



Inappropriate for Any Age – Ban It Forever!

2016 Annual Challenges Survey: Preliminary Report

Now in its 11th iteration, the Annual Challenges Survey is, for the first time, under the auspices of the Canadian Federation of Library Associations- Fédération canadienne des associations de bibliothèques (CFLA-FCAB). This survey creates a national snapshot of the nature and outcomes of requests to censor expressive content in publicly-funded Canadian libraries. It includes information about how library staff respond to pressures to remove, restrict, relocate, or label library materials deemed objectionable; which materials are targeted; by whom; and how challenges are resolved. Challenges include disputes about Internet access, library meeting rooms, speakers, library displays, library programs, or other matters that would prevent or restrict access to titles, collections, other resources, or services.

To date, libraries in four provinces (BC, AB, ON, QC) have reported more than 30 requests to censor materials held in collections, resources, or services. All of these challenges were initiated in public libraries, primarily by library users and customers, with a few coming from parents or guardians, community groups, and a staff member. The majority of concerns were about books and DVDs intended for adults; less than one-quarter were to children's or young adult materials, principally graphic novels and comics.

Individual titles were the most frequently targeted, but several challenges were also reported to Intellectual Freedom Access policies. More sweeping in consequence, access policy challenges took various forms in 2016:

- three complaints were lodged about library displays
- two complaints each were about library labelling policy, library shelf location, library programs, and children's Internet access in libraries
- one complaint was to a library collections policy that permitted the acquisition of purportedly violent and sexually explicit graphic novels for teenagers.

The reasons given to justify censorship requests varied widely and appeared to be prompted by concerns from both the left and the right on the traditional

cultural spectra. For example, one complainant was offended by the inclusion of “Queer Lit” as a book category choice in the library's teen summer reading game, arguing that, “There is a difference between showing respect for all peoples and using the summer reading program as a place to further LGBTQ propaganda. My son recognizes that there are people who choose to live this lifestyle, however it is not a healthy lifestyle to promote to our youth, and it is contrary to God's plan for human sexuality, love + marriage.” In contrast, another complainant was concerned that a book defending heterosexual marriage appeared to represent an attack on homosexuality and same sex marriage.

Overall, two-thirds of the challenges were prompted by concerns about explicit sexuality, violence, age appropriateness, and nudity. Three challenges targeted titles deemed to be “inappropriate for any age,” insensitive, racist, or about homosexuality. Others related to diverse claims of inaccuracy, offensive language, religious viewpoint, sex education, and suicide.

Three-quarters of complainants wanted the offending materials withdrawn completely from library collections, with other calls for items to be relocated, restricted, or labelled. One complainant wanted an item removed from the library and the “local police pornography unit” notified. Another wanted an item shelved behind the counter and made available only upon request (effectively eliminating choice and privacy, an action akin to banning). Other complainants wanted offending items either relocated to a higher age range or labelled with a warning or advisory sticker. One wanted the library to add a warning to parents about slander and its effects. Another requested that all books “with homosexual content” be labelled and relocated to a restricted special area marked with a rainbow “so that children, as well as adults, do not happen upon it unwillingly.”

After careful review and reconsideration, library staff retained most of the targeted materials without change in status, but in one case a title was withdrawn; in another case an item was restricted; in another the circulating copy was withdrawn and placed in the library’s local history collection; and in four cases the titles were relocated to higher level age categories.

While library staff retained most materials without a change in status, complaints about collections and access policies are never dismissed lightly. Every request for reconsideration of an offending title or library policy was investigated and decisions were guided by thorough research and the Canadian library profession’s [Statement on Intellectual Freedom and Libraries](#) (en

français, [Déclaration sur la liberté intellectuelle et les bibliothèques](#)). One example is a library's response to a customer who was unhappy with the influence of the library's Pride month display on their children and wanted it removed. The library manager met with the complainant and explained it was Pride month, with library displays showcasing the collection and reflecting community diversity and inclusiveness. The manager also asked what type of displays the complainant would like to see, and part of a later display focused on that subject matter. But the Pride display was not removed.

A complete list of materials and services challenged in 2016 that have been reported to date is appended to the end of this report.

It is important to note that survey findings are based on voluntary reports by libraries; not all libraries choose to participate, so the challenges snapshot is always going to be representative rather than an exact measure of the total number of challenges to Intellectual Freedom in Canada. However, documenting and reporting these incidents is one way in which publicly-funded Canadian libraries, whether public, school, post-secondary, or government, demonstrate their commitment to public accountability and institutional transparency.

The final report of the survey findings will be released by CFLA-FCAB in the summer of 2017 with a comprehensive database of challenged titles and policies; previous survey databases are available on request.

****NOTE** The survey will remain open until March 31st.** Libraries still have time to contribute to the national story of how library staff across Canada grappled last year with pressures to remove, reclassify, relocate, restrict, or label materials deemed objectionable, and how they responded to calls for changes to existing library access policies related to intellectual freedom. Further information and questions should be addressed to Alvin M. Schrader, Survey Administrator 2017, at alvin.schrader@ualberta.ca.

Library Materials Challenged in 2016

Books, Graphic Novels, and Comics

Arrida, by Samuel Archibald

Blankets, by Craig Thompson

Cage of Eden, vols. 4 and 5, by Yoshinobu Yamada

Filthy Rich: A Powerful Billionaire, the Sex Scandal that Undid Him, and All the Justice that Money Can Buy, by James Patterson, John Connolly with Tim Malloy

Graveyard Book, vol. 1, illustrated by P. Craig Russell

Ma soeur veut un zizi, by Fabrice Boulanger

Mrs. Lilly Is Silly, by Dan Gutman, in the "My Weirder School" children's series

One Man, One Woman: A Catholic's Guide to Defending Marriage, by Dale O'Leary

Robert Mapplethorpe: The Photographs, by Paul Martineau and Britt Salvesen

Thank You, Jeeves, by P. G. Wodehouse

The Gay Man's Kama Sutra, by Terry Sanderson

The People vs Muhammad: Psychological Analysis, by J. K. Sheindlin

The Scorpion Rules, by Erin Bow, in the Prisoners of Peace young adult series

Tintin Au Congo, by Hergé

Tut, Tut, Victoria!, by Ed Gould

Magazines

GQ cover of July 2016 issue

Sports Illustrated (2016 swimsuit edition)

CD booklet

"Hammer of the Witches" (images in the CD liner notes booklet), by Cradle of Filth

DVDs

"Alice: Primera Temporada," DVD, directed by Karim Aïnouz and Sérgio Machado, 15 titles in a television series and 2 films

"Child of God," DVD, directed by James Franco

"Fifty Shades of Grey," DVD, directed by Sam Taylor-Johnson

"For Those in Peril," DVD, directed by Paul Wright

"Me Before You," DVD, directed by Thea Sharrock

"Old Dog" DVD, by Pema Tseden

Library Access Policies Challenged in 2016

Library Collections

- One complainant wanted all young adult graphic novels similar to *Cage of Eden* by Yoshinobu Yamada – deemed “inappropriate for any age” and full of explicit sexuality, violence (extreme), collective rape, collective murders, blood from beginning to end – “banned forever from library shelves.”

Library Labelling

- One complainant wanted all library materials, including movies, that contained nudity and sexuality, such as *The Gay Man’s Kama Sutra*, by Terry Sanderson, to be labelled appropriately “so that children, as well as adults, do not happen upon it unwillingly.” The complaint was prompted by the library’s display of new materials, including this particular title, in a high traffic area, and also involved a request to relocate such items.
- A similar challenge to label library materials was received by the same library a few days after the first, probably by the same patron, who complained to a community group about an item that was purchased for the library with its funding entitled *The Scorpion Rules*, by Erin Bow, in the *Prisoners of Peace* young adult series. The complainant regarded the title to be age inappropriate because it contained “a bi-sexual sex scene not alluded to on the cover.” But the complaint went much further, seeking to have “all books with homosexual content” labelled appropriately “so that children, as well as adults, do not happen upon it unwillingly.” This policy challenge was also directed at the library’s shelf location policy.

Library Shelf Location

- This complainant, referenced above, wanted all library materials, including movies, that contained nudity and sexuality, such as *The Gay Man’s Kama Sutra*, by Terry Sanderson, to be relocated to a special area reserved for adults 18+ The complaint was prompted by the library’s display of new materials, including this title, in a high traffic area, and also involved a request to label such materials.
- A similar challenge to relocate library materials was received by the same library a few days after the first, probably by the same patron, who complained to a community group about an item that was purchased for the library with its funding entitled *The Scorpion Rules*, by Erin Bow, in the *Prisoners of Peace* young adult series. The complainant regarded the title to be age inappropriate because it contained “a bi-sexual sex scene not alluded to on the cover” and sought to have “all books with homosexual content”

relocated preferably to a specific shelf marked with a rainbow in a special area reserved for adults 18+. This policy challenge was also directed at the library's labelling policy.

Library Displays

- This challenge, referenced above, was to a book containing nudity and sexuality, *The Gay Man's Kama Sutra*, by Terry Sanderson, that was on display as part of the library's new materials section in a high traffic area. The complaint was also directed at the library's shelf location and content labelling policies.
- One customer was unhappy with the influence of the library's Pride month display on their children, and asked that the library remove it and focus on displays of "less controversial subject matter" that did not "push an agenda set forth by the municipality."
- A parent wanted the "Queer Lit" booklist removed from the brochures display in the library's teen area.

Library Programming

- A parent felt offended by the inclusion of “Queer Lit” as a book category choice in the library's teen summer reading game, arguing that, “There is a difference between showing respect for all peoples and using the summer reading program as a place to further LGBTQ propaganda. My son recognizes that there are people who choose to live this lifestyle, however it is not a healthy lifestyle to promote to our youth, and it is contrary to God's plan for human sexuality, love + marriage.” The complainant wanted the Queer Lit category removed from the reading game choices.
- The challenge was against a program “Wicca 101” being offered at the library. A minister and members of their congregation did not feel this was a topic that should be presented at the library. A resident objected to the library's presentation of ZooTek, a travelling zoo of exotic animals, as a performance for children in the summer, felt that such shows are inherently harmful to animal welfare. They wanted the library to promise never to have travelling zoo type shows in the future, and asked for evidence that ZooTek was in compliance with an applicable standard or law, presenting standards from animal welfare organizations in other provinces.

Library Internet Access

- A library received a number of challenges from both patrons and staff to child-designated computers in the children's area, wanting them removed.
- A patron challenged library policy on Internet access for children after witnessing children playing "violent" games online, and further inquired as to whether the volume of these games could be turned down; but what she appeared to be asking was for a ban on violent video games at Internet stations. (What was unspoken was that the library does not apply filtering software to Internet stations, so even those things that are against library policy (illegal activity and viewing or sharing obscenity) are only enforced by observation and possible banning of the offender.)