

Maryland Coalition Against Pornography, Inc.

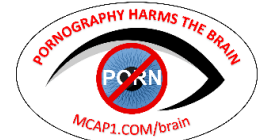
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TOGETHER WE CARE

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In Support of HB 282

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We wish to respond to assertions made in testimony on this bill from last year by some librarians who said there is no obscenity or sexually explicit books in public school libraries. MANY parents would disagree. Just to cite one example, here is a passage from the book *Gender Queer* which is in the collections of numerous Maryland public school libraries: "I got a new strap-on harness today. I can't wait to put it on you. It will fit my favorite dildo perfectly. You're going to look so hot. I can't wait to have your cock in my mouth. I'm going to give you the blow job of your life. Then I want you inside of me." A book with language like this, coupled with quite explicit drawing illustrations, is not for the simple purpose of "reading about LGBTQ+ people," as the proponents of such publications would have it. It's pornography. It reduces people to merely their sexual acts, which devalues the diverse kinds of people they're trying to educate the children about. Books like this portray people of various sexual orientations, who are created to love and be loved, into objects of others' fantasies and lusts: "I got...", "I can't wait...", "I'm going to...", "Then I want..." It's all about "me" without regard or respect for the other person involved. In a September 14, 2023, interview, the author of *Gender Queer*, Maia Kobabe, told the Washington Post, "It keeps being called a children's book ... but I think that's coming from a misreading of the comic-book form. '*Gender Queer*' is a comic, and in full color, but that doesn't mean it's for children. I originally wrote it for my parents, and then for older teens who were already asking these questions about themselves. I don't recommend this book for kids!"

Meanwhile, numerous Maryland public schools continue to include the book and others like it in school libraries. Not only do those choosing books for school libraries promote pornography (what other word applies to the lascivious language above?), that is, sex that objectifies the other, they do so while, in other parts of the curriculum, children are discouraged from using tobacco. Why? Because it adversely impacts their health and may kill them. So far so good. Other grade-5 lessons in disease prevention advise children to take measures to avoid HIV, which may kill them, while engaging in sex. In other words, children are being advised to abstain from the pleasures of tobacco altogether because it's dangerous, while being told that random sex is just fine even though it's dangerous (because decreasing the risk of HIV/AIDS, should they actually carry that out, does not remove the risk of death from it). Why the double standard? And why the blindness to **studies such as DeLago et al. (2020)* showing that viewing of explicit sexual content was among the factors predicting sexual abuse of other children, usually a few years younger than they?** The same study cites Ybarra et al. (2014) as showing that **youth exposed to ... media depicting kissing, fondling, or having sex, were seven times more likely to be involved in coerced sexual victimization, compared to youth who reported almost no media exposure to sexual situations.** The findings of these reports and many like them are

Not surprising. It is logical that exposure to sexual situations in which the parties of whatever sexual orientation focus on their own excitement and pleasure to the eclipse of another's dignity as a whole person – will lead to sexually coercive behavior.

A related question: we wonder why schools include units on recognizing and defending oneself against sexual harassment (so far so good) but none on how to treat persons we are attracted to with the respect due them as whole people: body, mind, and soul – instead of a lopsided emphasis on people as sex objects.

In last year's testimony, a critic of this bill spoke of what was seen as a need for exposure of young readers to media that explicitly depicts promiscuity and every sexual proclivity because it provides "windows" or "mirrors" for observation of every kind of sexual lifestyle. We would counter with the point of view – don't those "windows" amount to titillating voyeurism? We believe many parents would agree that public schools are not the place for the unhealthy promotion of such media.

Toward a goal of inclusivity, we respectfully call upon those making decisions about what books should or should not be in school libraries to make better choices of media. It is sad that we have come to this point where legislation seems needed to regulate these choices. Can we not truly educate children about various kinds of people without character portrayals that sink into one-dimensional pornographic stereotypes? Instead of books with explicit, sexually-charged plot lines that model for young readers such "me first" or lustful attitudes, we believe it would be healthier to emphasize literature showing generous, even sacrificial love to others – a model that has been held for millennia to be the height of human dignity, and that leads to the greatest human flourishing.

Respectfully,

Mary Joan Modderman
President, Maryland Coalition Against Pornography

*Studies cited:

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