

# BOOK BANS TRY AND FAIL TO ERASE LGBTQ+ YOUTH BUT ARE HARMFUL TO ALL IN THE COMMUNITY | OPINION

PUBLISHED: FEB. 02, 2023, 10:30 A.M. IN STAR LEDGER OF NEW JERSEY  
BY LAURA HOGE

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Another book ban attempt is coming up for a vote in New Jersey, this time in Glen Ridge, where the Glen Ridge Public Library Board of Trustees will hear an appeal on February 8th. The books in question are again by or about LGBTQIA+ people, part of a pattern of challenges around the state and country.

Book bans are notoriously unsuccessful, and have been ruled unconstitutional. Still, as a health professional, I can attest they are harmful to my LGBTQIA+ patients, their peers and all in the community.

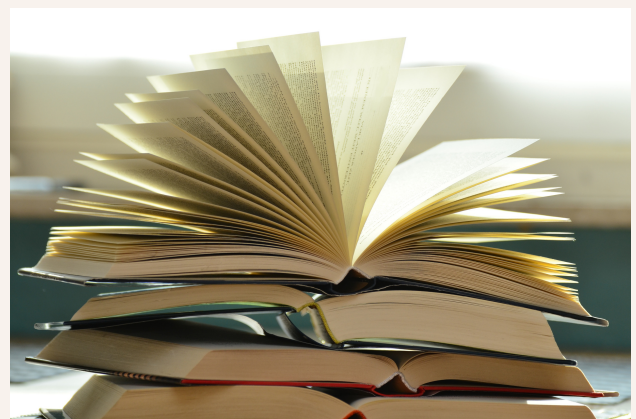
Book challenges are not just about particular books. They attempt to erase the existence of LGBTQ+ youth and their identities in their communities when their existence is not debatable. A record high 21% of the youngest generation, GenZ, is out as LGBT. Every major medical association has issued statements supporting affirming care for LGBTQ+ youth. Yet there is relentlessness in state and national efforts seeking to deny evidence-based healthcare and inclusive curriculum along with attempts to strip LGBTQ+ books from shelves.

There is no evidence to support that reading a book influences innate sexual orientation or gender identity. There is proof that positive portrayals in media improve the mental health of LGBTQ+ youth, and that debating their rights and access to society as their authentic selves is dangerous.

LGBTQ+ youth are at higher risk of mental health issues, not because their identity is a pathology (it is not), but because stigma, discrimination, and attempts at erasure block their vision of a future for themselves.

Here are frightening statistics that make my work for the health and safety of LGBTQ+ youth far more urgent:

- LGBTQ+ youth are more than four times as likely to attempt suicide than their peers.
- Almost 70% of LGBTQ students felt unsafe last year because of their sexual orientation and/or gender expression.
- 86% of transgender and nonbinary youth say recent debates around bills targeting them negatively impact their mental health.
- 45% of trans youth experienced cyberbullying.



As alarming as these statistics are, there is also hope:

- LGBTQ+ youth who live in a community that is accepting of LGBTQ people reported significantly lower rates of attempting suicide.
- Increasing connection with peers and mutual support can mitigate the impacts of societal stigma.
- Seeing LGBTQ+ characters in TV, movies, music, and books evokes joy, and hope and fosters positive attitudes among LGBTQ youth. This translates to hope in the youth themselves, and a realistic, positive narrative about what it means to be LGBTQ+ for their cisgender and heterosexual peers.

As a therapist who works with LGBTQ+ youth and families, much of my work is providing resources and connecting children and families to communities where

they can see a positive reflection of themselves. Too often, I send families outside of their towns to find this. I shouldn't have to do this.

I am creating my library in my clinical office so the youth I serve feel less alone, and see themselves in stories and the world. When one of the children I serve can read a hopeful story about themselves, they see hope for their future. This is critical for their mental health.

Attempts to erase the reality of their existence from bookshelves and history class sends a clear but false message that there is no place for them. Quite frankly, by attempting to erase their stories, another story is being written, a narrative far more sinister and destructive. This untrue story tells LGBTQ+ youth they don't matter, don't belong, and that anyone supporting them should be silenced or falsely smeared (adults inaccurately using this language should look up their definitions - affirming young people and providing safe environments isn't "indoctrination," it's the opposite - it's acceptance, expanded thinking, which nurtures growth and safety.)

We must counter lies that reinforce stigma and normalize discrimination. Ensuring representation and visibility is about saving lives and strengthening communities. LGBTQ+ youth and their parents are watching to see who is speaking up for them and their families, to know where they can be safe to live and visit. Every young person should be able to find and read books that show they have a place in our world. It's up to all of us to provide space for them to grow up in health, peace, and security, free to write their own stories of success, now and in the future.



The six book that were under attack by the CDE group in Glen Ridge, NJ