dedicated their life to corrupting the young generations by recommending spectacular books as a librarian. Being a librarian isn't enough, so they will seek out an even greater adventure in the coming months, graduate school.

If you don't see Antyna sitting with a book and cup of tea, you can always spot them sailing across the night sky on their broom hunting vampires and conversing with mermaids.