

# CHALLENGED MATERIALS IN COLORADO PUBLIC LIBRARIES, 2004

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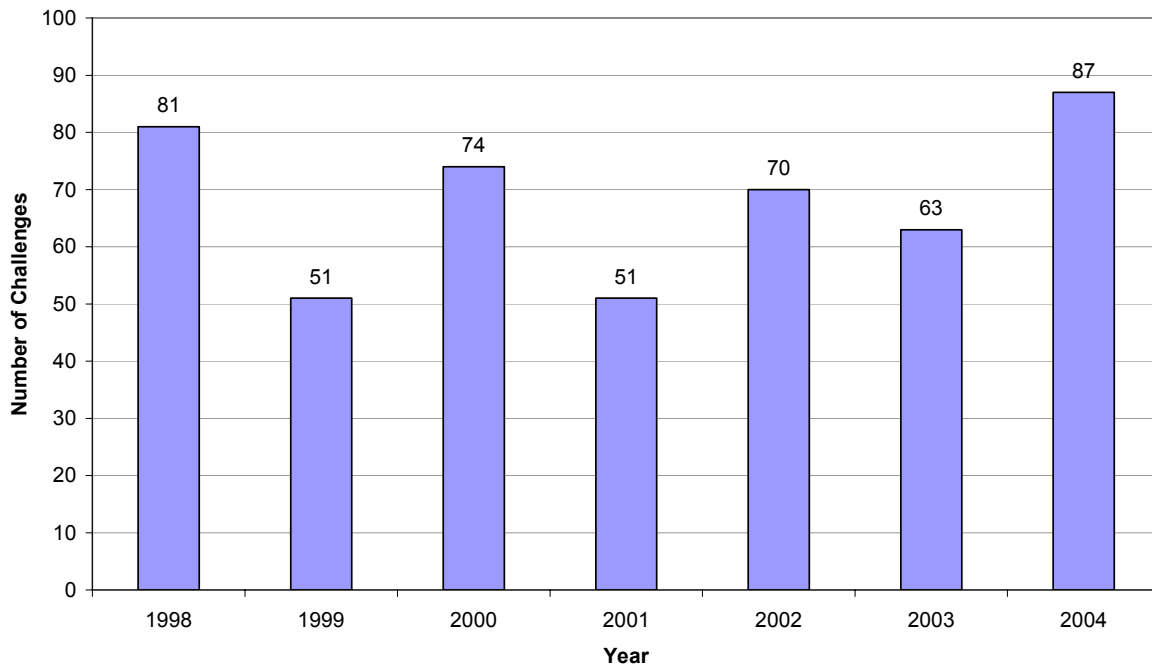
As a part of its annual survey of Colorado’s public libraries, the **Library Research Service** collects data on books, periodicals, non-print materials, events, and exhibits that have received formal challenges during the previous year. A challenge – as defined by the American Library Association – consists of “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.”

In 2004, 22 Colorado libraries reported 87 challenges to books, materials, events, and exhibits. This was a marked increase from the 63 challenges reported in 2003, and represented the largest number of challenges recorded during the last seven years (see Chart 1). The number of challenges to materials, events, and exhibits reported in 2004 was also well above the average of 65 occurrences for the preceding six-year period.

## Highlights

- The video for David Lynch’s film *Blue Velvet* was the only title receiving more than one challenge in Colorado’s public libraries during 2004.
- More than one in every six (17%) challenges to books in 2004 involved graphic novels, comics, or anime titles.
- Young adult materials represented a larger proportion of challenges in 2004 than in previous years, while children’s titles accounted for a smaller percentage.

**Chart 1: Number of Challenges Reported by Colorado Public Libraries 1998-2004**



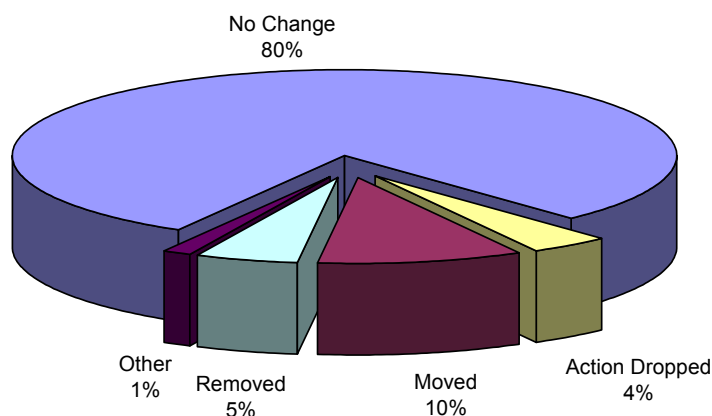
Since 2002, challenges to Internet content or access policies have been reported separately from materials and event challenges. Six Colorado public libraries reported a total of 13 challenges to these services in 2004, a near duplication of the figures from 2003 (12 challenges from six libraries), and a reduction of 59% from the 2002 total of 29 Internet-related challenges.

A follow-up questionnaire was sent to each library that reported challenges, requesting information about format, title, author, date of publication/incidence, reasons for each challenge, and actions taken by the library in response. Of the 22 libraries that had reported challenges of any kind, 20 responded to the follow-up survey. As a result detailed information was obtained for 86 of the 100 total challenges relating 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 79 non-Internet challenges reported in the follow-up survey, 63 (80%) resulted in no change being made by staff regarding the location, availability, description, or classification of an item. In eight cases (10% of the total), the item was moved to an alternate location in the library or reclassified. Four challenges (5% of the total) resulted in the removal of the item from the collection. In three cases (4% 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.

**Chart 2: Actions Taken by Colorado Public Libraries  
in Response to Formal Challenges  
2004**



Of the seven Internet-related challenges listed in the follow-up survey, three resulted in the modification of existing filtering software, while three resulted in no change to Internet policies or software configurations. In the remaining case, the action was dropped by the patron.

Overall, formal challenges prompted changes to availability, location, classification, description, or access policy in 16 of the 86 cases (19%) detailed in the follow-up survey. This figure is only

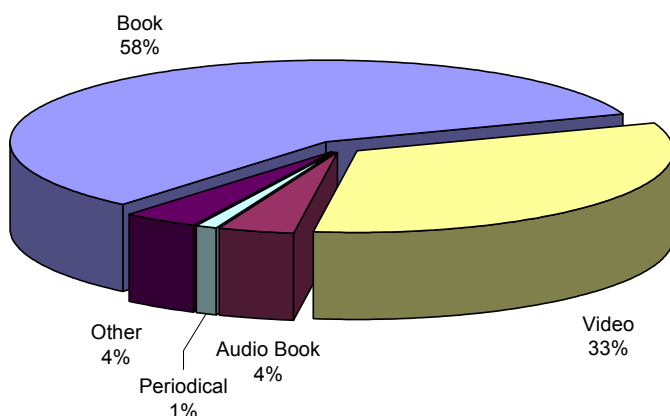


slightly higher than in 2003, when 17 percent of challenges resulted in changes in availability to materials and services.

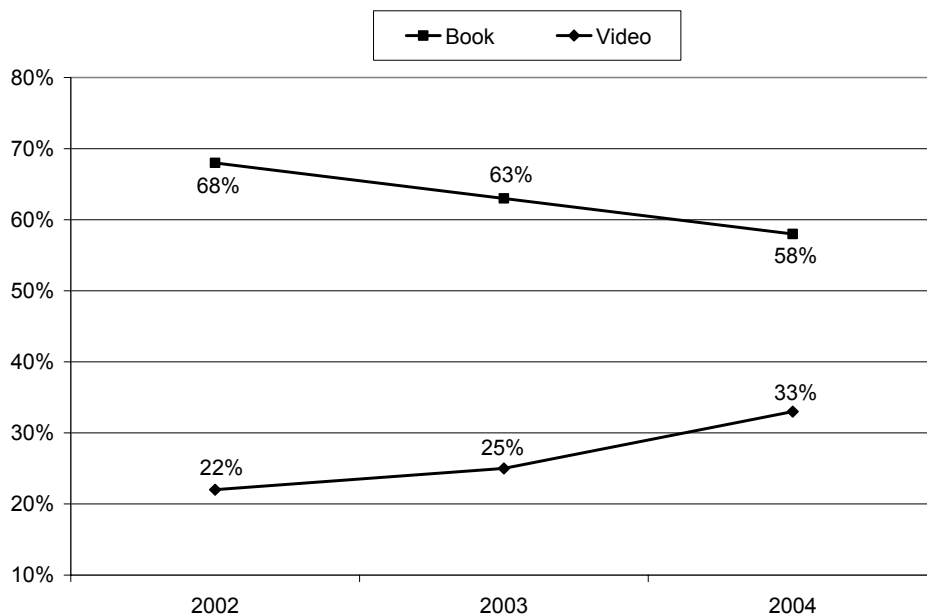
**Formats**

As in previous years, books were the most challenged format in Colorado public libraries in 2003. Over half (58%) of formal challenges unrelated to the Internet involved books, while a third of challenges (33%) were directed at video titles. Challenges involving periodicals, audio titles, and other formats (including events and programs) accounted for the about one-tenth (9%) of occurrences (see Chart 3). These figures are indicative of a continuing trend in which videos

**Chart 3: Formats of Non-Internet Materials Challenges in Colorado Public Libraries 2004**



**Chart 4: Proportion of Book & Video Challenges in Colorado Libraries, 2002-2004**

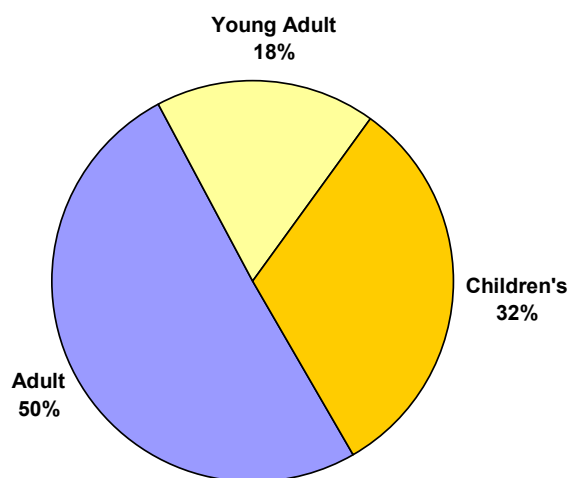


account for a greater proportion of challenged titles. While books are still the most frequently challenged format, their proportion of all non-Internet challenges fell from 68 percent of 2002's total to 63 percent in 2003, and then to 58 percent in 2004. During the same time period, the proportion of challenges to video titles increased from 22 percent of all 2002 challenges to 25 percent in 2003, and then to 33 percent in 2004 (see Chart 4).

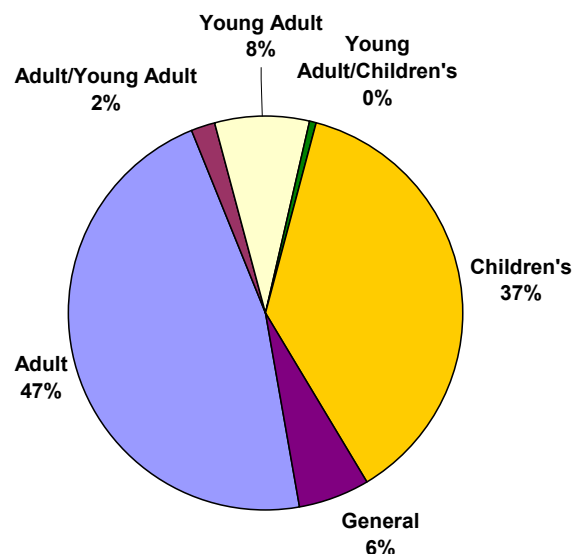
### Audience/Age Group

One half (50%) of the challenges in Colorado public libraries concerned materials classified as adult or general. Children's materials accounted the next highest proportion at 32 percent, while young adult titles made up 18 percent of the total (see Chart 5). In comparison with historical figures from the preceding five years, the proportion of challenges to adult/general materials has remained essentially unchanged (see Chart 6). The proportion of challenges to young adult titles, however, exceeded the average for the previous five-year period, while children's titles accounted for a smaller percentage than in the previous five years.

**Chart 5: Challenges to Materials in Colorado Public Libraries by Audience/Age Group 2004**



**Chart 6: Challenges to Materials in Colorado Public Libraries by Audience/Age Group 1999-2003**



### Reasons for Challenges

As has been the case in past years, multiple objections were often cited for challenges in 2004. Two reasons for challenges accounted for over half (51%) of the reported objections: sexually explicit and unsuited to age group. Reported frequencies of reasons for challenges are listed in Table 1. It should be noted that the "other" category includes all responses that were not listed on the follow-up survey, including instances in which no specific reason was given for a challenge.

### Challenged Titles

While the number of formal challenges to non-Internet materials reported by Colorado libraries increased from 63 in 2003 to 87 in 2004, no single title was responsible for producing this increase. Rather, these challenges were distributed among a vast array of individual titles. In fact, only one title – the video for David Lynch's film *Blue Velvet*, which was challenged twice – received more than one challenge in 2004.



An interesting trend, however, seems to be emerging, concerning one particular genre. More than one of every six (8 of 46) challenges in 2004 to print materials involved graphic novels, comics, or anime titles. Of these eight challenges, six were to young adult titles. In contrast, only four titles in this genre were challenged during the previous four years, three of them to young adult titles.

**Table 1:  
Frequencies of Reasons for  
Challenges Reported by Colorado  
Public Libraries, 2004**

| Reason                | Frequency |
|-----------------------|-----------|
| Sexually Explicit     | 37        |
| Unsuited to Age Group | 25        |
| Violence              | 12        |
| Offensive Language    | 11        |
| Other                 | 10        |
| Nudity                | 8         |
| Homosexuality         | 5         |
| Anti-Family           | 4         |
| Sex Education         | 3         |
| Insensitivity         | 2         |
| Occult/Satanism       | 2         |
| Religious Viewpoint   | 2         |
| Political Viewpoint   | 1         |

As mentioned above, the video for *Blue Velvet*, was challenged twice in 2004. Having been challenged three times over the past five years (2000 through 2004), *Blue Velvet* was the most frequently challenged video in Colorado libraries during this five-year period. The objection “sexually explicit” was mentioned in all of the challenges to this title.

Although it received no formal challenges in 2004, Michael Bellesiles’ book *Arming America: The Origins of a National Gun Culture* remains the most challenged title in Colorado libraries over the past five years with a total of six challenges during that time. The most frequently cited reason for challenges to this title was “political viewpoint” (three occurrences).

*It’s Perfectly Normal: A Book About Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex, and Sexual Health* by Robie H. Harris was challenged once during 2004 and has been challenged on five occasions during the past five years. The objection “sexually explicit” was mentioned in each formal challenge to Harris’ book. From 2000 through 2004, no other individual titles were challenged on more than three occasions.

### 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 1990-2000 (ALA):

<http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/bannedbookweek/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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Fast Facts – Recent Statistics from the Library Research Service

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