

Fifty shades of normal



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Fifty Shades of Normal Since its publication in 1996, Robe Harrier's book It's Perfectly Normal has appeared on the American Library Association list of challenged books. It's Perfectly Normal was the LA'S #1 Most Challenged Book of 2005. The book is intended for ages 10 and up, and it explains the various physical and psychological changes that occur during puberty including information about sex and sexualhealth. The books text is paired with cartoonist illustrations by Michael Embezzler.

Many religious institutions are posed to the information and the viewpoints discussed within because masturbation, abortion, homosexuality and other alternative sexual lifestyles are described as being " perfectly normal. " It's Perfectly Normal has been criticized for mocking religious beliefs by stating " some religions call masturbation a sin. But masturbating cannot hurt you" (48), and Harris then goes on to provide images of a young boy and young girl masturbating complete with an explanation how to masturbate.

In June 1996, John Chamberlain, a member of the Provo (Utah) Library aid It's Perfectly Normal " should be banned from the children's section because it's graphic illustrations of male and female anatomy, including sex organs, and its discussions of intercourse, masturbation, and homosexuality" (Forester 205). The Catholic Church believes that " masturbation is an intrinsically and seriously disordered act" (Vatican) and " any sexual act outside of marriage not intended for procreation is considered inappropriate" (Vatican).

Harris explains that " sexual intercourse-having sex-can involve the penis and the vagina, or the mouth and the initials, or the penis and the anus" (15). While the book is factually correct, many challenges are based on

whether this information is appropriate for children. In 2001, the book was restricted to elementary school pupils with parental permission in Anchorage, Alaska due to objections to the book's "value statements" and because "marriage is mentioned once in the whole book, while homosexual relationships are allocated an entire section" (ala. Org). Furthermore, the book was also challenged, but retained in 2002 after a conservative Christian group, the Republican Leadership Council, characterized the book as "vulgar" and trying "to minimize or even negate that homosexuality is a problem" (ala. Org). The book has been endorsed by Planned Parenthood, the largest abortion chain in the USA, but in contrast, nowhere does the book describe the virtue of chastity or abstinence (American Life League). Critics say the book promotes abortion by listing nine reasons to have an abortion (Dudgeon).

The book's description of the abortion process is very clinical, and it avoids any discussion about whether abortion is morally right or the various social views surrounding the topic. It's Perfectly Normal was challenged but retained in the children's section of the Mexico-Durian County, Mo. Library in 1997 when a Baptist minister complained not only about this title, but also about other "material concerning family sensitive issues, such as sexuality, the death of a loved one, or the birth process" (ala. Org). As per a BBC report, "all the religions have taken strong positions on abortion; they believe that the issue encompasses profound issues of life and death, right and wrong, human relationships and the nature of society, that make it a major religious issue" (BBC. Co. UK). Harris wrote the book with the intent to provide facts

that " were accurate and up-to-date and that the text was age-appropriate" (arbitrators. Com).

She later commented that " I knew that illustrator Michael Embezzler and I had created a book that provided kids and teens with honest and accurate information, which they have a right to and need in order to stay healthy as they enter and go through puberty and adolescence" (Crispin). Harris succeeded in this regard, and accordingly, the book has been highly recognized and honored by the ALA, Booklets, Child Magazine, The New York Times, Planned Parenthood, and Publishers' Weekly (Floorboards).

While some religious groups assert that the book " goes too far and even borders on child pornography" (American Life League), " removal of a book for political, social, or moral reasons is legally prohibited" (Forester 205). The American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights states that " librarians and governing bodies should maintain that parents-? and only parents-? have the right and theresponsibilityto restrict the access of their children-? and only their children-? to Barry resources" (Floorboards).