

Mrs. Pamalee Canterbury  
214 Richmond Ct.  
Coppell, TX 75019

Friday, January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Dear Mrs. Canterbury,

Thank you for sharing your concerns with us regarding the book *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe. Per our process for reconsideration requests (described in the Library's collection development guidelines, which were provided to you), I have reviewed your request with Library staff members who oversee collection development and programming for teens and adults, and am writing to share with you the results of our review.

The Cozby Library first added the book to its collection in January 2020, on the basis that it met the following criteria, set forth in the collection development guidelines:

- The work and its subject matter were of contemporary significance and popular interest, as determined by circulation activity of other collection materials on related topics and/or in similar genres.
- The work is accurate and objective in that the narrative of the memoir is enhanced with scientifically-based information and references to reliable resources for further reading.
- The work is comprehensive in depth of topic treatment, covering relevant experiences in Kobabe's life from childhood through adulthood.
- The work is clear and logical in its presentation.
- The topic (lived experiences of nonbinary persons) was relevant to existing materials already in the collection.
- Prior to the time of purchase, Kobabe had an established reputation in the field of comics and graphic novels. Kobabe previously had six pieces featured in published comic anthologies, and in 2016 was nominated by peers in the comics, cartooning, and graphic novel industry for an Ignatz Award in the Promising New Talent category.
- The work was published in a format compatible with existing collections, and was available for purchase through the Library's established procurement methods and within its budgetary constraints.

Library staff also consider professional reviews, awards, and credentials in the process of selecting materials for the collection. Prior to its addition to the Cozby Library collection, *Gender Queer* had received favorable reviews in *Publisher's Weekly* (February 2019) and *Shelf Awareness* (June 2019), as well as a "starred" review in *School Library Journal* (July 2019), which SLJ awards to books deemed outstanding examples of a particular genre or format. The book was nominated for a 2019 Ignatz Award, conferred by the comics, cartooning, and graphic novel industry to recognize outstanding achievements in the field. It was also included in the 2020 Maverick Graphic Novel Reading List, a recommended reading list developed by public and school librarians from the Young Adult Round Table of the Texas Library Association, to encourage students in grades 6-12 to explore a variety of current books.

After being added to the Library's collection, the book went on to earn two further awards in 2020: the Alex Award, conferred by the Young Adult Library Services Association to books that appeal particularly to teens, and the Stonewall Book Award-Israel Fishman Non-Fiction Award, conferred by the American Library Association to English-language nonfiction works of merit relating to the LGBTQIA+ experience.

In December 2021, Library staff observed an increase in hold requests for the title, and added a second copy of the book to the collection as a response to growing demand. As of the date of this letter, both copies of the book have been borrowed a combined total of 16 times over a span of almost two years.

In your request for reconsideration, you indicated your primary concern as being that the book is "pornographic material which by law is illegal," which I have discussed with the City's attorney. To qualify as pornography, a work must explicitly depict erotic behavior with the purpose of causing sexual excitement. Kobabe has stated publicly that the intent of the work is to provide a firsthand account of experiences growing up as a nonbinary person. Furthermore, explicit depiction of sexual content comprises a small percentage of the body of the work, and is not indicative of the dominant theme of the work as a whole.

For a work to be illegal, it must qualify as obscene or harmful to minors, as defined by US Code Title 18, Chapter 71, or Texas Penal Code Chapter 43, Subchapter B. In both codes, the applicable standards are based on the three-part test established in *Miller v. California* (1973). While some readers may find the book's sexual content offensive, the work, taken as a whole, is found to have "literary, artistic, political and/or scientific merit," and does not appeal to the prurient interest in sex. It therefore does not qualify as obscene or harmful to minors, and its inclusion in a public library collection is not illegal.

You also list, in your request, several specific instances in the plot of the book to which you object. As acknowledged in our collection development guidelines, the Library has a responsibility to collect materials expressing a variety of views and opinions, including those which some may find personally disagreeable or offensive.

To be clear, the Library recognizes the right of parents and guardians to promote their own beliefs and values within their respective households, as well as their responsibility for the reading, viewing, and listening choices of their children. Indeed, we encourage parents and guardians to talk with their children about their reading and learning interests.

However, the Cozby Library must serve the entire Coppell community, and cannot withhold material from the collection solely on the basis that some part of the community may find it disagreeable, objectionable, or offensive. No one set of beliefs or values can serve as the lens for developing a well-rounded library collection, which is why libraries use selection criteria in the first place, established in policies developed and implemented in coordination with members of the very community they serve.

In conclusion, we find that *Gender Queer's* inclusion in the Cozby Library collection is in accordance with the Library's collection development guidelines, and is permitted within state and federal laws. We determine, therefore, that it should remain in the collection, and should only be removed based on criteria listed in the "Collection Maintenance" section of the guidelines.

If, upon reviewing this letter, you are not in agreement with staff's conclusion, you may choose to continue your request by asking in writing that it be considered by the Materials Review Committee at a

meeting of the Library Advisory Board. You will then be notified of the meeting at which your request will be considered, and you will be invited to attend. The committee's decision will be final.

Thank you for taking an active interest in the Library's resources. Please feel free to contact me with any further questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Quinn', written in a cursive style.

Dennis Quinn, MSLS  
Director of Library Services  
Cozby Library and Community Commons  
177 N Hartz Road  
Coppell, TX 75019