

CHALLENGED MATERIALS IN COLORADO PUBLIC LIBRARIES, 2003

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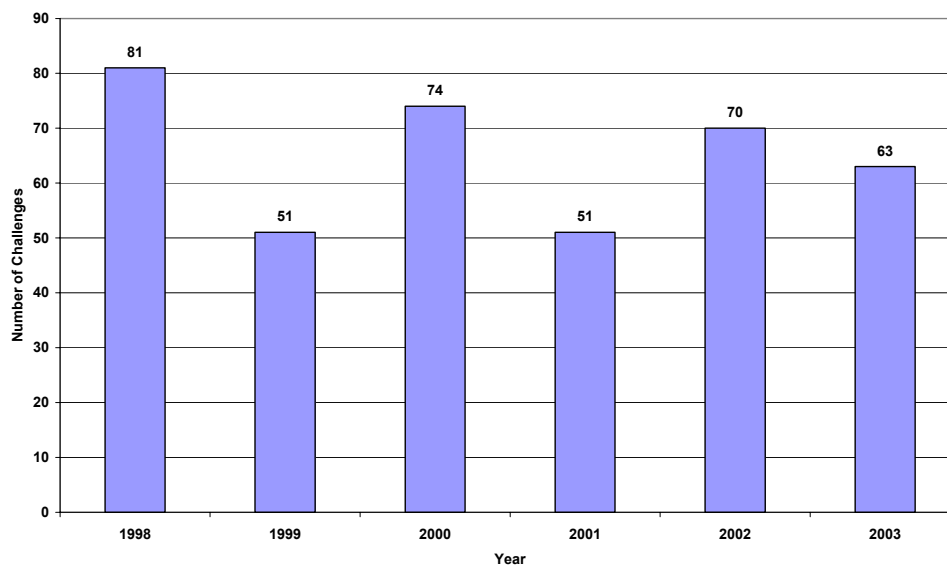
The American Library Association defines a challenge as: “an attempt to remove or restrict materials, based upon the objections of a person or group...Challenges do not simply involve a person expressing a point of view, rather they are an attempt to remove material from the curriculum or library, thereby restricting the access of others.”

Each year, the **Library Research Service** collects data on formally challenged materials as a part of the Colorado Public Library Annual Survey. In 2003, 20 Colorado libraries reported 63 challenges to books, materials, events, and exhibits. The number of challenges represents a reduction from the 70 reported in 2002, although the number of libraries reporting these challenges increased from 16 to 20. The number of materials, events, and exhibits challenges reported in 2003 was slightly below the average of 65 occurrences for the preceding five-year period (see Chart 1).

Highlights

- *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture* by Michael A. Bellesiles was the most challenged title in Colorado’s public libraries during 2003.
- Three reasons for challenges accounted for nearly half (45%) of reported objections: offensive language, unsuited to age group, and sexually explicit.
- Young adult materials represented a larger proportion of challenges in 2003 than in previous years.

Chart 1: Number of Challenges Reported by Colorado Public Libraries 1998-2003



Challenges to Internet content or access policies were also noted as a part of the 2003 survey. Six Colorado public libraries reported a total of 12 challenges to these services, a reduction of 59% from the 2002 total of 29 Internet-related challenges.

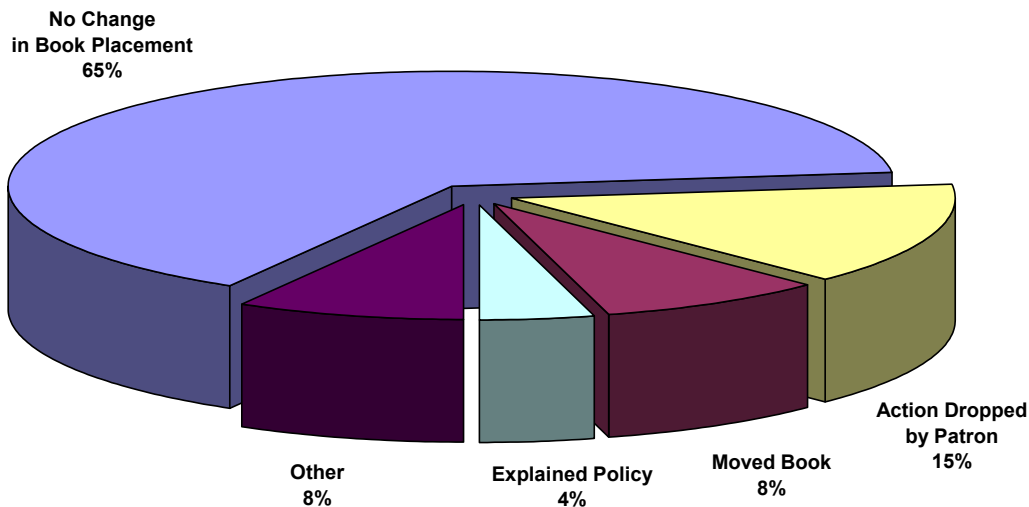


A follow-up survey was distributed to libraries that had reported challenges. The survey requested more detailed information about the nature of each challenge, including format, title, author, date of publication/incidence, and reasons reported for each challenge, as well as any actions that may have been taken by the library in response. Of the 21 libraries that had reported challenges of any kind, 15 responded to the follow-up survey, providing detailed information on 53 of the 75 total challenges related to materials, events, exhibits, and Internet access.

Actions

Actions taken by Colorado public libraries in response to formal challenges are summarized in Chart 2. Of the 48 non-Internet challenges reported in the follow-up survey, 31 (65%) resulted in no change being made by staff regarding the location, availability, description, or classification of an item. In seven cases (14% of the total), the action was dropped by the individual who filed the challenge before the library took official action on the matter in question. Four challenges (8% of the total) resulted in an item being moved to an alternate location in the library. One challenge resulted in the re-classification of an item, while one other challenge prompted a change in the description of the item in the library's online catalog. In an additional challenge case, a title was added to a library's collection in order to provide an opposing viewpoint. There were two reported incidents (4%) in which library staff members resolved challenge situations by explaining institutional policies to patrons.

**Chart 2: Actions Taken by Colorado Public Libraries
in Response to Formal Challenges
2003**



Of the five Internet related challenges listed in the follow-up survey, three resulted in filtering software being installed on at least one library computer.

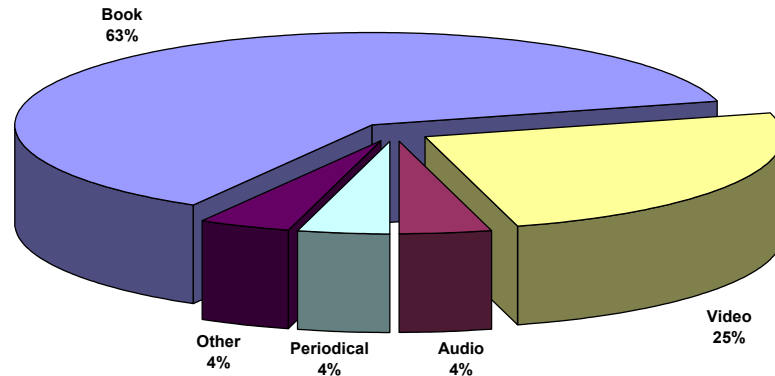


Overall, formal challenges prompted changes to availability, location, classification, description, or access policy in 9 of the 53 cases (17%) detailed in the follow-up survey, while 44 of 53 challenges (83%) resulted in no action taken by library staff that specifically impacted the item or service in question.

Formats

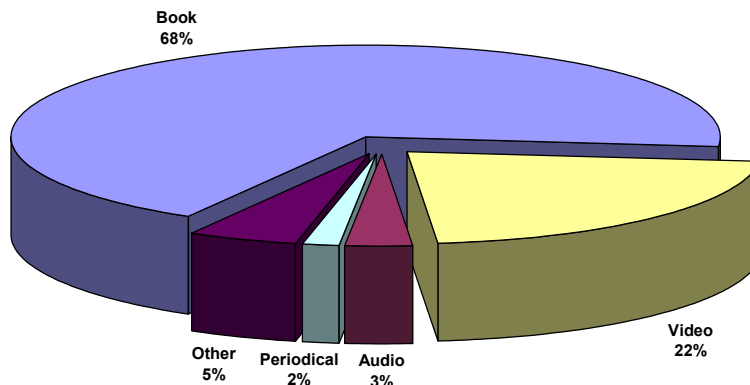
Books continued to be the most challenged format in Colorado public libraries in 2003. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of formal non-Internet related challenges were directed at books, while a quarter of challenges (25%) concerned video titles. Challenges involving periodicals, audio titles, and other/miscellaneous (e.g. unspecified) formats accounted for the remaining eighth (12.5%) of occurrences (see Chart 3).

Chart 3: Format of Non-Internet Materials Challenges in Colorado Public Libraries 2003



The percentages of formal challenges by format for 2003 did not reflect radical changes in the historical distribution of challenge episodes over the preceding five years. There were,

Chart 4: Format of Non-Internet Materials Challenged in Colorado Public Libraries 1998-2002



however, some interesting statistical shifts. While books continued to be the most frequently challenged format, the percentage of challenges directed at books in 2003 (63%) was lower than the preceding five-year average of 68 percent. The majority of this 5 percent decrease from the historical average can be attributed to an increase in the proportion of challenges that were



related to video titles, which jumped from an historical average of 22 percent (1998-2002) to 25 percent in 2003. Slight increases in percentages of challenges concerning audio and magazine titles account for the rest of the difference (see Chart 4).

Audience/Age Group

Forty-nine percent of challenges in Colorado public libraries concerned adult or general audience materials. Children's materials accounted the next highest proportion at 34 percent, while young adult titles made up 13 percent of the total (see Chart 5). These proportions are comparable with figures from the preceding five-year period, although young adult titles contributed a larger share of reported challenges in 2003 (13%) than during the previous five years (an average of 6%) (see Chart 6).

Chart 5: Challenges to Materials in Colorado Public Libraries by Audience/Age Group 2003

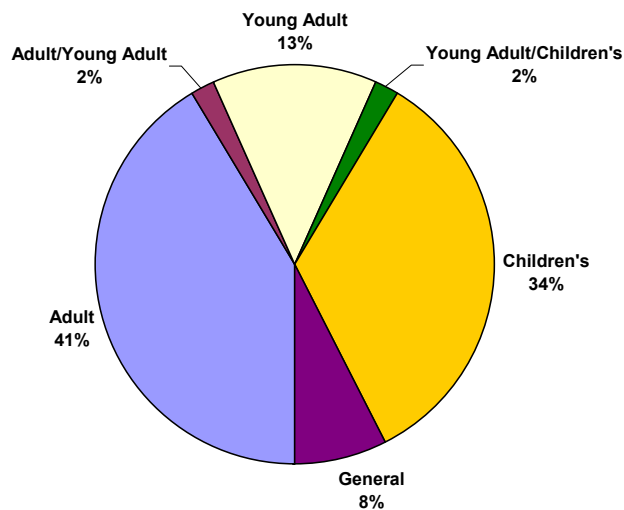
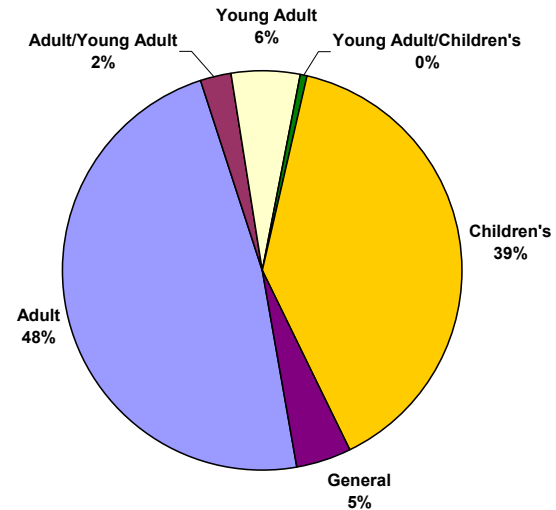


Chart 6: Challenges to Materials in Colorado Public Libraries by Audience/Age Group 1998-2002



Reasons for Challenges

When reporting details related to challenges in 2003, libraries often cited multiple reasons for a single challenge. Three reasons for challenges accounted for nearly half (45%) of the reported objections: offensive language, unsuited to age group, and sexually explicit. Reported frequencies of reasons for challenges are listed in Table 1.

It should be noted that the "other" category included all responses that were not listed on the follow-up survey, including issues relating to writing quality and accuracy of materials. The category also includes instances in which no specific reason was given for a challenge.



**Table 1:
Frequencies of Reasons for
Challenges Reported by Colorado
Public Libraries, 2003**

Reason	Frequency
Offensive Language	13
Unsuited to Age Group	12
Sexually Explicit	11
Other	9
Nudity	8
Violence	8
Homosexuality	5
Insensitivity	3
Occult/Satanism	2
Political Viewpoint	2
Sex Education	2
Anti-Family	1
Drugs	1
Racism	1
Religious Viewpoint	1
Sexism	1

Challenged Titles

The most challenged title of the year was *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture* by Michael A. Bellesiles, which was formally challenged five times during 2003. Bellesiles' book, first published in 2000, was also challenged once during 2002, making it the most challenged book in Colorado public libraries during the last five years (1999 through 2003) with six total challenges. The most frequently cited reason for challenges to this title was "political viewpoint" (three occurrences).

Over the past five years, only two other titles have been challenged more than three times in Colorado public libraries. Richard Cohen's book *Alfie's Home* has been challenged four times, with the most common complaint being "unsuitable to age group" (three occurrences). *It's Perfectly Normal: A Book About Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex, and Sexual Health* by Robie H. Harris was also challenged four times during this time span, with the objection "sexually explicit" being cited in each formal challenge.

Only one additional title was challenged on multiple occasions during 2003. The video for James Foley's

1992 film version of *Glengarry Glen Ross* (based on the play by David Mamet) was challenged twice. On each occasion, "offensive language" was cited as the reason for the challenge.

Other Intellectual Challenge Resources

For more information on challenge policies and challenged titles, see the following resources:

Colorado Association of Libraries: Intellectual Freedom Handbook
<http://www.cal-webs.org/ifhandbook.html>

American Library Association: Intellectual Freedom/Censorship
<http://www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=if>

The 100 Most Frequently Challenged Books of 1990-200 (ALA):
<http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/bannedbooksweek/bbwlinks/100mostfrequently.htm>

Support for Dealing with or Reporting Challenges to Library Materials (ALA):
<http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/challengesupport/challengesupport.htm>

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