

TO: Carrie Wilson, Calvert Library Director

FROM: Amy Tippet, Calvert Library Public Services Librarian

DATE: April 14, 2024

SUBJECT: Book challenge – *Gender queer* by Maia Kobabe

A concerned citizen submitted a “Materials Reconsideration Form” for *Gender queer* by Maia Kobabe because of perceived explicit content and graphics. This memo serves as an evaluation of the recommendation to maintain the book in Calvert Library’s collection. The author is nonbinary and prefers using the pronouns e/eim/eir.

Summary of *Gender queer*

Kobabe’s memoir *Gender queer* begins when e was a child in Northern California in 1992 and began to realize that e didn’t identify as a girl. E’s experiences are relatable as e is growing up as a teenager dealing with awkwardness around schoolmates, being embarrassed by eim first menstruation cycle, and first kisses. In high school, e joined a queer alliance group and began to explore eim sexuality more fully. The memoir continues through eim college years and in eim twenties where e begins to identify as nonbinary. The book also highlights how Kobabe found an emotional outlet in literature and art, culminating in becoming an author and artist. As *Publishers Weekly* (n.d.) mentioned in its review, “This heartfelt graphic memoir relates, with sometimes painful honesty, the experience of growing up non-gender-conforming.”

Challenge Considerations

The American Library Association (2024, April 8) named *Gender queer* as the most challenged book in 2021, 2022, and 2023 because of LGBTQIA+ content, explicit content, and explicit graphic images. *Gender queer* includes images and descriptions of menstruation, gay porn, sex toys, pubic hair, sexting, masturbation, and sexual relations between two males, including oral sex.



Kobabe, Maia (2019). *Gender queer* [Screenshots pp. 35,61,167]. Lion Forge.

Other Challenges of *Gender queer*

The American Library Association (2024, April 8) recorded 106 challenges of *Gender queer* in 2023. One of those book challenges took place in Carver County, Minnesota. Last summer, a concerned citizen challenged the Carver County Library Board about *Gender queer* (Mitchell, 2023). This was the first time the library board was faced with a book challenge, and it was determined to leave the book in their collection in the adult fiction section (Mitchell, 2023). The book has also been challenged in many schools, including nearby Fairfax County Public Schools in Virginia, where it was challenged in 2021. The review committee decided to keep the book in the collection, in part, because “students with a related experience will feel affirmed and others can gain understanding and empathy” (Asbury, 2021).

***Gender queer* in Calvert Library’s collection**

Although *Gender queer* is not required reading for Calvert Public Schools, it is important to include *Gender queer* in the Calvert Library collection for two main reasons.

First, it is important to evaluate the challenge based on the Calvert Library Materials Selection Policy (Calvert Library, 2024), which states,

“Materials are evaluated as a whole and not on the basis of a particular passage or passages. A work will not be excluded from the library’s collection because it presents an aspect of life honestly or because of frankness of expression. Selection will not be inhibited by the possibility that materials may inadvertently come into the possession of children and adolescents” (p. 3, para. 2).

Kobabe’s memoir depicts the challenges and joy of exploring eir sexuality while growing up. The passages in question do not depict sexual content to be exploitative or sensational. If Kobabe omitted those passages, then e wouldn’t have been authentically telling eim story. If the book were removed from circulation, we would be not supporting the selection policy of the library.

Secondly, The Trevor Project (2023) reported that 41% of LGBTQ young adults seriously considered attempting suicide in one year, and those who identified as transgender, nonbinary, and/or people of color had even higher suicidal ideation. *Booklist* stated, “*Gender Queer* exists so a new generation can see the words and experiences to help them feel whole and seen” (Rice, 2022). *School Library Journal* also noted that the book is “a great resource for those who identify as nonbinary or asexual as well as for those who know someone who identifies that way and wish to better understand” (Frencham, 2019). To support the mental health of LGBTQ young adults, they need to have access to books like *Gender queer*.

I have attached the American Library Association’s information sheet on *Gender queer*, which includes the awards the book has received. I will gladly discuss this further with you or provide recommendations on the placement of the book, such as a sampling of where other libraries place the book in their collections.

Attached: American Library Association’s Unite Against Book Bans Book Resume for *Gender queer*

References

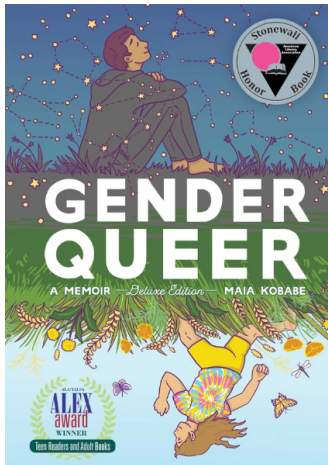
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The Trevor Project. (2023, May 1). *2023 U.S. National Survey on the mental health of LGBTQ Young People*. The Trevor Project. https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2023/assets/static/05_TREVOR05_2023survey.pdf



***Gender Queer: A Memoir* by Maia Kobabe**

Oni Press, 2019

ISBN: 9781549304002 (Graphic Novel)

Grade Range: 9 and Up (Recommended by *School Library Journal*)

BOOK SYNOPSIS

In 2014, Maia Kobabe, who uses e/em/eir pronouns, thought that a comic of reading statistics would be the last autobiographical comic e would ever write. At the time, it was the only thing e felt comfortable with strangers knowing about em. Now, *Gender Queer* is here. Maia's intensely cathartic autobiography charts eir journey of self-identity, which includes the mortification and confusion of adolescent crushes, grappling with how to come out to family and society, bonding with friends over erotic gay fanfiction, and facing the trauma and fundamental violation of pap smears.

Started as a way to explain to eir family what it means to be nonbinary and asexual, *Gender Queer* is more than a personal story: it is a useful and touching guide on gender identity—what it means and how to think about it—for advocates, friends, and humans everywhere.

REVIEWS AND PRAISE

★ "Vulnerable and honest, *Gender Queer* grapples with issues of identity and sexuality in ways that highlight how messy and painful but ultimately vindicating the process of understanding and valuing yourself can be. [...] Highly recommended reading for those on their own journey of exploration or those supporting the explorers in their own lives. *Gender Queer* exists so a new generation can see the words and experiences to help them feel whole and seen." – *Booklist*, **starred review**

★ "A book to be savored rather than devoured, this memoir will resonate with teens, especially fans of Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* and Mason Deaver's *I Wish You All the Best*. It's also a great resource for those who identify as nonbinary or asexual as well as for those who know someone who identifies that way and wish to better understand." – *School Library Journal*, **starred review**

"This heartfelt graphic memoir relates, with sometimes painful honesty, the experience of growing up non-gender-conforming. From a very young age, Kobabe is unsure whether to claim a lesbian/gay, bisexual, or even transgender identity: 'I don't want to be a girl. I don't want to be a boy either. I just want to be myself.'" – *Publishers Weekly*

"In the gorgeous and candid graphic memoir *Gender Queer*, e illustrates an aching journey toward reconciliation with being nonbinary and asexual." – *Shelf Awareness*

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"Kobabe's drawings, colored by sister Phoebe Kobabe, casts eir life and truths in splendorous, vivid light. And the relationship between the siblings on the page is one of *Gender Queer's* sweetest elements. Often scared of what lies ahead, Maia confides in Phoebe, a lesbian, about eir queer hopes and fears, and is met each time with the gracious enthusiasm of a sister who has eir back: "I lucked out so hard in the sibling lottery." A challenging yet heartwarming memoir, *Gender Queer* succeeds on all fronts." – Dave Wheeler

"More than simply a memoir, the book is designed to explain the very concept of being non-binary, beginning with the author's first memories of gender and ending with the discovery of Spivak pronouns (e, em, eir) and eir first steps towards getting the people around em to accept and understand said pronouns. [...] Kobabe's art is very readable and, above all, accommodating. E lays out eir personal history with an enviable degree of candor. [...] Part of the book details eir sexual history, as well as a series of terrifying and painful trips to the OBGYN, and even in the most sensitive areas Kobabe's art and storytelling remains both personable and clear." – *The Comics Journal*

AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

- 2019 Howard County (MD) Public Schools Best of the Year - High School
- 2019 New York Public Library's 50 Best Books for Teens, selection
- 2020 Alex Award
- 2020 Stonewall Award Nonfiction Honor Book
- 2020 ALA Rainbow Project Book List, selection
- 2020 YALSA Best Books List, selection
- 2020 YALSA Great Graphic Novels for Teens, selection
- 2020 Texas Library Association: Maverick Graphic Novel Reading List, selection
- 2021 Garden State Teen Book Award, nominee
- 2021 Chicago Public Schools Great Graphic Novels, selection
- Denver Public Schools Top 100 High School Books, 2020-2021
- 2021 Jefferson County (KY) Public Schools Recommended Reading Grades 9-12, selection
- 2021 School Library Journal's 17 Immersive Graphic Novels for Teens, selection

MEDIA AND RESOURCES

- ["Opinion | Schools are banning my book. But queer kids need queer stories."](#) Maia Kobabe, *Washington Post*, October 29, 2021
- ["I Made the Most Banned Book in America"](#) by Maia Kobabe, *The Nib*, September 1, 2023
- ["Access to Library Resources and Services Regardless of Sex, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, or Sexual Orientation: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights,"](#) American Library Association
- ["Virginia Judge Rejects Obscenity Proceedings Against Gender Queer and A Court of Mist and Fury,"](#) ACLU of Virginia, August 30, 2022
- [Final Order Dismissing Proceedings & Declaring Section 18.2-384 Unconstitutional in re: Gender Queer, a Memoir, Case No. CL22-1985,](#) August 30, 2022

RESPONSE TO CHALLENGES

- [Review Committee Recommendation - Gender Queer: A Memoir,](#) Fairfax County Public Schools
- [Statement of Support for Gender Queer by Maia Kobabe, Comic Book Legal Defense Fund,](#) October 17, 2021

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AUTHOR STATEMENT

“Queer youth are often forced to look outside their own homes, and outside the education system, to find information on who they are. Removing or restricting queer books in libraries and schools is like cutting a lifeline for queer youth, who might not yet even know what terms to ask Google to find out more about their own identities, bodies and health.” – Maia Kobabe

***A NOTE ON AGE RANGES**

A publisher-suggested age range covers the gamut of readers that publishers envision using the book, whether for independent reading, family sharing, group study, or in other ways. Educators have the best sense of the appropriate age range for the diverse learners they work with and understand these ranges vary depending on a book’s intended use.

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