

Challenged Materials in Colorado Public Libraries, 2005

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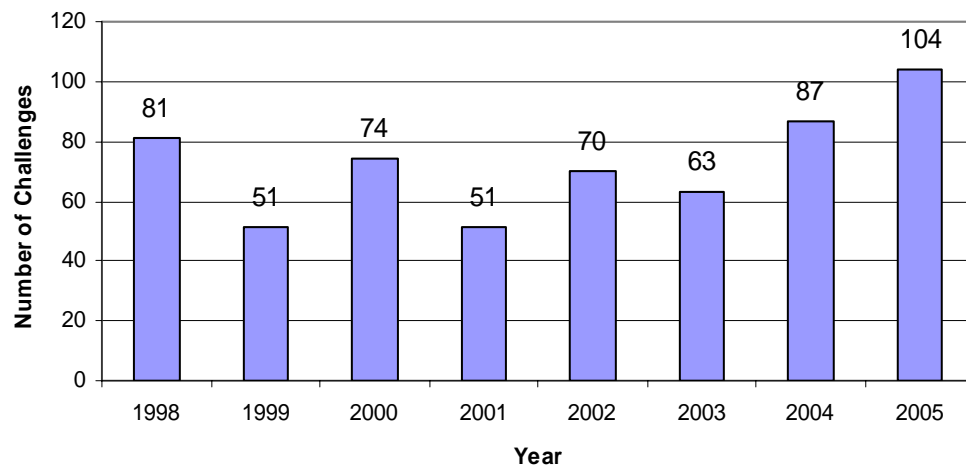
By Holly Cole

Each year the Library Research Service collects data on the state's public libraries via the Colorado Public Library Annual Report survey. A section of that survey is focused on formal challenges to materials receive by libraries throughout the year. The American Library Association (ALA) 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." In the 2005 survey, 26 public libraries from across the state reported 104 formal challenges. Seventeen (17) more challenges were reported for 2005 than for 2004, and 41 more challenges were reported for 2005 than for 2003 (see Chart 1).

Highlights

- Of all reported challenges, 21% concerned the Spanish language comics called *fotonovelas*.
- In 2005, only three items were challenged more than once at Colorado public libraries: *Oregon Trail*, *Paris Trout*, and *Angels in America*.
- By far, the most frequent reason given for challenging materials in the library was that the content is "sexually explicit."

Chart 1: Challenges Reported by Colorado Public Libraries
1998-2005





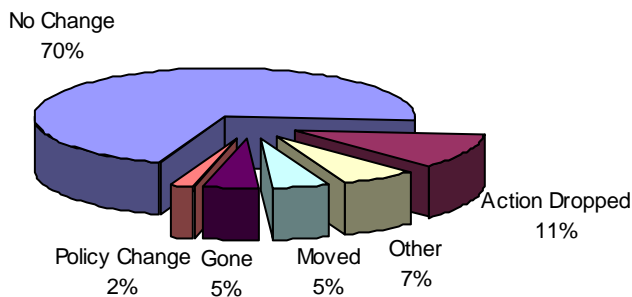
Notably, the modest decline in challenges from 2002 to 2003 (70 to 63) is most likely a consequence of cuts to spending on new items following the 2002 budget crisis. Apart from that anomaly, the number of challenges reported annually increased steadily from 2001 to 2005—more than doubling during that interval.

Libraries reporting challenges are sent a follow-up survey and are asked more specific questions about each challenge. As a result, additional information on the 1004 reported challenges was received. This information is not only used by the Library Research Service, but is also reported to the American Library Association’s Office for Intellectual Freedom to complete the picture of challenges nationwide.

Actions

There are many ways to resolve a challenge including changing a policy or removing the material from the library. However, during 2005, the majority of challenges (73 or 69%) had no action taken—meaning the items were left in the library and not moved to another section. The number of materials that had no change is higher than all the other actions combined (see Chart 2).

Chart 2: Action Taken by Colorado Public Libraries in Response to Challenges



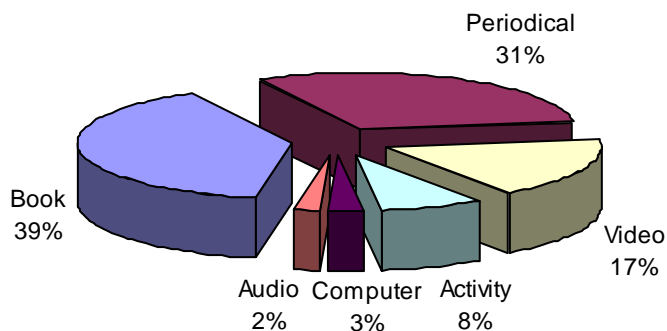
The materials that had “no change” decreased from 81% for 2004 to 70% in 2005; but, this may be explained, at least in part, by an increase in “actions dropped” from 4% in 2004 to 11% in 2005.



Formats

Among all the challenged materials, the majority focused on books (39%) followed by periodicals (31%) and videos (17%) (see Chart 3).

Chart 3: Challenged Materials by Format

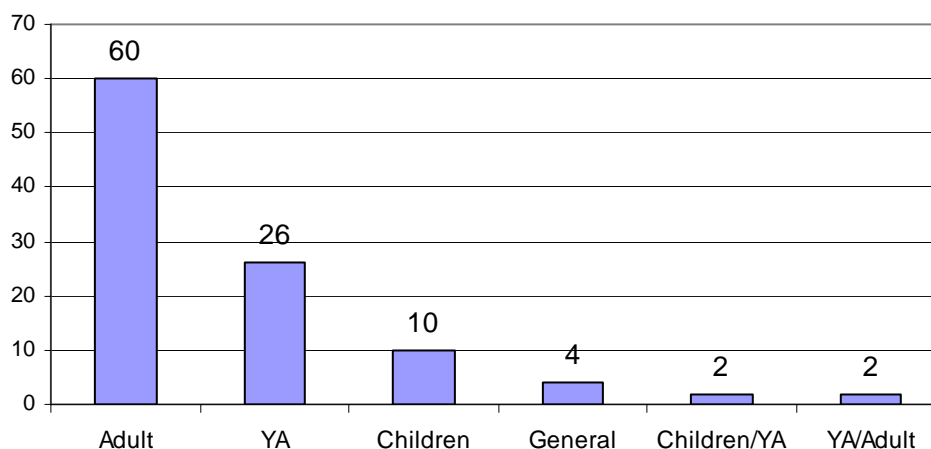


Of all challenged periodicals, 27 or 84% were the Spanish graphic novels known as *fotonovelas*, and only 5 (16%) were other types of periodicals. (As previously mentioned, 21% of *all* challenged materials were *fotonovelas*.) Activities, which comprised 8% of 2005 challenges, ranged from events put on by the library to displays on a particular topic.

Audience

Broken down by audience type, adult items were challenged the most with 60 challenges followed by young adult (YA) materials at 26 challenges (see Chart 4).

Chart 4: Challenged Materials by Audience



Compared to 2004, challenges to materials for adults and young adults increased, while challenges to materials for children decreased.



Reasons for Challenges

This year, many of the challenged items were reported for multiple reasons. Among the top reasons are that the content is

- sexually explicit (25%),
- unsuited for age group (19%), and
- contains nudity (11%).

Overall, respondents reported more than 15 different reasons why materials were challenged (see Table 1).

The majority of items were challenged only once and none of the items that had multiple challenges were books. Beyond the *fotonovelas*, only three other items (which happened to be non-print) were challenged more than once: *Oregon Trail*, *Paris Trout*, and *Angels in America*.

The children's computer game *Oregon Trail* was challenged twice during 2005. The challenges cited violence as the main objection. *Paris Trout*, directed by Stephen Gyllenhaal, was challenged twice because of nudity, violence, and being sexually explicit. Also challenged twice, *Angels in America*, directed by Tony Kushner, was challenged on the basis of its content containing nudity, homosexuality, and being sexually explicit and anti-family.

Despite the high number of challenges, none of the challenged authors were in the American Library Association's "Most Frequently Challenged Authors of 2005" list. Similarly, none of the challenged materials were in ALA's "Most Frequently Challenged Books of 2005" list. This list includes *It's Perfectly Normal*, *Forever* by Judy Blume, *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger, and *The Chocolate Wars* by Robert Cormier.

Table 1.

Frequency of Reasons for Challenges	
Sexually Explicit	61
Unsuited for Age Group	49
Nudity	26
Violence	17
Anti-Family	15
Insensitive	14
Drugs	15
Sexism	13
Abortion	13
Homosexuality	6
Offensive Language	5
Other	6
Sex Education	4
Religious Viewpoint	3
Political Viewpoint	2
Anti-ethnic	1



American Library Association: Challenged and Banned Books

<http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/bannedbooksweek/challengedbanned/challengedbanned.htm#mfcb>

American Library Association: Censorship and Challenges

<http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/ifissues/censorshipchallenges.htm>

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Fast Facts – Recent Statistics from the Library Research Service

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