

11-22-2022

## 'It's just filth:' Banned books and the project of queer erasure

Caitlin O'Loughlin  
*University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, caitlo@ad.unc.edu*

Taylor Schmidt  
*University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, twschmid@live.unc.edu*

Jocelyn Glazier  
*University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, jocelyng@email.unc.edu*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/nwjte>



Part of the [Curriculum and Social Inquiry Commons](#), [Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education Commons](#), and the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

**Let us know how access to this document benefits you.**

---

### Recommended Citation

O'Loughlin, Caitlin; Schmidt, Taylor; and Glazier, Jocelyn (2022) "'It's just filth:' Banned books and the project of queer erasure," *Northwest Journal of Teacher Education*: Vol. 17 : Iss. 3 , Article 7.  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15760/nwjte.2022.17.3.7>

This open access Article is distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License \(CC BY-NC-SA 4.0\)](#). All documents in PDXScholar should meet [accessibility standards](#). If we can make this document more accessible to you, [contact our team](#).

---

## 'It's just filth:' Banned books and the project of queer erasure

### Abstract

This paper seeks to explore the connection between the banning of queer books, the creation of discourses of controversy, and the erasure of queer knowledges and peoples from schools. Using a queer theory-informed approach to critical discourse analysis, we ask how these proposed bans seek to erase queer peoples, how this impacts teachers, and what teacher preparation programs can do to counter these acts of destruction.

### Keywords

queer theory, critical discourse analysis, education

### Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

As of February 14, there are 69 anti-LGBTQ school policy bills proposed in numerous states. Some of those propose banning LGBTQ books from school districts, while others ban discussion of sexual orientation or gender identity in class, such as Florida's 'Don't Say Gay' bill. (O'Hara, 2022)

This paper explores how anti-queer<sup>i</sup> extremists link queer youth literature to child pornography and obscenity to make the materials too controversial to be taught or even housed in schools. This concerted effort constitutes an epistemicide, wiping out all knowledges and representations of queer people from schools to reinforce the primacy of normative identities. In this paper, we detail the insidious path of epistemicide that strips bookshelves in public libraries and school buildings of LGBTQ characters and queer life experiences. The path begins innocently enough with a policy proposal that holds teachers and librarians newly accountable for any "pornographic" materials to which students are exposed. Next, these policies are debated in legislative sessions and school board meetings where pornography is defined implicitly as that which reflects any evidence of queerness. Banning pornography thus comes to mean banning all reference to queer youth. Through that interpretation, teachers and librarians become accountable for closeting queerness lest they face prosecution or dismissal for including queer materials in their classroom or curricula.

This project of queer epistemicide not only serves to erase mention of queer folks in the classroom; it does enormous harm to the queer students within those classes. Bills like Florida's so-called "Don't Say Gay" are not a new invention: "no promo homo" (short for "no promoting homosexuality") laws began appearing in the early 1990s in response to the spread of HIV/AIDS in many states. Such bills, like Texas's Health and Safety code 85.007 and 163.002, mandated teaching that homosexual conduct is "not an acceptable lifestyle" and that homosexual conduct "is criminal offense." As of 2017, eight states had no promo homo laws on the books (GLSEN, 2018) although the number is rising today in this new wave of anti-queer legislation.

In a research brief on the laws, GLSEN (2018) reported that such laws are detrimental to queer students who face increasingly hostile school environments. Students reported less access to clubs like gay straight alliances, less access to queer-affirming curricula or school staff, and are less likely to attend schools that have supportive anti-bullying policies (GLSEN, 2018). By every measure, queer students are harmed by the existence of such laws and their propagation puts queer students at higher risk.

Linking queer people and media to obscenity and pornography is not a new tactic of the far right. One can see similar tactics used by Anita Bryant who led the "Save our Children" campaign in response to an ordinance that expanded housing and employment protections to lesbian and gay people in Miami-Dade County in 1977. In a scene that will be familiar to those attending school board meetings today, Anita Bryant and others packed the hearing room to speak against the expansion of gay rights, claiming (incorrectly) that the ordinance would allow gay teachers into the classroom where they would 'recruit' children into the homosexual lifestyle (Bryant, 1977). She warned parents that, "The only way this terrible tide can be turned is if parents. . .who feel that the fabric of society is being torn to shreds, will rise up" (Bryant, 1977, p. 105).

In a similar vein, the "moral majority" led multiple sustained attempts to ban books throughout the 1970s and 1980s, using tactics that would be familiar to witnesses of today's school board hearings: a member of the conservative group "Parents of New York United" checked the school library card catalogue and noted the presence of nine books the organization

labeled “objectionable” and “just plain filthy” (Babcock, 1982). Proponents of banning ‘objectionable’ books argued that children need to be protected from inappropriate material, saying “When it's young the sapling has to be protected from the winter. A child's mind is the same way” (Babcock, 1982).

At the center of this argument and that of Anita Bryant and her followers, is the rhetoric of childhood innocence and protection and the assertion that queer people pose a threat to that innocence.

### Conceptual Framework

Understandings of childhood innocence are rooted in heteronormative, gendered, white, middle-class understandings of what ‘the child’ is and who is allowed to be ‘a child’ (Bryan, 2020; Goff et al., 2014; Ladson Billings, 2011)<sup>ii</sup>. This understanding of the child is constructed discursively against the concept of the adult with sexual knowledge becoming the defining difference between the two categories (McGinn et al., 2016; Robinson, 2021). While children’s innocence is equated with non-sexuality and sexual ignorance, children are also presumed to be naturally heterosexual (Robinson, 2013; Rubin, 2012). The protection of the proto-heterosexual non-sexual child dominates discussions about the education of children. The drive to preserve the innocence of the (white) child creates a regime of truth wherein what is sayable to and about children is severely curtailed due to the naturalized belief in the absolute separation of children and sexuality.

In her influential 1984 article, “Thinking Sex,” Gayle Rubin (Rubin, 2012) offered a framework for thinking about sex, sexuality, and their politics. In doing so, she explores how “erotic hysteria” is reliably stoked by calls to protect children. This hysteria has translated into successful repressive campaigns against queer people and other minoritized groups (see for example: the Save our Children campaign, the Republican electoral successes of 1980, the election of Glen Youngkin in the 2021 Virginia Gubernatorial race) (Palmer, 2007; Jenkins, 1998; Rubin, 2012). One particularly effective claim revolves around the supposed sexual exploitation of children. In 1977, the explosion of new reports about child sex abuse and child pornography across the country explicitly linked homosexuality with child sexual abuse (Palmer, 2007; Jenkins, 1998; Califia, 1994). This link was taken up in anti-queer campaigns across the country and resulted in a federal law to ban child pornography (Grocki, 2021; Rubin, 2012). Jenkins (1998) details how the shifting definitions of child molestation were expanded and capitalized on during the 1970s and 80s to push back against the expansion of gay rights after Stonewall. These moral panics resulted in child pornography laws that form the foundation of several states’ attempts to ban LGBTQ books from classrooms and public libraries, among them Idaho House Bill 666.

In writing about sexuality, it is important to discuss the ways in which a “queer” label in general, and the harms of repressive state actions in particular, do not fall on all equally. Cohen (1997, 2012) has critiqued queer theory as being “committed to a subjectless, white, sexual practice) that fails to understand sexuality outside of a single vector of oppression and tries to collapse all queer experiences as explainable under the same lens of homophobic oppression (p.127).

Much like an understanding of “child” is predicated on the white normative child, this understanding of queer requires one to ignore how race, class, gender identity, religion, and other components of identity impact the lived experiences of queer people.

## Methodology

The volume of discourse around the country tuned to talk of restricting certain topics and/or books in school is quite loud (e.g. Freeman & Tager, 2022). More than seven state legislatures are currently debating limiting materials reflecting LGBTQ people (see: Rummler, 2022).

The possible corpus of data for our study is large. Our objective here is to begin to sketch, via a single case study, the shape of a larger project of queer epistemicide by examining how it plays out in one specific example. How do officially sanctioned public discourses work in tandem to silence queer students and queer stories? We aimed to uncover the narrative structure(s) being reflected and perpetuated across the nation. To determine this structure, we employed techniques of critical discourse analysis (CDA) on a small subset of the data, specifically the recent Idaho statute HB666 and related legislative hearing.

HB666 (2022) amends a prior bill that carved out an exception for teachers and librarians who disseminated “material harmful to minors.” It removed this exception which now leaves teachers and librarians open to lawsuits if they disseminate material “harmful to minors.” The legislative hearing which followed the introduction of the bill—and which we analyze here— included a 38-minute discussion of the bill, ending in a final 12-2 passing vote in the committee. Participants in that hearing included committee members, parents, a local librarian, and leaders from various local organizations.

We began our analysis by engaging in a cursory review of the discursive data to determine general patterns of talk. From this informal analysis, we identified an initial set of codes which we then applied systematically across the data set, refining and adding during analysis through a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In addition to employing these codes, we also engaged in narrative analysis to discern not simply what was being articulated but how that articulation was happening. What were the discursive patterns— stops on the map of repression—that were repeated and in what format? As Luke (2002) explains, “CDA involves a principled and transparent shunting backwards and forth between the microanalysis of texts using varied tools of linguistic, semiotic and literary analysis, and the macroanalysis of social formations, institutions and power relations that these texts index and construct” (p. 100). Analysis included attention not only to such things as discursive repetition but also to the number of times certain terms were used across the data.

## Findings

### Child Innocence Must be Protected

An initial theme identified in the data was children as non-agentic, innocent, and under threat from sexually explicit material (= corruption). Narrative analysis of these themes revealed that children were positioned as passive participants in schooling and society, with the child existing ‘naturally’ within the bounds of heteronormativity-cum-non-sexual sexuality. This narrative representation presupposes children as maintaining a passive, fragile innocence. Such a representation demands through implicature (Jucker et al., 2002) active protection from those forces who would seek to corrupt that innocence, protection provided by the proposed policy. Speaker 2, testifying for the bill on behalf of the sponsor, articulated this connection: “Today, before you is...a policy change that will keep the children of Idaho safe from sexually explicit

and harmful material.” Reflecting this positioning of children as innocent and in need of protection, Speaker 12 shared: “Our children's innocence is being destroyed. . . Materials do not magically become less harmful to children just because they're given out by schools or libraries.” In the 38 minutes of the public recordings, the word “protect” appears 19 times and the word “harm” (as in protecting children from harm) appears 20 times (see Table 1 for further examples). The speakers consistently echo the claim that children must be protected from the harm that is caused by exposure to obscene and pornographic material.

Table 1

Speaker Number	Quote (emphasis added)
Speaker 1	This bill is to <i>protect children</i> not criminalize librarians. I always loved schools and libraries until I noticed a pattern of <i>harm being perpetrated on children</i> by those who hold the public trust.
Speaker 3	It [the bill] makes a simple move to align existing state law with the professed priority of every elected legislature- <i>to protect children</i> . The First Amendment was not drafted by our framers to provide blanket protection for obscenity or indecent material to children. <i>Our children deserve better, and are worth our best efforts to protect them.</i>
Speaker 5	We should not be institutionalizing harm to children. Associations like the American Library Association, the National Education Association, or any other Association should not override or be above state law.
Speaker 10	<i>Laws protecting minors from being exposed to obscene material</i> exist for a reason, as our own Idaho code states, “It is found that such materials and performances are a contributing factor to crime, juvenile crime, and also a basic factor in impairing the ethical and moral development of our youth.”
Speaker 10	When parents entrust their children to the public school system, they are relying upon that system to <i>protect their children, physically and morally</i> . Currently, the Idaho public school and libraries are allowed to violate the trust of Idahoans by allowing obscene materials to be made available to children. . .with a possible goal to pre-sexualize children and rob them of their innocence. Children, who by nature are vulnerable, and not yet mature.
Speaker 12	The professional materials for some of these books actually brag that the <i>books are designed to groom our children</i> . I believe that children are being targeted by those who desire to normalize sexual anarchy specifically because children can't filter information, same as adults.

The sponsor of the bill explains its importance by saying:

*I've been concerned about the obscene and pornographic material that finds its ways, way into our schools and libraries. While likely this is inadvertent, the increasingly frequent exposure of our children to obscene and pornographic materials and places that I, as a parent, assume are safe and free from these kinds of harmful materials is downright alarming. We can and should expect a level of vigilance in protecting our children from obscene and pornographic material,*

*particularly at public schools and libraries in our communities. I know I don't need to tell you how harmful that kind of exposure is to our children.*

In this justification, she repeats the claim that children are being exposed to obscene and pornographic materials at schools and libraries three times although she never explicitly defines what constitutes such material.

Aside from claims that exposure to pornographic material contributes to juvenile crime, the only other explicit harm mentioned is that “children are being taught to be confused about their gender, and even groomed into lifestyles they wouldn't have chosen otherwise” (Speaker 6) or “pre-sexualiz[es] children and rob[s] them of their innocence” (Speaker 1). Later statements by community parents clarify what they consider to be obscene which is explored in the next theme.

### **Sexually explicit material is queer content is obscene**

A second theme that came across in the data is that the pornography/sexually explicit/obscene content being referenced across the data is ultimately constructed by speakers as strictly queer content. While terms like “LGBTQ” neither appear often in the transcript of the legislative session nor in the body of HB666 (“LGBTQ” appears 2 times, “rainbow” once and “transgender” once), the terms “obscene” and “pornographic” are equated with queerness through the examples shared by speakers at the public policy hearing.<sup>iii</sup> Though the sponsor of HB666 does not explicitly define obscene and pornographic material as queer, *all* the examples provided by speakers during the policy hearing list queer texts as examples of said pornography/explicit material. Along with the books that have been highlighted in school board meetings across the country (see Asbury, 2021 for one example), *Lawn Boy* (Evison, 2018) and *Gender Queer* (Kobabe, 2019), one example of an “obscene text” mentioned is the children’s book *Prince & Knight* (Haack, 2018). Speaker 6 decries “This particular book . . . with pretty pictures, telling the story of a romance between a prince and a knight. They slay a dragon together, and when they tied the knot the whole community and parents celebrate” saying that it has “explicit graphic content” like other books “*Auntie Uncle Drag Queen* [sic], *Middle Grade Queer* [sic], and *Lawn Boy*.” She continues, “How did we go from Pollyanna to drag queens for the kids?” She claims that reading *Prince & Knight* was so disturbing that her “daughter's innocence was violated” and asks, “what happens when kids start acting on these graphic behaviors put forth in these books?”

While neither the bill’s sponsor nor the members of the committee explicitly define what they mean by “obscene or pornographic materials,” the community participants make it clear that they understand the targeted books to be those that portray queerness. Speaker 6 urges the house to “stop the flow of sexually explicit and LGBTQ books to minors.” While Speaker 8 provides an example of the kind of book that should be banned under the law saying, “Here's a book that I found in the little kids' section, the five-year-old section. *ABCs of Equality*. I'm not going to go through every single letter but here's a good one. . . ‘Sometimes the sex given by the doctor at birth might not fit with how that person feels’ . . . So, we're starting to program our kids at a really early age.”

Whereas the sponsors and lawmakers associated with the writing and passage of HB666 use vague descriptive language in defining such things as obscenity and pornography, it is the public discussion that both interprets the intent of the bill and provides descriptions absent from the bill itself. While there is political utility in using vague passive descriptions to distance

oneself from the intent and consequences of a bill on public life, involving the interpretive action of constituents allows for the feeling of common ground with a broad range of individual interpretations, shields lawmakers from culpability in the consequences of the constituent-led discourse, and guides the ‘spirit of the law’ toward its desired, if perhaps politically sensitive, meaning (Jucker et al., 2002).

### Discussion and Implications

The sponsor of bill HB666, an amendment to Section 18-1517 of the Idaho Code, does not define obscenity or pornography in her testimony, nor do her two witnesses. However, the community speakers make the definition explicit by providing queer books as examples of obscene texts and expressing concern that these materials “program” or “groom” children into homosexuality.

There does not need to be an explicit policy passed to influence what is perceived as controversial. Rather, it is through the discourse *surrounding* these bills that definitions of obscenity, pornography, protection, and harm are identified. These discourses are taken up more widely by the community. Local news and radio shows (see Sampson, 2022 for example), school board meetings, and community organizations cover the bill and bring the anti-queer intent to the fore. The innocent child is juxtaposed with the predatory queer out to groom them and texts like *Prince & Knight* are equated with “graphic and pedophilic content.” Setting the terms of the debate in this way denies the potential for rebuttal (after all, who can argue on the side of exposing children to pornography?).

Epistemicide of queer curriculum happens formulaically here: children are framed in the discussion of HB666 as innocent (heterosexual/non-sexual) and in need of protection, specifically from pornography and obscene material. Obscene material is then shaped in the narrative as queer texts. Thus, queer texts (and queerness *writ large*) must be left out/ taken out of the hands of children. Teachers (and librarians) are required to remove this material or open themselves up to legal consequences.

While the legislators in Idaho can avoid openly banning queer texts by expanding the reach of obscenity laws, the discussion on the ground via school board meetings (or in this case, public comment on the bill) make it clear what, exactly, schools should consider to be obscene material. This allows the state to fly under the radar of national attention the *de jure* bannings happening in states like Florida generate while effectively instituting similar policies. While we consider these *de jure* bannings to be a dangerous and concerning trend, it is this subtle movement of *de facto* anti-queer policy creation that concerns us most. It is difficult to organize opposition around these types of policy changes and they do not generate the same kind of attention and public response (see Boddie, 2021 for a discussion of the difficulty to find remedies to *de facto* school segregation).

Given the connection made between queer people and attacks on children, the rendering of queer representation in schools and public spaces as inherently controversial impacts the attitudes and choices made by teachers. Policies that ban specific books that feature queer characters and/or themes from school and public library shelves, for instance, influence what teachers are willing to teach by increasing perceptions of inherent controversy tied to representations of queerness in the classroom (Lycke & Lucey, 2018). As Kelly (1986) describes:



In a competitive, pluralistic climate, where divisiveness threatens tolerance and where aggressive clients/consumers (i.e., parents and students) pose a perceived omnipresent threat of litigation, expressing one's views on a controversial issue can be seen, at minimum, as an avoidable invitation to unwanted conflict. At maximum, it can invoke job-threatening accusations of coercive indoctrination of blatant bigotry. To avoid these risks, silence may seem the most prudent posture (pg. 123).

As HB666 and similar bills spread across the country, teachers risk punishment for exposing children to texts and topics deemed controversial or obscene. In such a climate, teachers must remain silent on queer issues. Since this silence is not directly mandated, it can be difficult for teachers to point to the exact place in the legislation that requires them to remain silent ("point to where in the bill it says that" is a not-infrequent rebuttal to opponents who call out the anti-queer intent of these bills). Despite the absence of a *de jure* requirement to exclude queer texts, the discourse surrounding the bill makes it clear what must be excluded: *Lawn Boy* is out, but so are *Prince & Knight* and *The ABCs of Equality*.

This *de facto* exclusion of queer content highlights the reality of the constant transfer of values to students through a hidden curriculum, one implicitly driven by a committed partiality to 'truth' and 'facts,' with the inclusion of that which policy and the broader community accepts, or exclusion of that which they ban as obscene (Apple, 1979; Apple & Weis, 1983; Kelly, 1986).

Dean Spade (2015) has written extensively on the ways that state intervention into queer lives does not impact all equally. He discusses how the rights-based approach to queer activism (including things like anti-discrimination laws) may benefit white normative gay and lesbians but disproportionately harm trans folk and people of color. Any discussion of anti-queer legislation, then, account for the unequal harms experienced across the queer community, harms compounded at intersections embodied by folk of multiple marginalized identities. Just as zero tolerance anti-bullying laws *prima facie* support all queer students, in practice they both expand the carceral state and the school-to-prison pipeline and disproportionately target Black and brown boys and masculine presenting youth for discipline (Hall, 2017).

Laws such as the anti-obscenity bill discussed in this paper do not discuss how, for some, their very existence is read by white middle class people as obscene. One text at the heart of anti-queer book bannings is *Lawn Boy* by Jonathan Evison, a coming-of-age novel about a young Mexican American boy that is frequently accused of depicting pedophilia and explicit language. Another frequently challenged book, *Gender Queer* (Kobabe, 2019), centers on a character growing to question their gender identity as well as their sexual orientation. While hardly the first LGBTQ YA books ever written or stocked in high school classroom libraries, books like these that center protagonists who question or challenge white normative identities are frequently challenged along with books by BIPOC authors or about BIPOC characters (Figueroa, 2022). In fact, books featuring protagonists of color and/or queer protagonists constitute 74% of all books banned across the United States between July 2021 and March 2022 (Freeman & Tager, 2022). It is at the intersection of queerness and Blackness that heteronormative white purity is most affronted, and it is at the intersection of whiteness and heteronormativity that the parameters of acceptability and worthiness are defined and enforced. In another example, the extremist parent organization "Moms for Liberty" submitted challenges to books in Brevard, Florida that they say violated the state's anti-pornography bill. Aside from LGBTQ books, they take aim at those that include "racially divisive" language like *Not All Boys are Blue* by George M. Johnson, *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, and *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker (Gallion, 2022). The expansion of

anti-obscenity laws to challenge books about BIPOC characters highlights how non-white identities are considered “queer” and threatening to a white heteronormative social order.

While thinking through the contours of queer-centered classroom are largely outside the scope of this paper<sup>iv</sup>, we wanted to provide a brief discussion of what such classrooms may entail to serve as a foil to this current project of epistemicide. For one, a queer-centered classroom might not only acknowledge the existence of queer people but include them throughout the curriculum including in queer-affirming sexual education classes. Students might have access to LGBTQ literature as well as participate in discussions of queer people within the school curriculum. Such schools would also likely include things like gender-neutral bathrooms and gender-affirming policies regarding sports and locker rooms. There should also be staff trained to meet the needs of queer students so students can receive appropriate care from counseling and health care providers to educators.

### Conclusion

There is enormous power in getting to frame an issue. Across the country, the anti-queer Right dominates the discussion around queerness’s place in the classroom. Queer books, curricula, and people are being legislated out of the school while these issues are being framed innocuously as fighting against distributing pornography to children. However, what constitutes pornography is determined in the discourse in committee meetings, school board meetings, and local policies. While the text of these laws may not explicitly mention queer content, they serve as a *de facto* ban on queer texts or curricula through the local level defining of what constitutes pornographic or obscene materials. Parents in local school board meetings are taking up the cry against certain texts (see for example the fight about *Lawn Boy* and *Genderqueer*) and leading the charge against their inclusion in the school. Without careful attention to the discourse on a local level, the queer epistemicide continues unabated. Calling out the ways in which queer texts are targeted and excluded from schools is the first step in the battle over the right of queer people to exist in schools and other institutions. Moving towards a queer utopic vision of schools requires us to see and challenge the insidious ways that queer knowledges and peoples are being challenged and removed from schools. The (sub)textual equating of queerness with obscenity and pornographic materials creates a non-controversial justification for excising it. Teachers must be made aware of the roots of this problem to combat it.

While this paper only examines one example of legislation connecting queerness to obscenity, this is not only happening in Idaho. Bills in Florida, Texas, Alabama and 17 other states (Sosin, 2022). Rhetoric such as that in HB666 tying queerness to obscenity and inherent threats to children contribute to a discourse of controversy in formal and informal teacher networks. Should such discourse become commonplace or codified into educational policy, it can be expected that teacher resistance will yield to the formidable socialization forces of policy, colleague talk, and peer-policing (Bausell & Glazier, 2018). As for preservice teachers, perceptions of inherent controversiality tied to any representation of queerness in the classroom acts as a strong barrier to their willingness to teach such content (Van Hook, 2002).

One area of future study we hope to undertake is a larger examination of these types of anti-obscenity laws across the country. This project of queer epistemicide is not only happening in Idaho: there are concerted efforts to ban LGBTQ texts and mention of queer people happening everywhere from local school board meetings to political party platforms. As this paper takes one example of such a law as a case study, we cannot yet make larger claims about this

phenomenon. We plan to further explore these types of discourses at different levels of politics in order to sketch out a fuller picture of the threat and the thinking behind such efforts.

## References

- Apple, M. (1979). *Ideology and Curriculum*. Routledge & Kenan Paul. <https://doi-org.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/10.4324/9780429400384>
- Apple, M., & Weis, L. (1983). *Ideology and practice in schooling*. Temple University Press.
- Asbury, N. (2021, November 23). Fairfax schools will return 2 books to shelves after reviewing complaints over content. *Washington Post*.
- Babcock, C. R. (1982, May 10). Book Banning Spreads. *Washington Post*.
- Bérubé, A. (2011). How gay stays white and what kind of white it stays. In *My desire for history: Essays in gay, community, and labor history*. University of North Carolina Press. [http://dx.doi.org/10.5149/9780807877982\\_berube.15](http://dx.doi.org/10.5149/9780807877982_berube.15)
- Boddie, E. C. (2021). The Muddled Distinction Between De Jure and De Facto Segregation. In K. L. Bowman (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of U.S. Education Law* (pp. 252–274). Oxford University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190697402.001.0001>.
- Bryan, N. (2020). Shaking the bad boys: Troubling the criminalization of black boys' childhood play, hegemonic white masculinity and femininity, and the school playground-to-prison pipeline. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 23(5), 673–692. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2018.1512483>
- Bryant, A. (1977). *The Anita Bryant story: The survival of our nation's families and the threat of militant homosexuality*. Revell.
- Califia, P. (1994). *Public sex: The culture of radical sex*. Cleis.
- Cohen, C. (2012). Death and Rebirth of a Movement: Queering Critical Ethnic Studies. *Social Justice*, 37(4), 126–132. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41478938>
- Cohen, C. J. (1997). Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics? *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 3(4), 437–465.
- Cramer, K. (2020). *Incorporating LGBTQ+ identities in K-12 curriculum and policy*. IGI Publishing. DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-1404-7
- Defend Young Minds Staff. (2022, March 15). *Shocking Sexual Content in School Books??? A Step-by- Step Plan for Speaking Up | Defend Young Minds™*. Defend Young Minds. Education Program about Sexual Conduct and Substance Abuse 1991 (HSC) s.163 (TX)
- Evison, K. (2018). *Lawn Boy*. Algonquin Press.
- Ferguson, R. (2004). *Aberrations in Black: Toward a queer of color critique*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Figuroa, A., April 17, T. L., & 2022. (2022, April 17). LGBTQ community, people of color in the crosshairs of banned book movement. *Tennessee Lookout*.
- Freeman, J., & Tager, J. (2022). *Educational Gag Orders: Legislative Restrictions on the Freedom to Read, Learn, and Teach*. PEN America.
- Gallion, B. (2022, May 11). *Next on Moms for Liberty library challenge list: The Kite Runner, Slaughterhouse-Five*. WKMG.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Sociology Press.

- GLSEN. (2018). *Laws that Prohibit the “Promotion of Homosexuality”*: Impacts and Implications.
- Goff, P. A., Jackson, M. C., Di Leone, B. A. L., Culotta, C. M., & DiTomasso, N. A. (2014). The essence of innocence: Consequences of dehumanizing Black children. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 106(4), 526–545. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0035663>
- Grocki, S. (2021). *Citizen’s Guide to U.S. Federal Law on Obscenity*. The United States Department of Justice.
- Haack, D. (2018). *Prince and knight*. Little Bee Books.
- Hall, W. (2017). The effectiveness of policy interventions for school bullying: A systematic review. *Journal of the Society for Social Work and Research*, 8(1), 45-69. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/690565>
- Jenkins, P. (1998). *Moral Panic: Changing Concepts of the Child Molester in Modern America*. Yale University Press. DOI:10.1097/00005053-200006000-00015
- Jucker, A., Smith, S., & Lüdge, T. (2003). Interactive aspects of vagueness in conversation. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 35(12), 1737–1769. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166\(02\)00188-1](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(02)00188-1)
- Kelly, T. (1986). Discussing Controversial Issues: Four Perspectives on the Teacher’s Role. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 14(2), 113–138. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00933104.1986.10505516>
- Kobabe, M. (2019). *Gender queer: A memoir*. Oni Press.
- Ladson Billings, G. (2011). Boyz to men? Teaching to restore Black boys’ childhood. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 14(1), 7–15. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2011.531977>
- Luke, A. (2002). Beyond science and ideological critique: Developments in critical discourse analysis. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 22, 96–110. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190502000053>
- Lycke, K., & Lucey, T. (2018). The Messages We Miss: Banned Books, Censored Texts, and Citizenship. *Journal of Social Studies Education Research*, 9(3), 1–26.
- McGinn, L., Stone, N., Ingham, R., & Bengry-Howell, A. (2016). Parental interpretations of “childhood innocence”: Implications for early sexuality education. *Health Education*, 116(6), 580–594. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/HE-10-2015-0029>
- Miller, S. (2016). *Teaching, Affirming, and Recognizing Trans and Gender Creative Youth*. Palgrave Macmillan. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-56766-6>
- O’Hara, M. E. (2022, February 14). Books not bans: I support LGBTQ books & authors. *GLAAD*.
- Palmer, D. (2007). *Normal politics: Negotiating sexuality and child endangerment in 1977 America* [Master’s Thesis]. University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.
- Robinson, K. (2013). *Innocence, Knowledge and the Construction of Childhood: The contradictory nature of sexuality and censorship in children’s contemporary lives*. Routledge. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9780203117538>
- Robinson, K. (2021). Difficult citizenship: The precarious relationships between childhood, sexuality, and access to knowledge. *Sexualities*, 15(3/4), 257–276. [doi/10.1177/1363460712436469](https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460712436469)

- Rubin, G. (2012). Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality. In *Deviations*. Duke University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1215/9780822394068-006>
- Rummler, O. (2022, February 9). More states want to restrict how LGBTQ+ people, issues are discussed in schools. *The 19<sup>th</sup> News*.
- Sampson, H. (2022, March 9). INTERVIEW: Stephanie Gifford on sexually explicit material in schools. *NewsTalk1079*.
- Sosin, K. (2022, April 20). In some states, versions of “Don’t Say Gay” bills have been around for awhile. *PBS NewsHour*.
- Spade, D. (2015). *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, & the Limits of Law*. Duke University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/9780822374794>
- Torres, G. S. M., Pérez, S. I., & Moragas, F. (2020). “Gender Ideology” in Conservative Discourses: Public Sphere and Sex Education in Argentina. In M. Pérez & G. Trujillo-Barbadillo (Eds.), *Queer Epistemologies in Education: Luso-Hispanic Dialogues and Shared Horizons* (pp. 161–178). Springer International Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-50305-5>
- Van Hooke, C. (2002). Preservice teachers perceived barriers to the implementation of a multicultural curriculum. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 29(4), 254.

---

<sup>i</sup> In this paper we use the term “queer” as a broad term meant to encompass a spectrum of identities under the LGBTQ+ umbrella. We are aware that “queer” can be a controversial term within the community given its pejorative roots, and no offense is meant in its usage. We use it to refer to any person who identifies as other than straight and/or cisgender to recognize the fluidity of queer identities and to reject ridged essentialized understandings of identity. We recognize that the term has different meanings within queer theory and that there is a push in queer theory not to think of “queer” as the opposite of “heterosexual.”

<sup>ii</sup> The racialized implications of childhood and queerness deserve a much longer discussion than is possible here. The protections of childhood are not afforded to all equally. While white children are considered “children” through their late teens, research has shown that children of color, and in particular Black boys, are consistently read as older and less innocent than their white peers by white people. They are less likely to be described as “children” from a young age and more likely to be incarcerated, prosecuted as adults, and sentenced to adult facilities (Goff et al., 2014). For discussion on the racialized history of queerness see Ferguson’s (2004) *Aberrations in Black* and Bérubé’s (2011) “How Gay Stays White and What Kind of White it Stays.”

<sup>iii</sup> Although the lawmakers don’t explicitly state that they conflate LGBTQ books with obscenity, one of the expert witnesses introduced by the sponsor claims to work with several organizations dedicated to combating pornography including protectchildhealth.org which redirects to defendyoungminds.com. They published an article in 2022 titled “Shocking Sexual Content in School Books” that specifically named a few LGBTQ books including *Lawn Boy*, *Gender Queer*, *Call Me Max* (a K-2 book about a transgender child), and *In the Dream House*. She states that she provided the committee with a list of obscene books but that list was not available to the public.

<sup>iv</sup> For a larger discussion of the needs and possibilities of queer-affirming schools see *Teaching, Affirming, and Recognizing Trans and Gender Creative Youth* by Miller (2016) and *Incorporating LGBTQ+ identities in K-12 Curriculum and Policy* by Cramer (2020). For a discussion of sex education in conservative discourses see “Gender Ideology in Conservative Discourses” by Torres, Pérez, and Moragas (2020) in *Queer Epistemologies in Education*.