

DO YOU KNOW WHAT IS IN YOUR PUBLIC LIBRARY?

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Update:

I went to the lola Register on September 19 and had politely requested that this article be published in their newspaper; and while one editor was very receptive to it and thought that it would go well with the hot-button issue of book choice in public schools and libraries, the publisher of the lola Register refused to publish it before they had even read my article and asserted that they were “not going to make my issue into a public issue”.

*This is very much a public issue. According to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, public libraries as of 2018 receive the large majority of their revenue from local government and represents 86% or more of all library revenues¹; and that public libraries are usually funded by levies on residential and business property and other tools used to generate revenue for a city or town². In short... if you are a resident of lola, Kansas and pay your taxes (such as my husband and I), then this is very much **your issue**.*

Dane Hicks graciously allowed that this article be published in The Anderson County Review and I am very hopeful that this message will eventually get to the people of lola. I politely ask that you share this with any family members or friends that live there.

Thank you.

Do you know what is in your public library?

I thought that I did. There are so many divisive articles on every news-site that scream the same thing: that people are intolerant of certain books and movies that encourage sex and homosexuality. A Georgian mother was cut off by board-members at a school-board meeting in March because she read sexual excerpts from a book found in their elementary-school library³. The Patmos Public Library in Jamestown, Michigan was defunded of its public funds this year when they refused to remove pro-homosexual and pro-transgender books from their shelves⁴. Parents in Fairfax County, Virginia protested several sexually-explicit publications that were found in their district library in December of 2021⁵.

¹ American Academy of Arts and Sciences, *Public Library Revenue, Expenditures, and Funding Sources*. <https://www.amacad.org/humanities-indicators/public-life/public-library-revenue-expenditures-and-funding-sources>

² McMahon, Mary. “How are Public Libraries Funded?” [languagehumanities.org](https://www.languagehumanities.org). Accessed September 21, 2022. <https://www.languagehumanities.org/how-are-public-libraries-funded.htm>

³ D’Abrosca, Peter. “Cherokee County School Board Shuts Down Mom for Asserting that Explicit Book from School Library is Inappropriate.” *The Tennessee Star*, March 22, 2022. <https://tennesseestar.com/>.

⁴ Paquette, Danielle. “A Mich. library refused to remove an LGBTQ book. The town defunded it.” *The Washington Post*. August 24, 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>

⁵ Satterfield, Kolbie. “Fairfax County parents call for removal of library books they claim are pornography.” *WUSA9*. December 2, 2021. <https://www.wusa9.com/>

I had assumed that the lola Public Library would have the normal assortment of novels that you could find at any small-town library: a few classical books, some biographies and newspapers, historical records and manuscripts, religious pamphlets of various denominations, scientific journals, and kids' books with splashy covers. I thought "... this is itty-bitty lola in the middle-of-nowhere Kansas. Cue the southern accent... *ain't none of that gonna happen here!*"

Then... while my 4 year-old son and I were searching for a book about airplanes in the **childrens' nonfiction section** of our lola Public Library, I saw a vivid-purple book with a cartoon cover called *Sex Is a Funny Word: A Book about Bodies, Feelings, and YOU*. I was a bit curious about it and thus checked the book out and took it home to read it.

And what I had read absolutely flabbergasted and upset me. This book was aimed at young children between the ages of 8 years old and 10 years old (verified because the four main characters were between those given ages)⁶ and intended to teach them about sex and sex-related activities. It had vibrant drawings of penises, vaginas, breasts, and anuses and included explicit details like pubic hair, wrinkles, and discolorations. The descriptions instructed its readers about different body-parts that may feel good if you touch them; and it also incorporated a comic-strip of one of the main characters masturbating in the bathtub. Here are some examples that are quoted *directly* out of the book:

- **page 14-15**; "Learning about sex is kind of like visiting a carnival or a fair. You can never do it all in one day. It can be fun and strange and sometimes a little exciting."
- **page 106**; a comic-strip in which Zai is actively touching herself while she is in the bath
- **page 107**; "Touching isn't just something we do with other people. We also touch ourselves. We touch ourselves all the time, in all kinds of places, for all kinds of reasons. Touching yourself is one way to learn about yourself, your body, and your feelings. You may have discovered that touching some parts of your body, especially the middle parts, can make you feel warm and tingly. Grown-ups call this kind of touch masturbation. Masturbation is when we touch ourselves, usually our middle parts, to get that warm and tingly feeling."
- **Detailed drawings of nipples, anuses, vaginas, and penises can be found between pages 60-68.**
 - **page 60**; "Some nipples are sensitive and some are not. Nipples can feel very good to touch, but if you pinch them it can hurt!"
 - **page 63**; "Like other holes in the body, the anus is usually very sensitive, which means it can feel good to touch but can also hurt if we are rough with it."

⁶ Silverberg, Corey. *Sex Is a Funny Word: A Book about Bodies, Feelings, and YOU* (Triangle Square, 2015).

- **page 65**; “The clitoris can be very sensitive, and touching it can feel warm and tingly.”
- **page 66**; “Like the clitoris, the penis can be very sensitive, and touching it can feel warm and tingly.”

But it gets worse. *Sex Is a Funny Word* also encouraged its readers to explore others’ bodies and openly promoted sexual intercourse between ‘trustful’ individuals.

- **page 56**; a comic-strip in which Mimi openly tells Omar that she will “show her [‘down there’] if Omar will show his.”
- **page 28**; “Joy is a big, beautiful, happy feeling. There are lots of ways to feel joy. Part of sex is feeling joy and pleasure. When you are younger, you can feel this joy and pleasure on your own, in your own body. As you get older, you might also decide to share those feelings with someone who deserves your trust.”
- **page 53**; “Which parts we show and which parts we keep private depends on many things like our communities and families, how old we are, and who we are sharing with.”

I did what I thought was best and politely took *Sex Is a Funny Word* to the public librarians. I showed them several excerpts and **requested that the book be moved to the young-adult or the adult section of the library.** I could not nor would ever advocate for any publication to be banned. I am a free-speech absolutist and I believe that everyone has a right to say what they want, write what they want, and read what they want whether I vehemently oppose it or not.

However, I do have a huge problem with this book being available to my 4 year-old son and other young people that browse the **junior non-fiction section** of our public library. As I had said... *Sex Is a Funny Word* was meant to be read by 8 year-olds and 10 year-olds and is **currently available in the childrens’ section of the Lola Public Library.** Children of this age group do not naturally think about sex-related activities and whether anal-sex would be pleasurable. They do not go around and ask their friends if they can see their private-parts or masturbate in the bathtub. Young children of those ages are still infatuated with firefighters, ballerinas, princesses, superheroes, My Little Pony, and Paw Patrol. They play tag on the playground and think that Santa is still real. These children do not naturally think about sex *unless they are exposed to it...* and this book unashamedly advertises sex to them.

And telling children that they can have sex as long as they *trust* the other person is dangerous and sickening. Think about how you were at 8 years of age and of the friends and the adults that you loved. Would you have asked them to show their private-parts? What about someone that you ‘had a crush on’? Do you think that it would’ve been okay to have sex with your crush at that age? A ZAVA study found that 58% of their participants had had at least one one-night stand

and that nearly half of them had regretted it⁷. The current divorce rate of all American marriages is nearly 50%⁸ and first marriages last an average of eight years⁹; and the most common causes of separations and divorces are infidelity, incompatibility, and drinking or drug abuse¹⁰. If our American adult population does not understand the basic concepts of trust... how can we expect an 8 year-old to do any better?

What about the thousands of youths that had been sexually-assaulted by people that they thought that they could trust? Our news-sites are inundated every week with various stories about teacher-student molestations, clergymen sexual-abuse cases, Larry Nassars, and Harvey Weinstains. The CDC explains child sexual-abuse as “the involvement of a child (person less than 18 years-old) in sexual activity that violates the laws or social taboos of society and that he/she (1) **does not fully comprehend** (2) **does not consent to or is unable to give informed consent to, or** (3) **is not developmentally prepared for and cannot give consent to.**”¹¹ The CDC, whom also admits that their statistics are underestimated because many children wait or never report child sexual-abuse, concluded that one in every four girls and one in every thirteen boys in the United States have experienced child sexual-abuse; and that **91% of those had been perpetrated by someone known and trusted by the child or the child’s family members**¹².

The public librarians said that I could do a “Request for Reconsideration of Library Materials” application and that it would be submitted to the director of the Lola Public Library; my application was rejected and a letter from the director told me that the Lola Public Library “trust[s] individuals and parents to make decisions about what they read and believe and rely on them to extend that same privilege to others.” They also told me that I could request a Board review of the book at their meeting on July 11.

Let me repeat that I never asked for *Sex Is a Funny Word* to be banned. I had requested to the librarians and on the application that *Sex Is a Funny Word* be relocated to the young-adult or the adult-section of the library. The director of the library had also written to me that “parents have the right to oversee their children’s reading and education and can grant parents that same right”. They also reminded me that Corey Silverberg (the author of *Sex Is a Funny Word*) had a ‘To the Grown-up Reader’ forward in his book and thus indicated that this book was meant to be read with a parent.

⁷ ZAVA Med, “One Night Only”, Accessed September 12, 2022. <https://www.zavamed.com/uk/one-night-only.html>

⁸ World Population Review, “Divorce Rate by State 2022.” Accessed September 12, 2022. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/divorce-rate-by-state>.

⁹ U.S. Census Bureau. *Number, Timing, and Duration of Marriages and Divorces*. (2021). <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2021/marriages-and-divorces.html>.

¹⁰ Scott, Shelby B.; Rhoades, Galena K.; Stanley, Scott M.; Allen, Elizabeth S.; and Markman, Howard J. “Reasons for Divorce and Recollections of Premarital Intervention: Implications for Improving Relationship Education.” *Couple Family Psychol* 2:2 (2013): 131-145, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4012696/>.

¹¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Fast Facts: Preventing Child Sexual Abuse* (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control: Division of Violence Prevention, 2022) <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childsexualabuse/fastfact.html>

¹² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Fast Facts: Preventing Child Sexual Abuse*.

I unequivocally agree with the director of the lola Public Library. Parents are “the best and most appropriate guide in life and at the library”.

But this book is currently located where that potential right of choice and oversight for parents is **not protected**. It is housed on a low shelf in the **junior non-fiction** side of our library and it is very colorful and eye-catching. This book is available to young children that may discover it without their parents’ knowledge and can read it without a trusted adult there to help them understand it. **That is not right.** *Sex Is a Funny Word* should be moved to the young-adult or adult section of our library where the parent can read it first and *then* choose whether they should share it with their child.

I agreed to attend the Library Board meeting and objected to the director’s decision to keep the book in the junior non-fiction side of our library; and I asked again that *Sex Is a Funny Word* be relocated to the young-adult or the adult section of the library. **The Library Board voted to keep the book in the junior non-fiction section** and predicated their explanation on the assumption that some children may not have good parents that would talk about sex with them and that some children may need to read the part about homosexuality and gender dysphoria. They reminded me that the *Material Selection Policy* of the lola Public Library “recognizes that many books are controversial and that any given item may offend some patrons. Selections will not be made on the basis of any anticipated approval or disapproval, but solely on the merits of the work in relation to the building of the collections and to serving the interests of patrons.”

Let me be very clear... I do **not** have any issue with the very few pages that mentioned homosexuality and gender dysphoria. I have a problem with the open-promotion of sex and sex-related activities; of telling children that anal sex can be pleasurable and that it is okay to touch yourself and to trust others to touch you too.

The blatant sexualization of our children is very much real and does not just exist in newspaper stories and bigger cities. It has wriggled its way into little rural communities like lola and Garnett and now affects our own children. This is a nationwide problem that we *can* stop... but that starts here in our own hometowns. We cannot be quiet about this problem any longer. We cannot expect it to go away on its own. Our silence has benefited these instigators and we cannot let it happen anymore.

So this is my next shot at changing it. I beg you, the lolan community, to check this book out and to read it yourself. It can be found in the junior non-fiction section of the lola Public Library (call number: J613.9071 Silverberg, Corey). Then ask yourselves... is this something that should be in the childrens’ section of our library? Are these hand-drawn pictures of human anatomy appropriate for our 8 year-olds and 10 year-olds? What does this book want to teach to our children... and should we allow them to be exposed to the open-promotion of sex when they may not fully comprehend what it means?

Please... read it yourself and decide.
Thank you.

Sex Is a Funny Word by Corey Silverberg
Iola Public Library J613.9071