

**A Dirty Little Secret:
Self-Censorship**

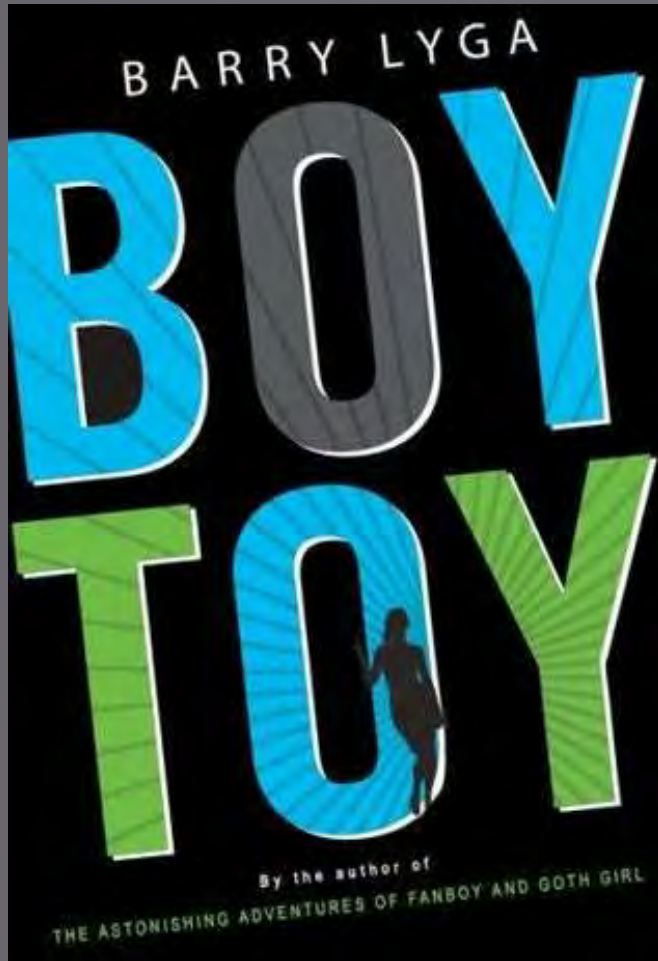
Debra Lau Whelan

School Library Journal – 02/01/2009

CENSORSHIP

You'd never guess what this was.

Boy Toy by Barry Lyga



About a 12 year-old who has sex with a beautiful teacher twice his age

Expected to:

- Spark letters
- Trigger complaints
- Incite parents



But none of those
things ever
happened



Why not?

“The book just didn’t get out there. Kids weren’t getting the book because adults weren’t letting them get the book.”

“It’s sort of a soft, quiet, very insidious censorship, where nobody is raising a stink, nobody is burning books. They’re just quietly making sure it doesn’t get out there.”

- YA author Barry Liga



Self- censorship: A dirty little secret

Presentation by Valerie Kyriakopoulos
LIS899: Capstone
Fall 2010
Karen Brown



Self – censorship

Why isn't it talked about more?

- ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom only documents written challenges
- ALA estimates only one out of five challenge cases are actually reported



Self - censorship

Almost impossible to quantify

- ⦿ No one is monitoring
- ⦿ No one is collecting stats
- ⦿ No open discussion

- ⦿ No one wants to admit to it



Quote

“In a way, self – censorship is more frightening than outright banning and removal of challenged material.”

- Author and former librarian Susan Patton



Why do some librarians reject books with edgy content?

A survey of 655 librarians conducted by *School Library Journal* found:

- 70% - Terrified of how parents will respond
- 29% - Fear backlash from administration
- 28% - Fear backlash from community
- 25% - Fear backlash from students
- 23% - Have personal objections



Reasons why librarians censor

| | |
|------------------------|-----|
| Sexual content | 87% |
| Objectionable language | 61% |
| Violence | 51% |
| Homosexual themes | 47% |
| Racism | 34% |
| Religion | 16% |

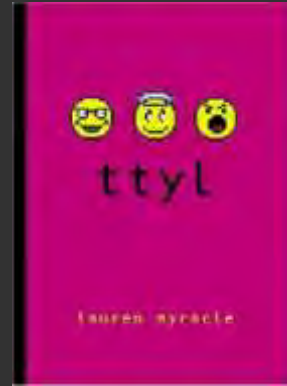


Books with objectionable content



- ✓ Homeless family

Tyrell
Coe Booth



- ✓ Vulgar language
- ✓ Descriptions of sex
- ✓ Teen drinking

ttyl
Lauren Myracle



- ✓ Children's nighttime terrors

Jibberwillies at Night
Rachel Vail

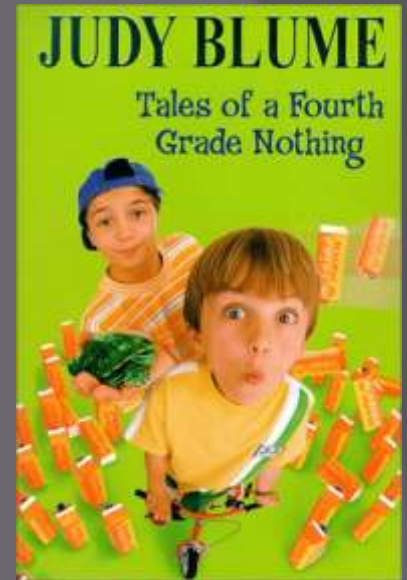
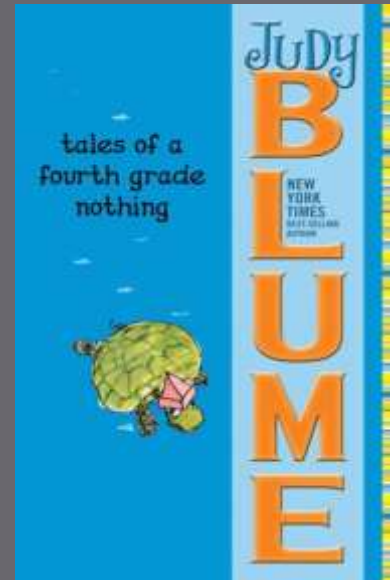
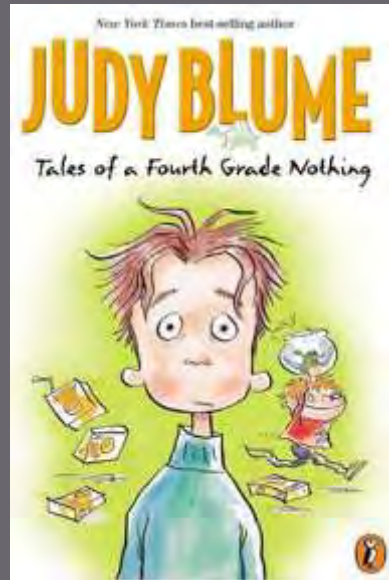


- ✓ Oral sex

Sandpiper
Ellen Wittlinger



Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing by Judy Blume



A progressive mom asked that this book be removed from her daughter's class because it included a scene with a dead turtle.

Fun fact: All of the covers feature a turtle!



A new wrinkle: Labeling

- Books with African American characters are being labeled as street-lit
- Street-lit is then considered inferior so the entire category is dismissed

This is yet another form of censorship



Genres often picked on

- Street-lit
- Horror
- Classics
- Fantasy

Special attention is paid to

- GLBT

(Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered)



GLBT examples



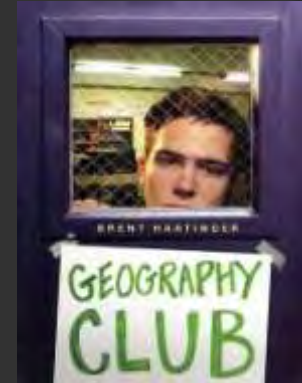
Rainbow Boys

Alex Sanchez



Boy Meets Boy

David Levithan



Geography Club

Brent Hartinger



Annie on My Mind

Nancy Garden



Box Out

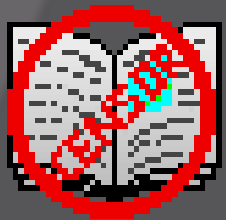
John Coy



Quote

Librarians often let “fear, not principle, guide their choices, which is deeply unfair to the teens they serve.”

- YA author David Levithan

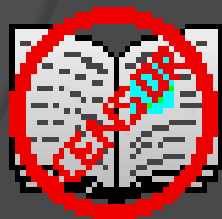


However...

The fear of retaliation is very real

The LeRoy C. Merritt Humanitarian Fund

- Created by ALA
- Helps pay for fees and expenses associated with First Amendment clashes
- Dozens of grants have been awarded since the fund was created in 1970



More fears and concerns

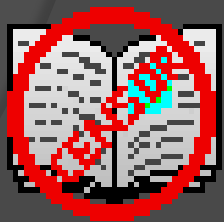
- Discrepancies in determining age-appropriateness
- Relentless attacks by parents
- Pressure from publishers



Pressure from publishers can cause authors to think about self-censoring

For example:

Lauren Myracle was pressured to change the name of her book from *The Bitches* to *Rhymes with Witches*



Now there are
complaints from people
who think the book is
about witchcraft



What authors think

- Driven by a moral compass
- Have a special responsibility to kids
- Sometimes crude language is necessary to convey true feelings

“*‘He lied to me’* and *‘He fucking lied to me’* are two very different sentences – the latter has an amount of rage and disbelief that the former can’t convey.”

- David Levithan



What can librarians do to protect themselves?

- Have a written selection policy
- Have a written reconsideration policy that addresses challenges to books

- It's not the librarians job to:
 - Impose their own ideologies
 - Parent children
 - Protect people from ideas or language



Questions to ponder

1. How can we remove the stigma of these self – censorship incidents?
2. Why is there no open discussion between librarians regarding this issue?
3. How can we get principle to trump fear?
4. Who gets to decide what words are offensive and why?



More questions to ponder

5. Can we create better guidelines for discrepancies in age – appropriateness?
6. Shouldn't opinions and feelings from teens be taken more seriously by parents, teachers and librarians?
7. Why don't all libraries have specific written selection and reconsideration policies?



Citations

Whelan, Debra Lau. 2009. "A Dirty Little Secret." *School Library Journal* 55, no. 2: 26-30.

<http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/CA6632974.html>

(accessed September 16, 2010).

Whelan, Debra Lau. 2009. "SLJ Self-Censorship Survey." *School Library*

Journal. <http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/CA6633729.html>

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Image citations

Censorship poster:

http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_KYcViNH08s/TG1zKFWI3oI/AAAAAAAEQ/1mOMv__2A7s/s400/censorshipPoster.jpg

Censored book:

<http://www.efc.ca/pages/chronicle/censorship.gif>

The worst part of censorship:

<http://www.northernsun.com/images/imagelarge/Worst-Part-Of-Censorship-Button-%280874%29.jpg>



Book cover citations

Annie on My Mind - <http://img1.fantasticfiction.co.uk/images/n6/n34305.jpg>

Box Out - <http://img1.fantasticfiction.co.uk/images/n63/n316231.jpg>

Boy Meets Boy - <http://img1.fantasticfiction.co.uk/images/n46/n233249.jpg>

Boy Toy - <http://img1.fantasticfiction.co.uk/images/n48/n244577.jpg>

Geography Club - <http://img1.fantasticfiction.co.uk/images/n48/n244674.jpg>

Jibberwillies at Night - <http://img1.fantasticfiction.co.uk/images/n54/n270491.jpg>

Kissing Kate - <http://img1.fantasticfiction.co.uk/images/n30/n153980.jpg>

Rainbow Boys - <http://img1.fantasticfiction.co.uk/images/n51/n256517.jpg>

Sandpiper - <http://img1.fantasticfiction.co.uk/images/n51/n256479.jpg>

ttyl - <http://img1.fantasticfiction.co.uk/images/n30/n153985.jpg>

Tyrell - <http://img1.fantasticfiction.co.uk/images/n63/n316167.jpg>

Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing -

http://ec2.images-amazon.com/images/P/044048474X.01._SCLZZZZZZZ_V1057190888_.jpg

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**The worst
part of
censorship is**

