

Hot Off the Presses for Freedom to Read Week....

There's Something in My Library to Offend Everybody!

Preliminary Report of the 2015 Annual Challenges Survey by the Canadian Library Association

Did your library experience any challenges to collection holdings or access policies in 2015? It's not too late to contribute to the national snapshot of how library staff responded to pressures to remove, restrict, relocate, or label library materials deemed objectionable, and how they dealt with calls to change library access policies. The survey, which is conducted annually by the CLA Intellectual Freedom Advisory Committee, remains open until **March 31, 2015** (French and English language survey links below).

Here's what we've learned so far from contributing libraries, almost all public libraries, across five provinces (BC, AB, MN, ON, and NS)...

Some 25 challenges have been reported for the 2015 survey to materials and policies. Individual titles were the most frequently targeted, but there were also two challenges to collection types or "genres" and two others to intellectual freedom-related access policies.

Challenges came from both the left and the right on the traditional political and cultural spectrum, echoing the slogan, *There's Something in My Library to Offend Everybody!*, which appeared many years ago on a sweatshirt produced by the Intellectual Freedom Committee of the British Columbia Library Association.

For example, the British documentary "Exposed," directed by Beth B., was challenged on the grounds of violence, explicit sexuality, and sexism, for a scene depicting "the soul of a sexually tormented man who is willing to mutilate his own body and to demean women as well."

A challenge was reported to "any and all books by author Meljean Brook," which should be removed because of homosexuality and explicit sexuality, and because her books are "inappropriate for any age."

Another collection challenge was to all physical and e-magazine subscriptions through the multi-platform magazine distribution service Zinio, which included Cosmopolitan, Details, Esquire, Glamour, GQ, Health, Men's Fitness, Men's Health, Redbook, Rolling Stone, SELF, Seventeen, Shape, Sports Illustrated, Teen Vogue, US Weekly, and Women's Health. The grounds were insensitivity and "the depiction of bodies that are being negatively objectified." A corollary challenge was to face-out display of these magazines on library shelves.

The most frequently mentioned reasons for challenges in 2015 were explicit sexuality, age inappropriateness, violence, insensitivity, and inaccuracy. Mentioned only once or twice were: offensive language, religious viewpoint, political viewpoint, racism, sexism, homosexuality, nudity, and inappropriate for any age.

Challenges were evenly split between titles written or produced for adults and those intended for children. The most common formats were books and graphic novels followed at a distance by DVDs.

The challenged titles reported so far in the 2015 survey are as follows (some bibliographic details subject to further verification):

- Chicken Clicking, by Jeanne Willis and Tony Ross
- Country Matters, by A.E. Coppard and H.E. Bates
- The Day I Met Jesus: The Revealing Diaries of Five Women from the Gospels, by Frank Viola and Mary Demuth
- The Graveyard I and II, by P. Craig Russell
- Hulk: Abominable, by Bruce Jones
- If I Ran the Zoo, by Dr. Seuss
- The Magic of Facial Exercise, by Cynthia Rowland
- Mistress of the Game, by Tilly Bagshawe
- The Old Testament
- The Three Musketeers (Classics Illustrated Deluxe Graphic Novel), by Alexandre Dumas, adapted by Morvan, Dufranne, Ruben, and Galopin
- Tintin in America, by Hergé
- Zeke Pippin, by William Steig

Targeted DVDs were:

- "Exposed" directed by Beth B.
- "Fifty Shades of Grey" directed by Sam Taylor-Johnson
- "Last Ounce of Courage" by Darrel Campbell and Kevin McAfee
- "Stranger by the Lake" directed by Alain Guiraudie.

Complainants, primarily library patrons or parents/guardians along with a few library staff themselves and one school administrator, generally wanted materials withdrawn from collections. There were also several calls for titles to be reclassified and relocated; a couple slated for restricted access; and one for labeling.

While the majority of reported library holdings were retained by libraries in 2015, challenges to resources and access policies are never dismissed lightly by library staff. Careful investigation is undertaken into each and every challenged item, and complainants are promptly informed of library decisions.

One example is to the library staff's response to the objection to "Exposed," categorized as an unrated documentary available in the general adult film collection, and thus not available for borrowing on a child's library card. Library staff explained to the complainant: "The library does not have the legal authority or expertise to create its own ratings or warning system or to change a film's rating." They pointed out that there is a warning statement on the DVD cover, which reads: "This film contains explicit full-frontal nudity." As well, they noted, that the description on the cover places this documentary about burlesque in the context of controversial filmmaking and performance art, challenging "our notions of gender identity, disability, and sexuality" and exposing "the contradictions inherent in our society's taboos."

Thanks to the library staff who have already reported 2015 challenges to the CLA survey. **Please note the survey will remain open until March 31st**, so you still have time to contribute (links below) to the national story of how library staff grappled last year with pressures to remove, reclassify, relocate,

restrict or label materials deemed objectionable, and how they responded to other calls for changes to existing library access policies related to intellectual freedom.

Survey results for 2015 will be posted on the CLA website along with a list of targeted titles and an anonymized database of challenges.

Survey in English: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/PWJ73ZV>

Survey in French: <https://fr.surveymonkey.com/r/5QQ5ZWM>

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