

When I was in high school, a close friend came to me and confided in me that she had been pressured by her boyfriend into giving him a blowjob. Or at least, that's what I knew it to be—she didn't know what it was, and she wasn't even sure if it was a bad thing; it was just something her boyfriend told her she needed to do and so she complied even though it made her uncomfortable. The only way I knew it was called a blowjob—and the primary way I knew that being pressured by someone to do something you don't want to is not how a healthy relationship works—is because of books. I was a voracious reader as a child, and it was through books that I learned many of the lessons I carry with me today. And I say this as a child of a healthy, stable, two-parent household: my parents surrounded us with love, supported us in our activities, and took us to church every Sunday. But they did not have conversations with us about healthy relationship behaviors. And they definitely didn't detail the specifics of the unhealthy things that can occur in relationships; those are all things I learned in my reading. Was it uncomfortable as a child to read fairly graphic accounts of abusive and/or sexual relationships? Absolutely. But through those books and the lessons in them I learned what healthy, appropriate relationships look like—and what to do if you or someone you know are on the wrong side of one of those relationships. With my support, my friend ended that relationship before she was pressured by her boyfriend to perform sexual acts beyond a blowjob, and I am forever grateful to books for giving me the knowledge and voice to say “that behavior is inappropriate”.

I have four children of my own now, and I understand how difficult those conversations can be with your children. I don't fault my parents for not filling in some of the gaps in my knowledge. And while my husband and I try our best to make sure we are having those uncomfortable conversations with our children, I know we will leave gaps in their knowledge and understanding, just like my parents did with me. When that happens, I pray that they will stumble upon a book that will fill that gap. And even if the content of the books they choose makes me uncomfortable at times, I trust that librarians have done their due diligence to ensure that the books on their shelves (especially the ones that contain sensitive material and explicit scenes) also contain values and lessons that my children can carry with them to help them through their own difficult life situations. As such, I can confidently say that I would be comfortable with my children reading any book available to them in a public library, classroom, or museum. However, if librarians, teachers, and museum employees are worried about legal action from a family who finds the material obscene, they will have to limit the materials they have available in their institution in order to avoid such lawsuits. That is the textbook definition of censorship, and by repealing obscenity-related prosecution exemptions for librarians, teachers, and museum employees, House Bill 1239 will absolutely result in censorship of materials. Censorship has never been on the right side of history—which side of history will you stand on?



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