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*ENG 110-B*

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**The lack of LGBTQ literature and its effect on youth**

Research Question:

How is the banning of books by LGBTQ authors affecting LGBTQ youth? What about those who are not part of the LGBTQ community?

Annotated Bibliography:

Citation 1: Perfas, Samantha Laine. “LGBTQ Book Challenges Are on the Rise. Here’s Why.” *The Harvard Gazette*, 9 Nov. 2023, news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2023/06/lgbtq-book-challenges-are-on-the-rise-heres-why/.

Transgender athlete Schuyler Bailar describes their childhood experience and how it lacked the identity that they associate with today. Their book— “Obie is Man Enough,” a 2021 novel about a transgender middle school swimmer—has been banned in many states that ban the conversation about sexuality and gender identity in school altogether. There was even a teacher in Iowa that was placed on administrative leave after teaching a short story about Bailar’s first time swimming for Harvard’s men’s team.

The ban on books doesn’t just affect authors, it greatly impacts children too—even those that don’t identify as a part of the LGBTQ+. By eradicating the presence of queer characters in literature, it removes an audience’s ability to empathize with LGBTQ+ people in the real world. The author includes a quote by Bailar at the end of the article stating, “We know when kids aren’t allowed to be who they are until they’re adults — or if they have to hide their identity — it’s harmful to them. When we affirm children’s identities, we can actually save their lives.”

Citation 2: Wolfe, Elizabeth. “Book Bans Are Harming LGBTQ People, Advocates Say. This Online Library Is Fighting Back.” *CNN*, Cable News Network, 16 Dec. 2023, www.cnn.com/2023/12/16/us/queer-liberation-library-combats-lgbtq-book-bans-reaj/index.html.

There’s been a growing number of books banned that contain LGBTQ+ themes. From 9% between 2010 and 2019 to more than 47% in 2023. The author argues that by removing these stories from libraries deprives readers of all ages of, “essential, affirming representation of the LGBTQ community’s lives and history.” The Queer Liberation Library (QLL for short) helps bring these banned books back to audiences everywhere by maintaining an online free collection of queer eBooks and audiobooks. The article further talks about the good that QLL can do for queer readers. The author brings up that the QLL allows for privacy and comfortability when indulging in these stories. Especially with how anxiety inducing pulling one of these stories off a shelf in a public library can be.

Citation 3: Bouranova, Alene. “Don’t Say Gay.” *Boston University*, 16 Nov. 2023, www.bu.edu/articles/2023/dont-say-gay/.

The article starts by introducing the rapid increase in book bans over the past couple years. Those titles have predominantly been by and about people of color and LGBTQ+ people. Queer authors—or authors of queer books—have been seeing a shift over the past several years. The criticism they receive is becoming less and less about the actual writing and more about the content the writing is about. Sarah Prager, the author of several queer history books for children and young adults, says, “instead of a book review, it’s another ban […] I’m getting called a groomer and a pedophile, like other authors of queer children’s literature. I dread alerts now.”

These book bans aren’t entirely new--the article lists several examples of queer books that have been banned in the past—but there has been increasing local legislative support for these bans. Prager later in the article explains her dilemma of wanting people to discover her writing but, she’s afraid that the more people that see her writing, the more likely her book is to be banned.

Citation 4: Rafei, Leila. “How LGBTQ Voices Are Being Erased in Classrooms: ACLU.” *American Civil Liberties Union*, 24 Feb. 2023, www.aclu.org/news/lgbtq-rights/how-lgbtq-voices-are-being-erased-in-classrooms-censorship.

The article shares three LGBTQ advocates and their stories on how the books bans and censorship bills have affected their lives, work, and students.

Jared Fox—an English teacher in the Cleveland School District in Ohio—shares his opinion on the subject: “Books are incredibly powerful, and the fact that people are trying to ban them just speaks to that. [..] I want [my students] to see that they matter, not just in my eyes but in the words on the page.” He then argues against the common argument that, “reading books with LGBTQ characters will make students gay,” by explaining that although he grew up reading heterosexual literature, he ended up gay. Jared Fox relates the two topics of LGBTQ equality and works of anti-racism. The struggles are closely intertwined.

Tiffany Wright—a mother to a seventh grader and a member of university facility—tells us of her firsthand experience of the affect of LGBTQ censorship on students and educators. She exclaims how important representation is, especially in young students. Tiffany describes her experience in college when she finally found queer voices in literature. She says, “maybe I wouldn’t have had to go through adolescence twice—before and after coming out,” and blames it on the lack of these voices in her early life. Even with the lack of major LGBTQ representation in Tiffany’s life, she still came out. The removal of queer authors and literature does not remove queer populations. Rather, it prolongs their ‘second life’ as Tiffany describes. The one they truly belong to.

Ricardo Martinez—the Chief Executive Officer of Equality Texas—talks about how Texas had some of the most anti-LGBTQ pieces of legislation filed in the history of the United States. Although a single bill passed, the effect of the legislation rippled outwards. With the removal of symbols and books of support, the classrooms have become increasingly hostile towards queer youth. Ricardo began getting phone calls about escalated bullying, harassment and violence. Empathy is one of the most important traits of a student. It means that to others, that student matters.

Citation 5: “Schools Can Be Affirming, Safe Places for LGBTQ Youth amid Book Ban Disputes.” *California School Boards Association*, 12 June 2023, publications.csba.org/california-school-news/june-2023/schools-can-be-affirming-safe-places-for-lgbtq-youth-amid-book-ban-disputes/.

The article suggests that the debate of whether LGBTQ+ books should be allowed in the public library is harmful—even before the books are actually banned. These public dialogues question more than just the literature itself, it’s a public questioning of a group’s identity. This is especially harmful to students that are still growing and maturing into said identities. The negativity greatly impacts students’ mental health. There’s been a lot of psychological research to prove that mental health is directly linked to student success and dropout rates.

The article also suggests that even just school policy can greatly impact student performance. Schools that have an LGBTQ+ inclusive policy and curriculum are associated with lower suicide attempts for queer youth and higher GPA compared to schools that don’t have an LGBTQ+ inclusive policy or curriculum.

The author then talks about the growing books bans. The list of the “Most Challenged Books” is almost completely compromised of books that contain LGBTQ+ topics. These challenges used to come from individuals who sought to ban a single book their child was reading. Now, these challenges are increasingly from “political/religious groups.” In the end, LGBTQ+ literature is incredibly important for the self esteem of students which in turn will increase student GPA and lower queer student drop out and suicide rates.

Citation 6: Rummler, Orion. “Book Bans Internalize ‘shame’ for Young LGBTQ+ People, Advocates Say. Here’s How They’re Pushing Back.” *The 19th*, 23 Feb. 2023, 19thnews.org/2023/02/book-bans-lgbtq-reading/.

LGBTQ+ literature, especially at a young age, is incredibly important for students. It benefits not only their understanding of queer ideology but helps develop empathy for other marginalized groups as well. The “Don’t Say Gay” and “Stop W.O.K.E.” acts are to blame for the 1.6 million books in classrooms and school libraries that are being reviewed. In many states, bills—that were originally used to protect children from inappropriate sexual content in literature in schools, are now being used to justify reasoning for banning books that cover LGBTQ+ topics. These attacks on books are also deeply linked to attacks on racial justice. The article states, “2,532 individual books were banned from July 2021 to June 2022 […] Of those banned books, 41 percent depicted LGBTQ+ themes and 40 percent featured protagonists or prominent secondary characters of color.” People deserve to find characters that they relate to. As a community, it is important that we work together to spread awareness and inform students of their rights to protest book bans.

Citation 7: Morataya, Elyssa, and Tara Calligan. “Book Bans and Anti-LGBTQ+ Legislation Can Be Isolating for Queer Youth.” *WUSF*, 3 May 2023, [www.wusf.org/education/2023-05-03/book-bans-anti-lgbtq-legislation-isolating-queer-youth](http://www.wusf.org/education/2023-05-03/book-bans-anti-lgbtq-legislation-isolating-queer-youth)

Book bans are not uniquely Floridian. The author writes, “As of an April 2022 report from PEN America, Florida had the third largest number of bans at 204, following Texas and Pennsylvania at 713 and 456, respectively.” The bans set in place in these states are based on many legislative proposals. From proposal topics such as parental rights in education to child protection in public schools, it’s clear that this wave of book bans is purposeful and deliberate. The lack of information on LGBTQ+ topics alone is detrimental to LGBTQ+ youth’s mental health—leading to feelings of isolation and loneliness. The author includes a quote by Lukas Goldstein that explains the importance of diverse literature for all students—not just the marginalized ones, “Having diverse books in classrooms [not only makes] minority students feel seen and heard, but it also educates others who may not have ever heard of an identity and it creates that much needed visibility.” Another strong quote the author gives to summarize the article is a quote by Dr. Jon Braddy—a queer theory professor at Florida Gulf Coast University. Braddy states, “To hide the reality of life doesn't prepare us for the reality of life.” The author then leaves us a hope: that LGBTQ+ youth will one day will be able to find themselves being represented in characters in a positive affirming way.

Citation 8: Harris, Elizabeth A., and Alexandra Alter. “Book Ban Efforts Spread across the U.S.” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 30 Jan. 2022, [www.nytimes.com/2022/01/30/books/book-ban-us-schools.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/30/books/book-ban-us-schools.html).

Book banning isn’t by any accounts new, but legislators are getting more and more involved in the process. Many books that have won countless awards are now being challenged and even removed. Frequent targets of these bans are books that cover topics such a race, gender and sexuality. The author gives an example, “in Tennessee, the McMinn County Board of Education voted to remove the Pulitzer Prize-winning graphic novel “Maus” from an eighth-grade module on the Holocaust because of nudity and curse words.” The criteria for banning these books have become so broad yet deliberate. Susanne Nossel, the chief executive of the free-speech organization PEN America, notes, “Some groups […] have essentially weaponized book lists meant to promote more diverse reading material, taking those lists and then pushing for all the included titles to be banned.” Parents in favor of the book bans feel as though their voice is finally being heard by legislators.

George M. Johnsons book, “All Boys Aren’t Blue,” has become one of the many controversially banned books. During a school board meeting where the book was discussed, student protestors and anti-protestors were present. At the protests, obscenities, anti-gay slurs and accusations of distributing pornography were thrown at the student protestors. It was later ruled that the book would be kept out of the school district’s libraries. The author leaves us with some words of wisdom from Deborah Caldwell-Stone, director of the American Library Association’s office for intellectual freedom, “If you focus on five passages, you’ve got obscenity,” Ms. Caldwell-Stone said. “If you broaden your view and read the work as a whole, you’ve got Toni Morrison’s ‘Beloved.’”

Question (Again): How is the banning of books by LGBTQ authors affecting LGBTQ youth? What about those who are not part of the LGBTQ community?

Thesis: By banning books of LGBTQ+ authors, it deprives the youth—not just the queer youth—of useful and essential information required to grow and develop the empathy necessary to make positive changes in the world.