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Talk dirty to me: Why books about sex and relationships belong in libraries.

By Stacy Creel

The State of Mississippi or The Facts

"Sexual relations at one level or another are in the minds, hearts, and bodies of teens" (Chance, 2008, p. 61). A quarter of Mississippi's population is under the age of 18. There are almost 250,000 state residents who are 10 to 19 years of age (National Center for Health Statistics, 2011). The United States is experiencing its lowest national birth rate for teens since the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) started keeping records in 1940. In 2010, the national birth rate was 31.3 per 1000 females ages 15 to 19. Even though Mississippi's birth rate has dropped 21% in the last 3 years, it still has the highest birth rate among teens with a birth rate of 55 per 1000 (Associated Press, 2012). The counties in the state with the highest teenage pregnancy rates per 1,000 among 15-19 year olds are Tunica (125.7), Quitman (116.8), and Yazoo County (58.1) (The Mississippi State Department of Health—MSDH, 2010).

Almost 58% of Mississippi's high school students have had sex, and almost 19% of them used drugs or alcohol prior to their last sexual experience (CDC, 2012). Over 11% of Mississippi's youth have sex for the first time before age 13, and Mississippi's high school freshman are more sexually active than the national average—49% versus 32.9%. The state of Mississippi ranks among the highest in the nation for chlamydia and gonorrhea infections, and teens and young adults between the ages of 15-29 years remain the leaders in new cases. From 2001-2010, HIV cases among 15-19 year olds have nearly *tripled* (MSDH, 2010). Teenagers make up almost 40% of those diagnosed with sexually transmitted diseases in Mississippi.

In February 2011, House Bill 999 was adopted. The bill required local school boards to adopt a sex education policy by June 30, 2012. School boards must implement either an abstinence-only or an abstinence-plus curriculum. Before this bill, there was no state law requiring Mississippi to teach sex education in public schools; however, schools that did choose to teach sex education before this bill were required to teach abstinence only until marriage curriculum with abstinence being the best

way to prevent unplanned pregnancies and disease (MSDH, 2010).

While reports are mixed about the impact on whether teens benefit more from abstinence only or comprehensive sex education, one study from the University of Washington in Seattle found that "teenagers who received some type of comprehensive sex education were 60 percent less likely to get pregnant or get someone else pregnant" (Washington Post, 2008). A multi-year federally funded research project investigated the impact of abstinence only programs on sexual abstinence, pregnancy risks, and sexually transmitted diseases. This study found that teens in abstinence only programs were no more likely to abstain than teens not in a program and did not wait until they were older than other teens to become sexually active (Trenholm et al., 2007).

"Considering the high rates of teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases that remain in Mississippi, evidence suggests that abstinence only until marriage programs are ineffective and that a more comprehensive approach to sex education provides young people with medically sound information to make informed decisions related to sex" (MSDH, 2010, p.9).



Books in the Library

Realistic fiction books for teens cover a variety of topics and issues ranging from the innocuous topics like friendship, or dealing with school pressure, or summer adventures to topics considered to be edgy, or even taboo by some. These more edgy books may cover topics ranging from first sexual experiences, to bullying, to sexual identity, to parental divorce or

neglect, and much more. Many of the topics covered in teen realistic fiction make adults uncomfortable. "These novels are disturbing, sometimes shocking, but they reflect the lives of today's teens – not the lives of every teen but of enough teens for the stories to be authentic" (Chance, 2008, p. 62). Issues like sexuality and sexual attraction are especially important to younger teens as their bodies and hormones are changing. These are also topics that they may not feel comfortable discussing with adults. "Exploring these issues through fiction is one way for young adolescents to ask questions and seek answers for a very important topic in their lives" (Anderson, 2007, p. 77).

Teen collections should contain materials covering a variety of interests, lifestyles, and beliefs. By covering the gamut of a topic, the library is better able to supply books for their entire population—while realizing that legitimately some books are perfectly acceptable to one person but not another. Having a broad collection insures a book choice for everyone. Collections should contain books that cover comprehensive sex education in non-fiction, including books that cover abstinence, and fiction books that cover teens making a variety of choices for a variety of reasons. The collection must be balanced (Nilsen & Donelson, 2008, p. 303). Since there are such differing opinions about what teens should know and when especially when it comes to the nonfiction topic of sex education, including a variety of books for a range of readers is essential (Anderson, 2007). But having a balanced collection means having books that may make some adults cringe and can lead to challenges and censorship of the library collection.

So how do libraries defend having books in their collections that depict teens having sex, getting pregnant, discovering their sexuality or sexual preference? The first step is to depend on your collection development policy. This policy should be current and inclusive. It should describe the service area and community and include all of the community. The policy should contain statements about the community's right to read, freedom to read, anti-censorship, the Library Bill of Rights, and should have specific statements about youth and their rights and freedom. "Collection development

policy statements protect the library against external pressures" and helps ensure that challenged materials are "fairly reviewed and retained" (Johnson, 2009, p. 75). The collection development policy should also make it clear that the library protects its employees who make the collection development decisions.

Along with the collection development policy, procedures for challenged materials should be established including a committee that reviews complaints and materials receiving complaints. Some examples of collection development policies can be found at AcqWeb's site, a place of interest for librarians on acquisitions and collection development: http://www.acqweb.org/cdv_policy. Examples of possible wording to consider including are:

- The ____ library recognizes that some materials are controversial and that any given item may offend some patrons. Selection of materials is not made on the basis of anticipated approval or disapproval.
- Responsibility for the reading of youth is the responsibility of their parents or guardians.
- No employee shall be disciplined or dismissed for selecting library materials in good faith and in accordance with the written policy.

Second, depend on the American Library
Association's resources. Use their expert resources
like "Strategies and Tips for Dealing with Challenges
to Library Materials" and the "Intellectual Freedom
Manual." Additionally, librarians should especially be
versed on the following from ALA's Policy Manual on
Services and Responsibilities of Libraries:

52.5.2 Sex Education Materials in Libraries: ALA affirms the right of youth to comprehensive, sex-related education, materials, programs, and referral services of the highest quality; affirms the active role of librarians in providing such; and urges librarians and library educators to reexamine existing policies and practices and assume a leadership role in seeing that information is available for children and adolescents, parents, and youth-serving professionals.

The Policy Manual's section on Intellectual Freedom also contains the following:

53.1.4 Free Access to Libraries for Minors: Lack of access to information can be harmful to minors. Librarians and library governing bodies have a public and professional obligation to ensure that all members of the community they serve have free, equal, and equitable access to the entire range of library resources regardless of content, approach, format, or amount of detail. This principle of library service applies equally to all users, minors as well as adults. Librarians and library governing bodies must uphold this principle in order to provide adequate and effective service to minors. Adopted 1972, amended 1981, 1992, 2004, and 2008. (See "Policy Reference File": Free Access to Libraries for Minors: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights, revised, 2007-2008 ALA CD#19.7. - PDF, 3 pgs)

Third, the librarian can find and use professional reviews and public opinion to support the inclusion of materials that some might find questionable. The fourth thing that can be done is to use the statistics about "the state of the state" of residence; for those of us in Mississippi a handy resource, "Sexually Transmitted Diseases: 2011 Fact Sheet Mississippi, produced by the MSDH and found in Appendix A.

Conclusion:

It may be overwhelming to think about adding potentially controversial books to the library collection. Perhaps Appendix B can help. It is a list of just over 100 titles on sex, sexuality, love, dating, relationships, and more that can help get the collection started. Most of the titles are found on booklists and/or have received positive professional reviews. The handful of books not on lists or reviewed were added because of popular reviews and opinions. Hopefully, this article will give you the standing needed to "talk dirty..."



Stacy Creel received her Ph.D. from the University of North Texas and has over 10 years of public library experience. She has been teaching at Southern Miss since 2010.

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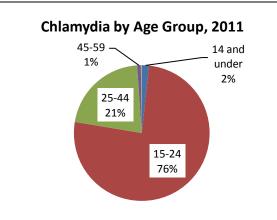
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April is National STD Awareness Month

For more information please visit: www.cdc.gov www.healthyms.com/std

Sexually Transmitted Diseases 2011 FACT SHEET Mississippi



* In 2010, MS ranked #2 nationally in chlamydia case rates.

In 2011, **Mississippi** reported 21,214 cases of chlamydia.

Among chlamydia cases reported in **Mississippi**:

74% were females, and 67% were African Americans.

Although 15-24 year olds make up 15% of Mississippi's population, they represent 76% of chlamydia cases.

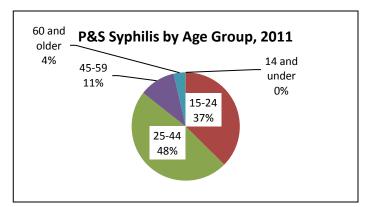
- * In 2010, MS ranked #1 nationally in gonorrhea case rates.
- In 2011, **Mississippi** reported 5,816 cases of gonorrhea.

Among gonorrhea cases reported in Mississippi:

58% were females, and

75% were African Americans.

Although 15-24 year olds make up 15% of Mississippi's population, they represent 69 % of gonorrhea cases.



**Of the 46 states with confidential name based reporting, Mississippi had the 7th highest rate for HIV infection in 2010.

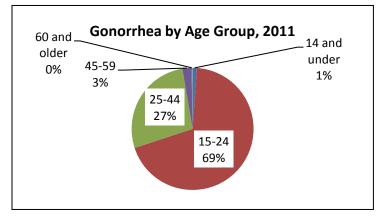
The national rate for HIV infection was 16.1 compared to MS, at 19.1 per 100,000 population in 2010. In 2011, **Mississippi** reported 573 cases of HIV disease.

Among HIV disease reported in Mississippi:

75% were males,

76% were African Americans, and

47% were between the ages of 25-44.



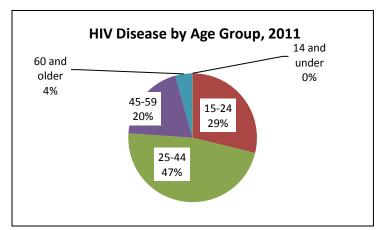
* In 2010, MS ranked #3 nationally in Primary & Secondary (P&S) syphilis case rates.

In 2011, **Mississippi** reported 195 cases of P&S syphilis. Among Primary and Secondary syphilis reported in **Mississippi**:

76% were males,

83% were African Americans, and

48% were between the ages of 25-44.



^{*} Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Sexually Transmitted Disease Surveillance 2010. Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2011. **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. HIV Surveillance Report, 2010; vol.22.

http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/surveillance/resources/reports/2010reports/. Published March 2012. Accessed April 24, 2012.

Appendix B

| Book Info | List | Review |
|---|----------------|-------------------|
| Acito, Marc. How I Paid for College: A Novel of Sex, Theft, Friendship, and Musical Theater. Broadway Books, 2005. | PPBK2006 | SLJ, 50(9), 2004 |
| Adams, Lenora. Baby Girl. Simon and Schuster/ Simon Pulse, 2007. | QP2008 | BL,103(13), 2007 |
| Barnes, Derrick. The Making of Dr. Truelove . Simon Pulse, 2006. | PPBK2008 | SLJ, 53(4), 2007 |
| Barnholdt, Lauren. Sometimes it Happens. Simon & Schuster/Simon Pulse, 2011. | QP2012 | SLJ, 57(8) 2011 |
| Beam, Cris. I am J. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2011. | QP2012 | SLJ, 52(2) 2011 |
| Bechard, Margaret. Hanging on to Max. Simon Pulse Publishing, 2003. | BFYA2003 | SLJ, 51(3), 2005 |
| Behrens, Andy. All the Way. Puffin, 2007. | PPBK2008 | SLJ, 52(5), 2006 |
| Bend, Don't Shatter: Poets on the Beginning of Desire. Ed. by T. Cole Rachel and Rita Costello. Soft Skull Press, 2004. | PPBK2006 | SLJ ,51(1), 2005 |
| Blume, Judy. Forever . Simon Pulse, 2007. | PPBK2008 | Not Found |
| Booth, Coe. Bronxwood. Scholastic/Push, 2011. | QP2012 | SLJ, 57(10) 2011 |
| Booth, Coe. Kendra. Scholastic, 2008. | QP2009 | SLJ, 54(10), 2008 |
| Boyer, David. Kings and Queens: Queers at the Prom. Soft Skull Press, 2004. | PPBK2006 | LJ,129(16), 2004 |
| Boylan, Jennifer Finney. She's Not There: A Life in Two Genders. Broadway, 2004. | PPBK2006 | Not Found |
| Brian, Kate. The Virginity Club . Simon Pulse, 2005. | PPBK2008 | Not Found |
| Brown, Jennifer. Bitter End. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2011. | BFYA2012 | SLJ, 57(4), 2011 |
| Burd, Nick. The Vast Fields of Ordinary. Speak Publishing 2011. | Stonewall 2010 | SLJ, 55(6), 2009 |
| Burgess, Melvin. Doing It . henry Holt & Company, 2006. | PPBK2008 | SLJ ,50(6), 2004 |
| Byrd, A.J. Losing Romeo (BFF Novel). Kimani Press, 2010. | QP2011 | Not Found |
| Cabot, Meg. Ready or Not . HarperTeen, 2007. | PPBK2008 | SLJ,55(2), 2009 |
| Cart, Michael. Love and Sex, Ten Stories of Truth. Simon Pulse Publishing, 2003. | QP2002 | SLJ, 47(6), 2001 |
| Chambers, Aiden. Dance on my Grave. Amulet Books, 1982. | BBYA | SLJ, 30(1), 1983 |
| Cohn, Rachel. Gingerbread. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2003. | QP2003 | SLJ, 51(12), 2005 |
| Conley, Erin. Kiss: a Girl's Guide to Puckering Up. Zest/Orange Avenue Publishing, 2009. | QP2011 | Not Found |
| Corinna, Heather. S.E.X.: The All-you-need-to-know Progressive Sexuality Guide to Get You through High School and College. Da Capo Press, 2007. | Not Found | Not Found |
| Daniels, Babygirl. Glitter (series #4). Urban Books, 2009. | QP2010 | Not Found |
| Davidson, Dana. Played . Jump at the Sun, 2007. | PPBK2008 | SLJ, 52(6), 2006 |
| De Oliveira, Eddie, Lucky. Scholastic, 2004. | PPBK2006 | Not Found |
| Deal With It: A Whole New Approach to Your Body, Brain and Life as a gurl. Pocket, 1999. | QP2001 | Not Found |
| Dessen, Sarah. Someone Like You. Puffin Books. 2004. | BBYA1999 | SLJ, 44(5), 2004 |
| Divine, L. Drama High # 6: Courtin' Jayd. Dafina/Kensington, 2008. | QP2010 | Not Found |

| Downham, Jenny. You Against Me. Random House Children's Books/David Fickling Books, 2011. | BFYA2012 | SLJ, 57(11), 2011 |
|---|----------------|-------------------|
| Efaw , Amy. After. Viking Juvenile, 2009. | QP2010 | SLJ, 55(9), 2009 |
| Elkeles, Simone. Return to Paradise. Llewellyn/Flux, 2010. | QP2011 | SLJ, 56(11), 2010 |
| Elkeles, Simone. Rules of Attraction: A Perfect Chemistry Novel. Bloomsbury/Walker, 2010. | QP2011 | SLJ, 56(5), 2010 |
| Freymann-Weyr, Garret. My Heartbeat. Puffin, 2003. | PPBK2006 | SLJ, 49(10), 2003 |
| Fricke, Aaron. Reflections of a Rock Lobster: A story about | PPBK1997 | SLJ, 28(2), 1981 |
| Growing up Gay. Alyson Books, 2000. | | |
| From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun. Scholastic, 2003. | PPBK2006 | SLJ, 71(4), 1995 |
| Garden, Nancy. Annie on my Mind. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007. | ALABestBk1983 | SLJ, 55(6), 2009 |
| Giles, Gail. Dark Song. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2010. | QP2011 | SLJ, 56(10), 2010 |
| Grant, Cynthia. White Horse. Simon Pulse, 2000. | QP1999 | SLJ, 44(12), 1998 |
| Greenman, Catherine. Hooked. Random House/Delacorte, 2011. | QP2012 | SLJ, 57(10) 2011 |
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| Hasler, Nikol. Sex: A Book for Teens: An Uncensored Guide to Your Body, Sex and Safety. Zest/Orange Avenue Publishing, 2010. | QP2011 | SLJ, 57(2), 2011 |
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| High, Linda Oatman. Planet Pregnancy. Boyds Mills Press, 2008. | QP2009 | SLJ, 54(12), 2008 |
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| Howe, James. The Misfits. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2003. | PPBK2005 | SLJ, 49(7), 2003 |
| Howe, James. Totally Joe. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2007. | ALANotable2006 | SLJ, 51(11), 2005 |
| Hrdlitshcka, Shelley. Dancing Naked. Orca Book Publishers, 2002. | QP2003 | SLJ, 48(3), 2002 |
| Huegel, Kelly. GLBTQ*: The Survival Guide for Queer and Questioning Teens *(Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning). Free Spirit, 2004. | PPBK2006 | SLJ, 49(12), 2003 |
| Johnson, Angela. The First Part Last. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2010. | BFYA2004 | SLJ, 51(2), 2005 |
| Johnson, Maureen. The Bermudez Triangle. Razorbill, 2005. | PPBK2006 | Not Found |
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| Wittlinger, Ellen. Love & Lies: Marisol's Story. Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2009. | RBOW2009 | SLJ, 54(8), 2008 |
| Woodson, Jacqueline. The House You Pass on the Way. Puffin, 2003. | PPBK2006 | SLJ, 43(10),1997 |

Codes:

BIBR: Black Issues Book Review

BL: Booklist KR: Kirkus

LJ: Library Journal

BBYA: Best Books for Young Adults ALA YALSA BFYA: Best Fiction for Young Adults ALA YALSA NYPL: NYPL Books (or Stuff) for the Teen Age

PPBK: Popular Paperbacks for Young Adults ALA YALSA

QP: Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers ALA YALSA

RBOW= ALA Rainbow Booklist

STPTOE = Corretta Scott King John Steptoe New Talent

Other Lists of Interest:

Austin Public Library African American Teen Fiction:

http://www.connectedyouth.org/books/index.cfm?booklist=afam

Austin Public Library Teen Parents:

http://www.connectedyouth.org/books/index.cfm?booklist=teenparents

Austin Public Library GLBTQ:

http://www.connectedyouth.org/books/index.cfm?booklist=glbtq

ALA GLBT Round Table:

http://glbtrt.ala.org/rainbowbooks/

Hennepin County Library Sex 101:

http://www.hclib.org/pub/bookspace/BooklistAction.cfm?list_num=124