

Texas Library Workers on Censorship in the State: Implications for Practice for LGBTQIA+ Collections

Josh Salmans, Shelby Hebert, and Erin Burns

Censorship efforts, especially when geared to fight against censorship of materials for minority sexuality and gender identities, are often hindered by social, cultural, religious, administrative, and political resistance. LGBTQIA+ collections within libraries face resistance, which can come in the form of overt or covert challenges. This study examines the experiences of Texas libraries with materials and book challenges through a survey conducted in summer 2023 to discover the policies and responses to censorship attempts. It also discusses implications for practice regarding material challenge policies and proactive approaches to intellectual freedom.

Introduction

Critical librarianship asserts that libraries are not neutral and that librarians must engage with their collections in a way that incorporates social justice into library practice (McAuliffe, 2021; Brink Drescher, 2022; Mathiasson & Jochumsen, 2022). These efforts, especially when geared to fight against censorship of materials for minority sexuality and gender identities, are often hindered by social, cultural, religious, administrative, and political resistance. Queer collections within libraries have been fraught with such resistance, given that it challenges power structures and social norms (Barr-Walker & Sharifi, 2019; Bale 2017). For school and public libraries, encountering such resistance is historically familiar and expected. Many have developed policies and procedures to form a defense against challenges designed to marginalize and remove perceived offensive material. In academic settings, the discussion of such challenges is not readily found within literature. With the advent of Texas's Senate Bill 17 (SB17) and other legislative encroachments on academic freedom and tenure from members of the Texas legislature, we want to extend the discussion on material challenges beyond school and public libraries to include publicly funded academic institutions, as they may soon become more targeted by political movements. This article explores if, when, and how librarians perceive the occurrence of censorship in academic library settings in Texas and offer strategies for academic librarians everywhere to utilize to combat it.

* Josh Salmans is Assistant Librarian at Texas Tech University, email: joshua.salmans@ttu.edu; Shelby Hebert is Assistant Research Services Librarian at Texas Tech University, email: shhebert@ttu.edu; Erin Burns is Assistant STEM Librarian at Texas Tech University, email: erin.burns@ttu.edu. ©2025 Josh Salmans, Shelby Hebert, and Erin Burns, Attribution-NonCommercial (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>) CC BY-NC.

Nature of Challenges

Challenges to materials within the walls of libraries is not a new concept. History is replete with examples of attempts to censor materials. Beckham (2022) cites some of these occurrences from 3rd B.C.E. to the modern era in North American jurisprudence. These scenarios include censorship, or attempts at censoring, religious ideologies or debates, anti-slavery literature during the Civil War era, and nineteenth and twentieth century legislation crafted to define and restrict what was seen as “obscene, lewd, or lascivious,” “immoral” or “indecent” (Beckham 2022). From the twentieth century to the present day, Beckham notes, school libraries have become the focal point of challenging materials as parents sought to have titles removed as they perceived the titles to be contrary to social norms, profane, contrary socially acceptable sexual or political content, or inappropriate their child’s ages group (2022; Banned Book FAQ, n.d.).

Beckham (2022) defers to ALA, PEN America, and other library literature to further define challenges and bans. The American Library Association (defines a challenge as “an attempt to remove or restrict materials, based upon the objections of a person or group” 2016). Such challenges often have implications greater than the personal beliefs of the individual parent and seek to remove access to challenged material from all students (Beckham, 2022). Based on the literature, we propose that libraries face two types of challenges: overt and covert. Overt challenges are formal objections from library users through official processes, such as challenge forms or through email to an appropriate library administrator or librarian. Overt challenges may also result in legislation that targets controversial materials. Covert challenges are often more dynamic and clandestine (i.e., theft of titles, hiding titles, or purposefully vandalizing or destroying titles). Such challenges are more difficult to measure as motivations for these types of activities are not easily discernable because it is not unusual, in the course of normal library operations, for items to go missing, whether they are incorrectly shelved, incidentally removed from the premises, or never returned. Deciphering intent is difficult to prove in any case. Some patrons may have political motivations for improperly removing titles while others may have personal reasons for engaging in these activities. Not all removals are necessarily a challenge. Members of marginalized perspectives or identities may resort to secretly taking titles on sensitive topics, such as sexuality, gender identity or expression, or reproductive rights, to avoid the embarrassment of interacting library staff during check out, or to avoid having a record of their checkout materials on their account.

According to Beckham (2022), when a title is challenged either through overt or covert means, two actions can be taken: restriction or removal. Restriction involves cordoning the title into a special section where a student would have to have a signed waiver from a parent to access it. A removal or ban is the “physical elimination” of challenged material from a collection and, consequently, denying access to all patrons (ALA, PEN America). Bans can be implemented at the request of parents or community members, administration officials, through “threatened action by lawmakers or other government officials” (Beckham, 2022, p. 6).

All these tactics mentioned previously can create “a phenomenon called the chilling effect” (Downey, 2018, p. 121). Librarians may be inclined to self-censor their collection development practices, avoiding politically charged interactions with administrative, political, legal, and community apparatuses (Best, 2007; Buschmann, 1994; Buschmann, 2009; Downey, 2018; Greenhaus, 2023). Furthermore, librarians’ own personal or political biases may be another factor in decisions related to material selections, and/or in choosing to take the path of least

resistance and contribute to covert censorship of materials before the public or the institution is aware of it (Asheim, 1953; Best, 2007; Brink Drescher, 2022; Cain, 2006).

“All librarians have biases,” asserts Downey (2018), “knowing our biases and making a proactive, concerted effort to keep them out of our collection activities is part of the job of a professional and ethical librarian” (p. 122). Harris (1999) questions librarianship’s commitment to this process even at the academic level. Contrary to what they view as rather vague and lofty declarations in the Library Bill of Rights, Harris argues that the promotion and tenure process with academia can be an effective mechanism to curtail speech within academic arenas and can contribute to librarians engaging with self-censorship. Mann (2017) specifically extends this conversation to the need for academic librarians to have both academic and intellectual freedoms to pursue inquiry along with their colleagues in other colleges.

While academic libraries are not the usual target of these types of challenges, Best (2007) questions whether academic libraries also avoid controversial titles in personal decisions in collection development. Do curricula based controversial literature have any influence on collection development, especially in children and young adult titles? Does geographic location play a role in self-censorship even in academic settings? Considering that some states, such as Florida and Texas, have proposed and passed legislation targeting this process within academia, university libraries most likely will not be immune to such efforts to censor materials and may need to learn from school and public librarianship on how to protect collections from myopic attempts to rid them of holistic, inclusive, and representative titles.

Given that the academic librarian profession suffers along with higher education in general of a diversity crisis, it behooves the profession to re-evaluate its long-held conceit of neutrality. Brink Drescher (2022) discussed this issue of neutrality and investigated what “triggers and/or preconditions that led academic librarians to ... interrogate their [own] worldview” and privilege to become active in social justice causes for disproportionate and underserved minority by introducing the framework of critical transcendence. Brink Drescher cited Goodman’s (2011) admonition that, “People from privileged groups tend to have little awareness of their own dominant identity, of the privileges it affords them, of the oppression suffered by the corresponding disadvantaged group, and of how they perpetuate it” (p. 22). Given this reality, Brink Drescher (2022) reminds academic librarians, who typically are persons of privilege, that it is in these times of extreme polarization and censorship that the concept of neutrality does a “disservice to underrepresented groups with whom they work and serve” (p. 16). They further suggest that it is imperative for academic librarians to avoid this dynamic by becoming culturally competent so they can demonstrate inclusive leadership in cultivating an environment where peers and patronage from underserved and underrepresented groups can flourish.

Current Climate

The American Library Association writes at length about censorship in school and public libraries; however, censorship within the academic library setting is rarely addressed. The organization says, “Books usually are challenged with the best intentions—to protect others, frequently children, from difficult ideas and information” (“About Banned & Challenged Books,” 2012). This dynamic may be due to a few factors, including lack of awareness about censorship occurring at universities, the belief that college students are in less need of protection from “dangerous” books, or that it simply does not occur.

At the heart of each Library Bill of Rights tenet is a commitment to protecting information access. The Library Bill of Rights overtly addresses censorship, and it defends the right of the public to make decisions regarding individual information needs. This codified opposition to censorship and the commitment to developing diverse collections that meet community needs are essential components of a librarian's code of ethics. Despite efforts by librarians and the American Library Association, the problem persists (Library Bill of Rights, 2006). The American Library Association released the "ALA (American Library Association) Statement on Book Censorship" in 2021. In the statement created collaboratively by all eight of the American Library Association's divisions, the organization condemned censorship saying, "We are committed to defending the constitutional rights of all individuals, of all ages, to use the resources and services of libraries. We champion and defend the freedom to speak, the freedom to publish, and the freedom to read, as promised by the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States" (ALA Statement on Book Censorship, 2021).

The American Library Association is far from the only professional library organization; however, opposition to censorship is a shared value among most organizations. In a 2019 statement on censorship, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions wrote:

Censorship is a breach of respect, on the part of some members of society, for the human dignity and equality of other members of society. This is achieved by preventing some persons from enjoying access to the same information and ideas as are available to those responsible for or affecting the censorship. Because censorship prevents the enjoyment of several generally recognized human rights, as expressed most fundamentally in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations) emphatically argues for principles of freedom of expression and freedom of access to information.

At the same time, attempts to ban books are increasing, OIF (Office of Intellectual Freedom) documented "1,269 demands to censor library books and resources in 2022, the highest number of attempted book bans since ALA began compiling data about censorship in libraries more than 20 years ago. The unparalleled number of reported book challenges in 2022 nearly doubles the 729 book challenges reported in 2021" (2022 Book Ban Data, 2023). When compared to the 458 challenges issued in 2003, attempts to censor library collections are increasing significantly, and these challenges are increasing with the help of organizations that distribute lists of books deemed unacceptable. The American Library Association estimates that 90% of book challenges include multiple titles with 40% of all challenges including 100 titles or more ("2022 Book Ban Data," 2023).

While the American Library Association collects data on book challenges and successful bans, one only needs to look to the news to find evidence of rampant attacks on library collections and employees. In Texas alone, the Llano County Public Library was subject to a closure attempt over collection items (Albanese, 2023); books were pulled off the shelves in multiple school libraries (Hixenbaugh, 2022); and the state itself banned 801 books from school libraries (Lopez, 2022). At the time of writing, these are a few examples of the most recent attacks on library collections; however, challenges occur quickly enough that these examples will not be recent at the time of publication.

Beyond direct attacks against libraries, a culture of distrust and aggression exists. Multiple well-connected groups are involved in organized efforts to challenge books. Moms for Liberty is perhaps the best-known and most powerful of these groups. The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) describes Moms for Liberty as, “an antigovernment organization” with their focus being on eliminating “woke indoctrination” in public schools (2023). The group opposes most positive depictions of LGBTQIA+ experiences and discussions of racism.

Moms for Liberty’s impacts are not exclusively bound to a K-12 setting. The SPLC points out that “the organization has openly expressed opposition to the current administration’s proposed changes to Title IX, which would provide more rights and accessibilities to the LGBTQ community” (2023). In April of 2024, the Biden administration expanded the protections offered by Title IX: “The U.S. Department of Education announced rule changes [in April] to Title IX, the federal policy prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex in education programs or activities that get federal funds. The final rule expands the definition of sex discrimination to include gender identity and sexual orientation” (Dupree, 2024). While Moms for Liberty does not address the impacts of the Title IX expansion on adults attending college in either its social media or official statements regarding the expansion, the results of anti-LGBTQIA+ lobbying can be felt in the realm of higher education (Moms for Liberty, 2024; Justice & Descovich, 2024). Texas governor Greg Abbott sent a letter to Texas universities on May 8, 2024, ordering all public universities and colleges to ignore the Biden administration’s expansion of Title IX stating, “Last week, I instructed the Texas Education Agency to ignore President Biden’s illegal dictate of Title IX. Today, I am instructing every public college and university in the State of Texas to do the same” (Abbott, 2024). The protections Title IX would now afford to LGBTQIA+ students in Texas are not only being denied to those under the age of majority but to full-fledged adults attending institutions of higher learning as well.

Unfortunately, Moms for Liberty is not alone in their attacks against Texas libraries. SPLC tracked 72 hate and antigovernment groups located in Texas in 2022. This list also includes five explicitly anti-LGBTQIA+ groups, however, these groups share values and sometimes work in concert with one another (2022). One such example occurred within our own community. On July 13, 2023, the Lubbock chapter of the True Texas Project hosted Tracy Shannon, an anti-library activist. The True Texas Project is categorized as an antigovernment organization by the SPLC; however, Shannon leads the Texas chapter of Mass Resistance, an organization categorized by the SPLC as an anti-LGBTQIA+ group. The event, titled Defeat the Dirty Books, was advertised in the following way:

Come learn how to find dirty books and get them out of schools and public libraries! You will be shown the sneaky tactics, key players, and machinery of the dirty book pushers and ‘change agents’ who have been pedaling smut and child sexual grooming materials in public libraries and school libraries (True Texas Project, 2023).

The well-organized nature of these challenges and collaborative approaches of anti-library groups empowers community members who oppose the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ materials in library collections to challenge collection items at the exponentially higher rates referenced previously. The change in how challenges occur also puts library employees in the difficult

position of deciding whether to preemptively censor materials themselves (Downey, 2018; Greenhaus, 2023). This dilemma presents issues that are difficult to prognose without an analysis of the nature of challenges and what forms they take in practice.

While the public focus of these organized attacks on libraries centers on child welfare, the wider climate provides essential context. In 2023, Texas passed SB17, colloquially known as the Texas anti-DEI bill. Under this ban, “public colleges are prohibited from creating diversity offices, hiring DEI employees, or requiring DEI training for students or employees” (Spitalniak, 2024). The resulting fallout from the passing of SB17 included a change in available services to marginalized students and job loss for some employees of Texas colleges and universities. Attempting to comply with SB17, the University of Texas at Austin laid off around 60 employees with plans to shut down some of the offices those employees worked in (Xia and Dey, 2024). It is still too early to understand the full implications of the passage of SB17, but early compliance with the bill could create a chilling effect among Texas scholars out of fear of job loss and further retaliation from the state.

Methodology

Our survey was partially developed using research from Matacio’s 2003 study of Seventh Day Adventist colleges and universities, which investigated materials challenges that these colleges and universities faced, and how they dealt with such challenges. In addition, we developed separate questions for this survey to see if librarians, or library workers who have collection development responsibilities, also had any responsibilities when it comes to participating in the removal of such items (i.e., did their library have a set number of people who were allowed to work on the challenge materials, or is it the decision of only one person at the library, or a board decision with no input from the librarians). We developed other questions to gather data on the recent laws and challenges that libraries and librarians are facing in Texas. Using Qualtrics, we built the survey using an institutional account through Texas Tech University’s Rawls Business School. To measure and evaluate the effects of recent censorship laws and bans affecting academic libraries, we developed a survey that would also collect some demographic data to identify trends.

At first, our survey was to be sent only to Big XII R1 institutions. However, this was too small a sample size and would have resulted in the possible exposure of personal identifying information. After this discovery, we stopped collecting information, submitted modifications to our IRB, and deleted all previously submitted surveys. Those modifications enabled us to broaden our collection to include public, special, and other types of libraries and knowledge workers (e.g., museums). However, we kept the scope to the libraries in the state of Texas.

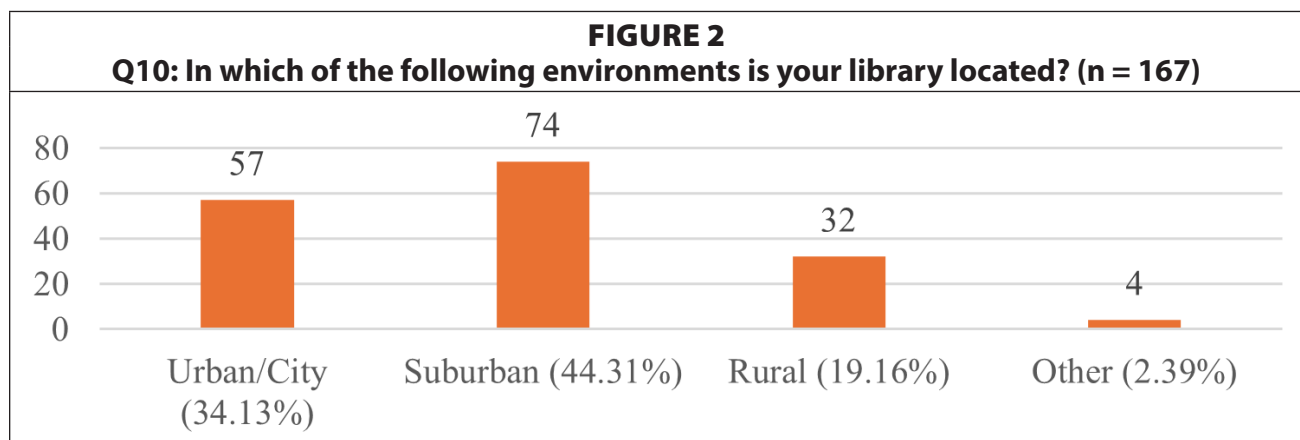
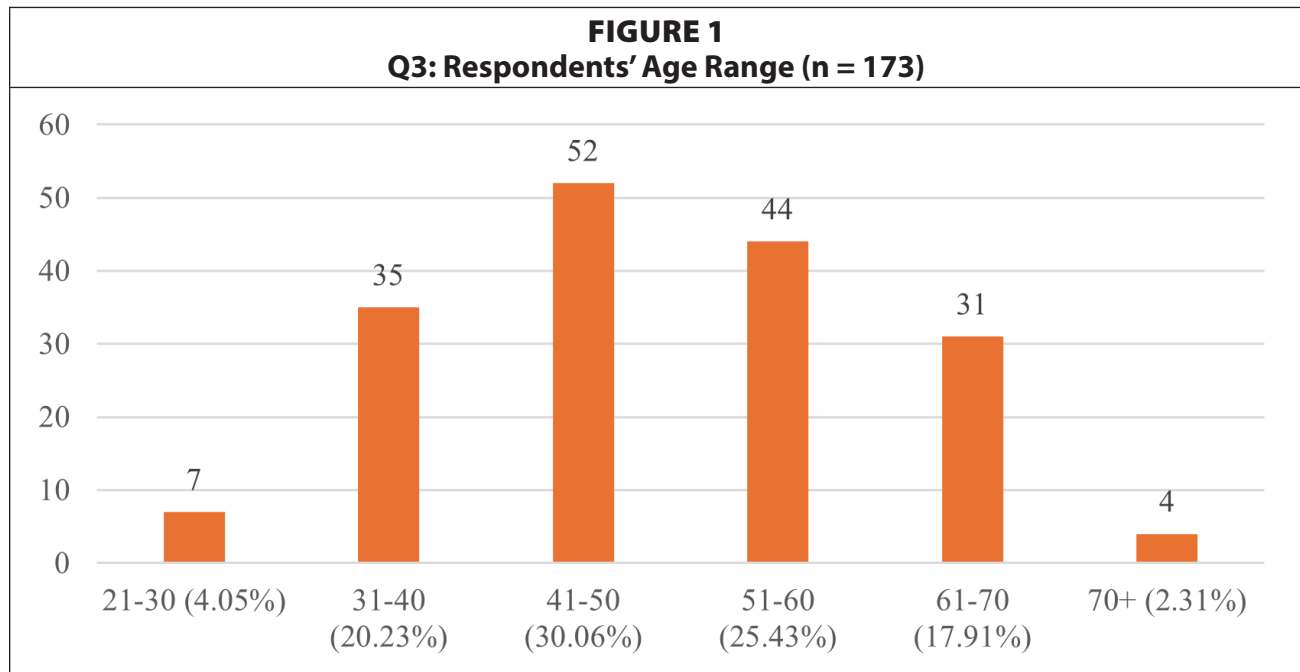
We sent the survey link multiple times to the Texas Library Association (TLA) listserv in July and August 2023, as well as to ALA and ACRL (Association of College and Research Libraries) main listservs through ACRL Connect. The total number of responses totaled 187, with two answers being “tests.” These answers were removed and demarcated for a total of 185 submissions to the survey.

We know that many people work on the “honor system” when it comes to taking these types of surveys; however, once the survey was deployed out to the ALA listserv, the survey had a few respondents from outside of Texas. We kept those responses in the data, if only to show the vast differences in opinion that workers in librarianship have towards this topic.

Results and Discussion

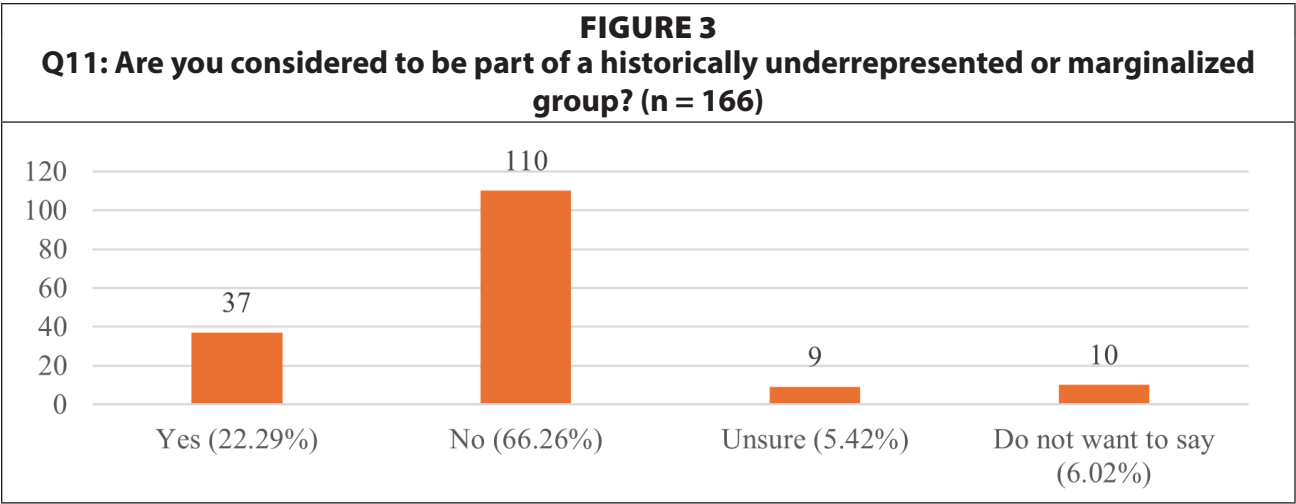
Respondent Demographics

There were a total of 185 useable responses. Several demographic data points were collected, including age range (see Figure 1) and the environment in which their library is located (see Figure 2).



Texas is a very large state in both population and land area, and it has many rural libraries; therefore, we were interested in respondents' location. Thirty-two respondents (approximately 19%) indicated that they are located in these rural areas. Most respondents indicated that they were in suburban areas of Texas, with 74 respondents (approximately 44%), and 59 (approximately 34%) of respondents indicated that they are in urban/city environments.

The survey also asked whether the respondent considered themselves to be a person from a not historically marginalized community, to which 110 respondents indicated no (see Figure 3). This may be because of the documented whiteness of the profession, and the access to the listservs, which requires the ability to personally pay for access to ALA and TLA and be a part of the professional organizations.



Graphs are situated so that the number of responses is outside the bars and the percentages are with the x-axis data. The ages of survey participants implicate power differential between those taking the survey and those who the topic might affect, as more people who were 30+ answered the questions, many of whom had been in their jobs for more than 10 years (see Figures 4 and 5).

When asked if they currently worked for a library or a museum in Texas, 152 said yes, 18 said no. Participants were then asked a series of questions about their jobs as library workers, including current length of employment in the state of Texas as a library worker (Figure 4), length of time people have worked in their jobs at libraries (Figure 5), type of library people work for (Figure 6), and an open-ended question where participants could share job title if they were willing.

Library Job Types and Collection Development

The survey also asked what type of library people work for and included an open-ended question where participants could share job title if they were willing. When asked what type

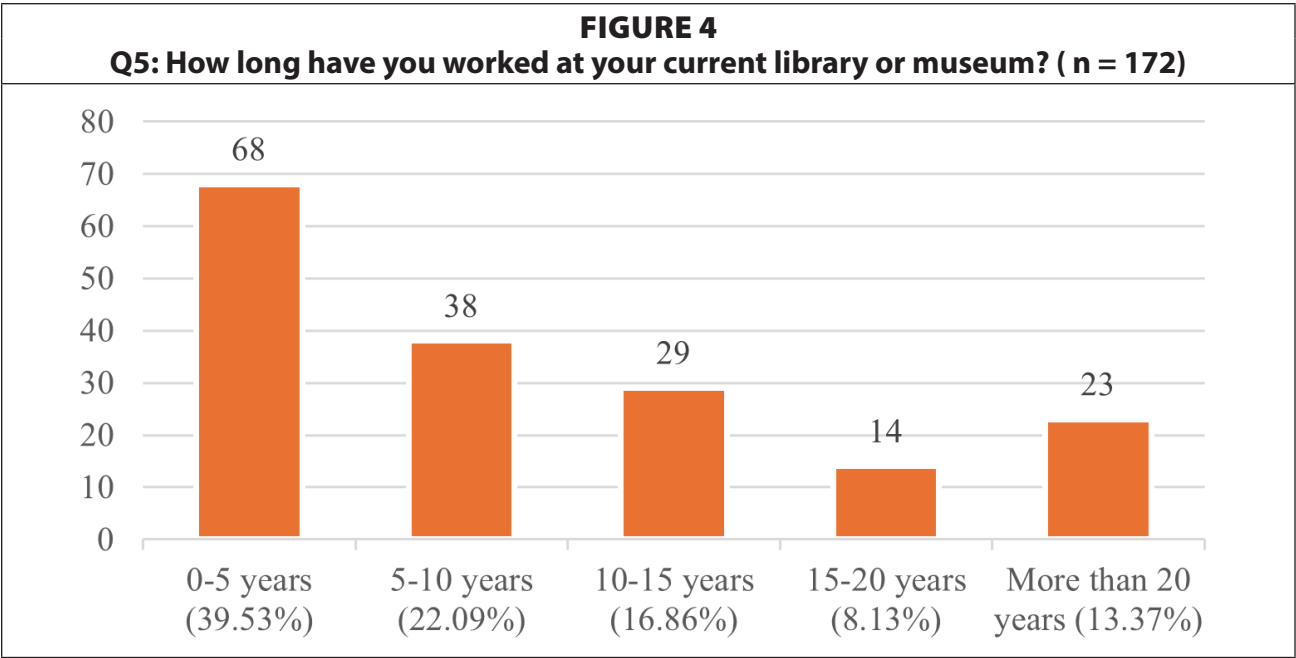
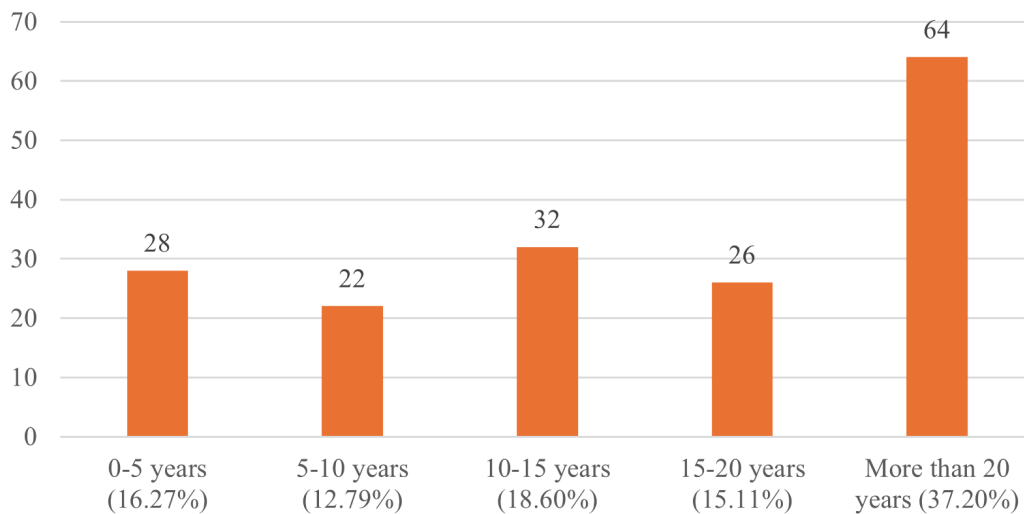


FIGURE 5
Q6: How long have you worked in libraries in your career? (n = 172)



of library people worked for, 64 people responded at public libraries, 55 at academic libraries, 3 at special libraries, 42 at school libraries, 1 archives/museum, and 6 said “Other” (see Figure 6). “Other” for this question allowed people to write in, and those answers included “retired,” “library system,” “vendor,” “archive and special collection library,” and “school district and library director.”

If the respondent selected “academic library,” they were shown a question regarding what type of higher education institution. Most people from academic libraries who took this survey were working at a four-year graduate/doctoral granting institution (37 respondents, almost 70%)(see Figure 7). Job titles varied across fields, but within the public library responses, there were 24 responses that indicated the participants were directors or assistant directors of their libraries, four youth services librarians, and various other technical and librarian roles. Academic library job titles included nine academic deans or associate heads of departments,

FIGURE 6
Q7: Are you currently working for: (n = 171)

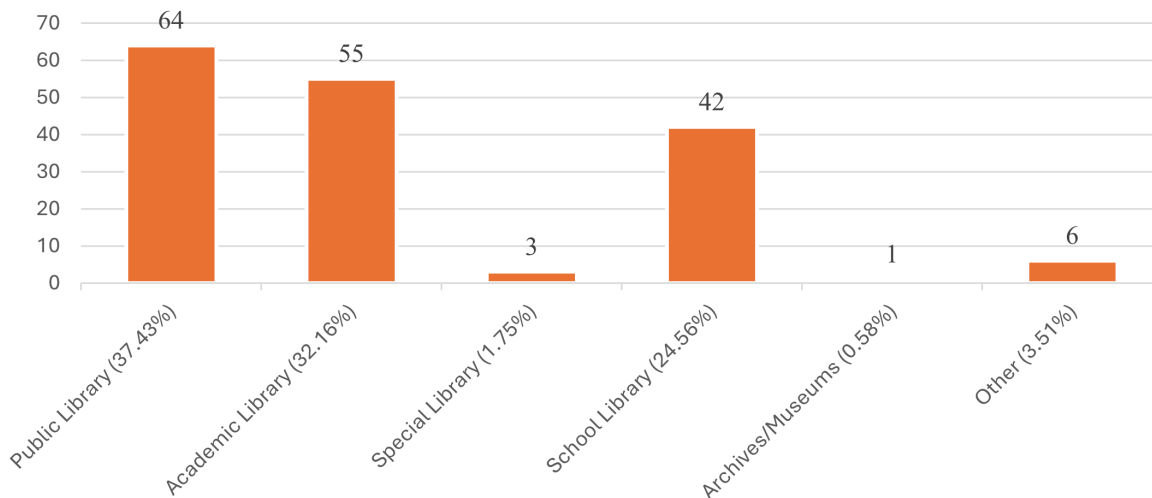
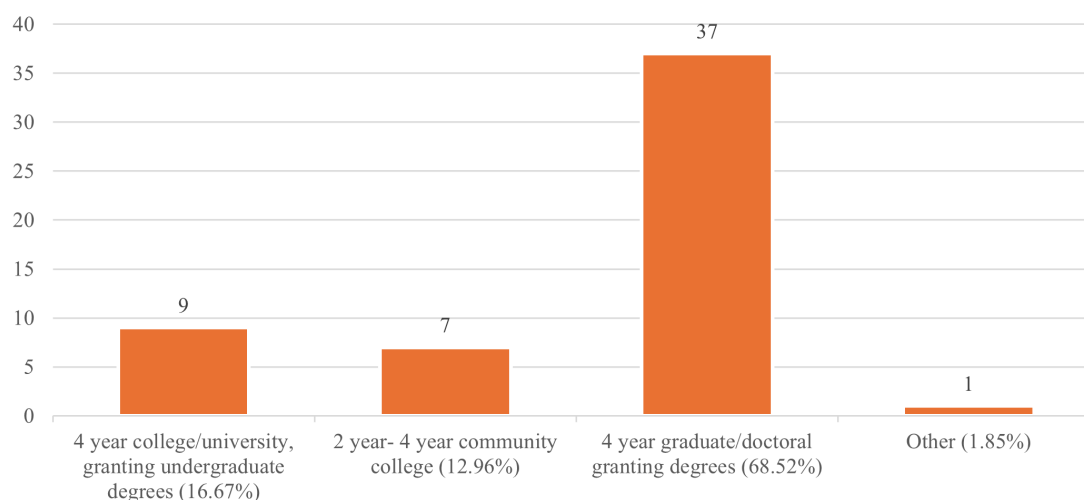


FIGURE 7
Q8: If you work for an academic library, please select which type of academic library you work for (n = 54)



and various other roles, including but not limited to: liaison librarians, associate librarians, research services, electronic resources, metadata analysts, and program coordinators. School librarians also had a variety of roles, including district librarians, coordinators, media technology specialists, and lead librarians. Furthering this discussion, the survey presented a question about collection development roles, as wielding purchasing power may be related to any challenges that may be faced to the collection (see Table 1).

TABLE 1
Q13: Which describes your collection development responsibilities? (multiple answers allowed) (n = 327)

	Public Library	Academic Library	Special Library	School Library	Archives/ Museums	Other	Total
Acquisitions	33	16	2	35	1	0	86
Selectors	34	22	1	32	1	0	92
Inventory	26	12	2	33	1	0	74
Other	19	30	1	6	0	3	59
None	7	7	0	0	0	2	16

Participants were then asked about daily work duties and collection development responsibilities, and answers varied greatly across the types of libraries. These answers were not coded or graphed for this article, as we did not want to identify any participant through their answers, but there were a variety of administrative and public facing roles, including but not limited to: outreach, engagement, reference services, teaching, readers' advisory, circulation, and "everything." Several people also indicated that they were retired librarians taking this survey.

TABLE 2
Q14: Are you aware of a materials/book challenge policy at your workplace? (n = 156)

	Public Library	Academic Library	Special Library	School Library	Archives/ Museums	Other	Total
Yes, I was told during the hiring process	37	5	2	17	0	2	63
Yes, but I had to seek out that information	19	14	1	19	0	2	55
I am unsure if we have a policy like that	2	18	0	0	1	0	21
No, but we are developing one	2	5	0	2	0	0	9
No, and no plans to develop one	1	7	0	0	0	0	8
Total	61	49	3	38	1	4	156

Knowledge of and Preparedness for Book and Material Challenges

Question 14 asked the participants if they were aware of a materials or book challenge policy at their workplace. The respondents from academic libraries are far less likely to have a policy or have been told about one during their hiring processes, than their colleagues at public libraries or school libraries. Public libraries and school libraries seem to discuss this aspect more during the hiring process in Texas libraries (see Table 2). One comment from later in the survey pointed out that we should have defined book and materials challenges for the participants, as it could be said that having a conversation with a patron about why a book stays on the shelf might be considered a challenge, as opposed to the ALA's definition of formal challenges to the collection.

Question 15 asked if respondent would be involved in any decision making about materials challenges at their library, and we sorted this data by library type (see Table 3).

The survey also focused on gathering data about the currency of book or materials challenges. As stated, ALA data indicates that Texas is the state that has the most banned and most book challenges. Fifty-two respondents indicated that their workplace has been subject to these material or book challenges in the past year (2022-2023), the majority of which happening at Public (30 respondents) and School (22 respondents) (see Table 4). A concerning number of academic librarians do not know or are unsure if their institutions have been subject to these challenges.

TABLE 3
Q15: Are you a person who would be involved with any decision-making about any materials challenges at your workplace? n = 155

	Public Library	Academic Library	Special Library	School Library	Archives/ Museums	Other	Total
Yes	52	16	3	33	1	1	106
Maybe	6	21	0	3	0	0	30
No	2	13	0	1	0	3	19
Total	60	50	3	37	1	4	155

TABLE 4
Q16: Has your library been subject to a materials or book challenge in the past year (2022-2023)? (n = 155)

	Public Library	Academic Library	Special Library	School Library	Archives/Museums	Other	Total
Yes	30	6	0	22	1	1	60
Unsure/Don't Know	1	20	0	2	0	1	24
No	29	25	3	13	0	1	71
Total	60	51	3	37	1	3	155

Survey respondents were presented with a follow-up question about awareness of any book or materials challenges in the past five years (2018-2022). Most responses indicated that these challenges as happening at Public (22 respondents) and School (12 respondents) libraries (see Table 5). However, more than 50% of respondents noted that there were not as many challenges in the five years leading up to 2023 as there have been in 2023. An additional consideration for this data is respondents may be unaware of challenges that occur. Academic libraries are often larger than their public and school counterparts, and this may lead to siloed libraries where information does not travel as freely as it would in a smaller library. In the case of particularly sensitive information like a book or materials challenge, information may be kept within a smaller group and not made widely available to all library employees.

TABLE 5
Q17: Has your library been subject to a materials or book challenge in the 5 years prior to 2023? (2018-2022) (n = 155)

	Public Library	Academic Library	Special Library	School Library	Archives/Museums	Other	Total
Yes	22	10	2	12	1	1	48
Unsure/Don't Know	5	29	0	8	0	2	44
No	33	11	1	17	0	1	63
Total	60	50	3	37	1	4	155

The survey then asked about the content area covered in the material or book that was challenged; multiple responses were allowed (see Table 6).

Most of the challenges were focused on LGBTQIA+ identities and issues, with a total of 54 respondents indicating that they had at least one challenge for this topic area. Also indicated were "Inappropriate/Pornographic." The authors of the survey included this as an option, as we know from the book bans happening, that many books which are LGBTQIA+ in their topics may be viewed by some members of the public as being inappropriate or pornographic (Faller, 2023). However, this is a broad speculation, and there could be items, like the Sarah J. Maas books, which sometimes get labeled as Young Adult, which may actually be more adult or emerging adult in their age groups.

We then created an Excel file with titles that library workers had said were challenged at their workplaces. The following books were mentioned more than once: *Gender Queer* (four

TABLE 6
Q18: If so, what was the content area of the materials (Select all that apply) (n = 175)

	Public Library	Academic Library	Special Library	School Library	Archives/ Museums	Other	Total
Racial identities and issues	8	2	1	11	0	1	23
LGBTQIA+ identities and issues	26	9	0	17	1	1	54
Women's identities and issues	2	1	0	2	0	1	6
Abortion	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Inappropriate/ Pornographic	22	4	1	10	0	0	37
Religious/ Philosophy issues	6	3	1	1	0	0	11
Other	7	6	1	5	1	0	20
Don't know/ Unsure	1	19	0	2	0	1	23

times); *George/Melissa* (which changed its title in 2021); *It's Perfectly Normal*; *Rick*; *A is for Activist*; *Doing It*; *Flamer*; *Ghost Boys*; *Huckleberry Finn*; *Irreversible Damage*; *My Room is a Dungeon Rest Stop*; *Prince and Knight*; and "Sarah J. Maas books" twice as a whole, with 93 other titles or materials mentioned once. Other books have appeared perennially on the ALA's Most Banned Books lists over the past several years, including but not limited to: *The Bluest Eye*, by Toni Morrison; *The Handmaid's Tale*, by Margaret Atwood; *Fun Home*, by Alison Bechdel; and *I am Jazz*, by Jazz Jennings.

Many more of the titles listed by participants in our survey may have been challenged because of the list of books that Texas House and Senate members circulated amongst themselves in 2022. The list contained a list of 988 titles, some of which were not spelled correctly or had the wrong publication dates attached; the list was roundly criticized on social media (see Appendix B for the other titles mentioned in the survey responses). Additionally, instances of historical artifacts related to racist organizations being challenged were listed several times. As the authors of this survey know what those items are, we did not want to identify the collection specifically by name here as it could possibly be used to identify participants.

Participants were asked on a Likert scale if they replace items that cover LGBTQIA+ topics more frequently than other materials. With 144 responses, more than half of the respondents indicated that they neither agreed or disagreed with this statement, and 52 responses indicated that they somewhat or strongly disagreed with the statement. However, there are 16 responses indicating that yes, they might have to replace these items more frequently. As discussed, there might be a variety of reasons that books go missing, including the stealing of books by patrons. However, for the larger numbers, we speculate that libraries may not be collecting that type of information or could be reluctant to share that information with us. Library workers who took the survey may also not know what other departments are doing when it comes to replacing materials, so it is possible that this statement is vague.

Question 23 was an open-ended question asking library workers about the types of obstacles they might encounter while developing collections for their communities. Library workers indicated a variety of obstacles, but most often mentioned was budget or budgetary concerns. We saw several themes emerge from the comments, including the academic library workers responding "none" or that library workers are hampered by their ability to purchase titles, as they may have to only rely on purchasing those items which have a review. There

were also several insightful comments, including “how to meet the need of marginalized communities when we don’t have a dialogue with that community,” “lashback [sic] from community members, who don’t even typically use the library, to protest materials they don’t agree with,” “lack of titles for marginalized communities for our specialized area,” and “Balancing having a collection that 1. we can afford, 2. meets the needs of the people actually using the library and 3. meets the needs of the community members who are not using the library.”

To discern how Texas library workers are familiar with current book and materials challenges that have been happening in public libraries over the past several years, we asked several questions. Our results indicate that most respondents were at least moderately to very familiar with these challenges (see Table 7).

TABLE 7 Q24: To what extent are you familiar with current book and materials challenges happening in public libraries over the past several years? (n = 139)							
	Public Library	Academic	Special	School	Archives/ Museums	Other	Total
Extremely Familiar	23	7	1	8	0	0	39
Very Familiar	20	21	1	12	0	0	54
Moderately Familiar	10	12	0	11	1	2	36
Slightly Familiar	2	4	1	3	0	0	10
Not Familiar At All	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Survey participants also indicated a strong level of agreement with the open-ended question about whether their institution can meet these book and materials challenges in ways that align with the professional values and codes of ethics from the American Library Association (see Table 8). There were also several comments indicating that respondents wished more libraries were proactive in their approach to these challenges, such as: “we haven’t had any challenges reported to the front-line librarians, but I wish we were proactive in having a policy” and “we have leeway to expand our collections, but not too much” as commenter was warned that they don’t want the library to “be in the news.”

The survey also asked if any participants were concerned about any state or local legislation that would impact their ability to carry out their professional values and codes of ethics. Ninety-eight respondents indicated “yes” or emphatic “yes” (meaning exclamation points were included or capitalization of the word “yes”). Nine participants specifically mentioned HB900, as well as several other laws that Texas is considering or has already passed. HB900 is a law that will require book vendors to assign ratings to books based on depictions or references to sex.

TABLE 8 Q 25: Do you feel your institution is meeting book or materials challenges in ways that align with the professional values and code of ethics from the ALA? (n = 106)	
	Coded responses
Yes	93
No	5
Mostly/Sometimes	5
Maybe/Unknown	3

The last question asked survey participants if there was anything else they would like us to know about what's happening at their institution related to anything we asked in the survey. There were many responses thanking us for the survey, as well as insightful comments about people's experiences. One wrote: "Fear is rampant. A secretary refused to place an approved book order because she was afraid it 'might' contain suspect books." Another wrote from an academic library point of view, stating that "we have the privilege of largely being shielded from book bans or challenges. That said, I'm very afraid for my sisters and brothers who work at public libraries. They are our real fighters for intellectual freedom." Others mentioned that the Texas Library Association should also be getting out accurate information to all library staff and teachers. One indicated that they did not have a policy in place before their first challenge but are currently drafting one. There was also fear of reprisal in the comments, especially from library boards or from outside actors. Another comment said: "We recently received our first book challenge in over 100 years of history at our institution. The challenger seems to think a book was inappropriate for young patrons, but we are a university library. It seems the challenger is playing a part in a culture war that is irrelevant to our context."

While it is tempting to believe librarians are monolithically opposed to censorship, survey results yielded diverse opinions among respondents. These opinions range from considerate criticism to personal attacks. In response to question 25—which asked respondents whether they felt their library was meeting challenges in ways that aligned with the American Library Association's professional values and code of ethics—several people responded with criticisms of the American Library Association. The mildest response being, "Yes. The ALA, on the other hand, could use some work." One of the more extreme responses declared, "The ALA is an extremist org pushing a one-sided agenda." Disagreements extended beyond criticisms of the American Library Association and ranged into sweeping political commentary and direct attacks against the authors and librarianship as a profession. In response to question 26 which asked about concerns regarding legislation impacting the ability to do one's job, one respondent commented, "Yes, but the liberal left has brought it upon themselves by pushing specific agendas and not listening to their communities."

The final question asked participants if there was anything else they would like the investigators to know, and it prompted both the most nuanced criticism and vehement hostility from some who took the survey. A helpful note about clarity was brought up in this question and is noted in our limitations; however, there were far more personal attacks than constructive criticism. One person simply said, "This is a terrible survey" while another went so far as to write, "Please drop the divisive political nonsense and actually try to help all of our patrons." Another said, "Frankly, the scrutiny is good as it forces us to articulate what we collect, how we collect, why we collect, and we would be better served if the ideological balance within the profession wasn't seen as so intolerably leftwing." The range of hostile responses may indicate a more intentional form of self-censorship among library professionals who do not agree with the left-leaning values that tend to be present in libraries, and the more measured, thoughtful responses indicate a lack of consensus on how to address censorship among librarians who agree it poses a threat.

Limitations

This research is limited to Texas library employees and is not reflective of the experiences of library workers nationwide or internationally. In addition to this limitation, we experienced

setbacks during the distribution of the study. Changes to the Texas Library Association listserv prevented some subscribers from receiving the survey email, so the survey was sent out through national listservs with a request that only library workers employed in Texas take the survey. Unfortunately, that request was overlooked, and we received responses from outside the state. One respondent also suggested that the authors should include definitions of challenges and bans in the survey, so results may be impacted by unclear vocabulary. Additionally, the authors limited the scope of the article to censorship of LGBTQIA+ materials, however, substantial evidence exists to support further research of censorship focusing on racism, antisemitism, and other subject matter.

Findings and Implications for Practice

Among many librarians, there is a growing sense of concern and unease. Public librarians and school librarians are especially concerned for the collections after Texas's legislative body passed HB900, a bill that requires book vendors to assign sexually explicit and sexually relevant rankings to items. As of the writing of this article in October 2023, HB900 is being challenged in the court system on its broad definitions and restriction of free speech. One commenter wrote for our survey that the book vendors will "misrepresent appropriateness to cover their asses."

Among academic library workers specifically, many indicated they are under-prepared for the materials and books challenges. They also have a high rate of being unaware of challenge policies in their institutions, or they have no plans to develop them compared to their colleagues in public or school libraries. Comments from these librarians indicated that some do not feel worried about any possibility of challenges, since as an academic library, they have more "freedom" for their collection development than others. However, this is a false sense of security. As evidenced by Texas's recent attacks on academic freedom and DEI initiatives in universities and colleges, the freedom of speech that is so heavily referenced by the leaders of the state only includes them and what they have to say, and not the rest of us. While many in academic fields will acknowledge the need for social justice and cultural competencies, integrating such policies into library services continues to have difficulty gaining traction (Brink Drescher, 2022; Lumley, 2019; Leung & López-McKnight, 2020; Seale, 2020; Tewell, 2020). Such failures in developing critical policies to counter censorship will affect generations of Texans and their rights to read, and to read literature that is culturally and demographically relevant. As a university library, one does need to make sure to serve the community and the researchers at the institution. To support LGBTQIA+ students and represent the needs of the student body, academic libraries need collections that meet both academic needs and personal needs. Developing and maintaining collections for students from historically marginalized groups is part of the academic library's mission to serve the campus.

The many book and materials challenges happening in Texas libraries tend to be focused on LGBTQIA+ issues. When drafting that specific survey question, we hesitated to include the word "pornographic" because the word is frequently used by religious groups that do not agree with LGBTQIA+ materials or books to describe LGBTQIA+ collection items that are not actually pornographic. This conflation of LGBTQIA+ representations with "porn" is harmful for the LGBTQIA+ communities that our libraries serve. As evidenced by the specific titles that were discussed in Question 19, these titles do have LGBTQIA+ themes but are not exclusively related to these themes.

Further, self-censorship is still an issue in libraries. In 2016, the *School Library Journal* (SLJ)

published findings from their survey of school librarians, and more than nine out of ten librarians working in these spaces are not buying books that they could because they are worried about the potential “controversies” that the book may engender. Our survey indicates this is a continuing issue. Librarians are told that to stave off these controversies, they should be using book reviews that appear in places like *Booklist*, for example, to back their decisions. This can also be a limiting practice when it comes to adding to the collection, as sometimes those added items or new authors may not have any of these types of recommendations.

Library workers from all types of libraries could benefit from more training and sessions on developing a plan and hearing others’ stories. As evidenced by the recent *School Library Journal* online seminar (Hickson & Jones, 2023), Texas is not alone in facing these book and materials challenges, however, Texas is also facing free speech and academic freedom repression from the state itself. Because of recent anti-academic freedom legislation and other attacks by the state of Texas, it would behoove academic librarians to become familiar with the challenges happening at public and school libraries and prepare their institutions for these situations. According to ALA’s Office of Intellectual Freedom (OIF), in 2022, 52% of challenges are occurring at public libraries, 41% at school libraries, 10% in schools (general) and 1% at college libraries or other public institutions (2023). Even in 2016, librarians were raising the alarm about needing to have these policies written and structured so that libraries and library workers could be prepared (LaRue, 2016).

These best practices can include having a well-developed collection development policy, which incorporates a reconsideration policy that clearly states the procedures for a formal process to reconsider such materials. Steps to this policy should be outlined in exact steps, with a timeline, committee makeup contact points, and the information being used to make decisions. Policies should be explicit about requirements for a challenge, including that the material was read in full, was understood, and the points of contention were not copied and pasted from other places outside the filers own form, which can be easily checked by Googling the points of contention (Jensen, 2022). Patrons can be limited to how many challenges they can have active at once, and the item should remain in place until review is complete. Cost of a book challenge can also be included, which might include costs for acquiring materials so that each committee member may view it, time spent reading and accessing reviews of the material, and time spent in committee meetings (Jensen, 2022).

If the institution does not have a book reconsideration policy, ALA’s OIF offers support and example policies, guiding documents, and other guides. This support can be found on their Collection Development and Reconsideration Toolkit site (ALA OIF Selection Toolkit, 2018) and the new edition of the *Intellectual Freedom Manual* (2021). If the library already has these procedures in place, it is good practice to share this information with new hires and provide training at regular intervals. Because freedom to read and academic freedom issues are not solely occurring in conservative states, library workers who work at all types of libraries in the United States should be prepared to face challenges. As evidenced by the rise of challenges across the country, documented by ALA and our own study, Texas leads the country in materials challenges, and Texas librarians of all types should be prepared.

Lastly, librarians can become more involved with the other organizations that will help them through the book or materials challenge. These organizations are also currently listed on the ALA’s OIF site on Challenge Support. This includes organizations like The Freedom to Read Foundation, Unite Against Book Bans, Moveon.org’s Banned Bookmobile Tour, and more.

Conclusion

We echo the call that we should be inviting our “students, colleagues, administrators, board members, parents and caregivers, school board members, and community members into deeper dialogue about our shared beliefs in providing all students with the resources and opportunities that they need in order to be successful in school, the community and life” (Hicks et al., 2022). Only by doing so will we as academic librarians and library workers, be better able to advocate for inclusive and diverse collections and support our colleagues at school and public libraries.

References

- Albanese, A. (2023). Texas county to consider shutting down library after book ban ruling. *Publisher Weekly*. Retrieved from <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/libraries/article/91958-texas-county-to-consider-shutting-down-library-after-book-ban-ruling.html>
- American Library Association (ALA). (2006, June 30). Library Bill of Rights. <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill> (Accessed June 14, 2023) Document ID: 669fd6a3-8939-3e54-7577-996a0a3f8952
- American Library Association (ALA). (2012, December 10). About banned & challenged books. <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/aboutbannedbooks> (Accessed June 14, 2023). Document ID: 777f206e-32cc-4015-b45a-591ee37f2319
- American Library Association (ALA). (2013, March 26). Top 10 most challenged books lists, American Library Association. <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/frequentlychallengedbooks/top10/archive> (Accessed June 15, 2023). Document ID: 8417fa9e-ceff-4512-aca9-9fbc81b8bd81
- American Library Association (ALA). (2021). ALA Statement on Book Censorship. <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/statement-regarding-censorship> (Accessed June 15, 2023). Document ID: 934d7bbb-ffb4-41e3-bcc1-43e6b032b1ce
- American Library Association (ALA). (2023a). Banned Books, <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks> (accessed Sept 18, 2023).
- American Library Association (ALA). (2023b, March 20). 2022 Book ban data. <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/book-ban-data> (Accessed June 15, 2023) Document ID: 7abf2016-140c-43dc-b07c-a07133216c0b
- Abbott, Greg. (2024, May 8). Title IX Expansion Letter. Letter. https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/press/Texas_Regents_Title_IX.pdf
- Asheim, L. (1953). Not censorship but selection. *Wilson Library Bulletin*, 28(1), 63–67.
- Bale, S. (2017). *Social justice and library work: A guide to theory and practice*. Elsevier Science & Technology, ebook.
- Barr-Walker, J., & Sharifi, C. (2019). Critical librarianship in health sciences libraries: An introduction. *Journal of the Medical Library Association*, 107(2), 258–264. <https://doi.org/10.5195/jmla.2019.620>
- Beckham, R. (2022). *Censorship in schools: Reading's position in the landscape of policy creation* [Undergraduate Honors Thesis, Harding University]. Harding University Honors College at Scholar Works. <https://scholarworks.harding.edu/honors-theses/18>
- Best, R. (2010). Censorship or selection? Academic library holdings of the top ten most challenged books of 2007. *Education Libraries*, 33(2), 18–35. <https://doi.org/10.26443/el.v33i2.292>
- Brink Drescher, J. L. (2022). *Toward a transdisciplinary model of social justice in academic librarianship: Promoting critical awareness within advocates and privileged allies*. Thesis and Dissertations. <https://digitalcommons.molloy.edu/etd/133>
- Buschman, J. (1994). Librarians, self-censorship, and information technologies. *College & Research Libraries*, 55(3), 221–228.
- Buschman, J. (2009). Who defends intellectual freedom for librarians? *Academe*, 95(5), 15–17.
- Cain, C. (2006). Librarians and censorship: The ethical imperative. *Louisiana Libraries*, 68(3), 6–8.
- Downey, J. (2018). Learning on the job: Censorship and intellectual freedom in the real world. *Journal of New Librarianship*, 3(1), 120–124. <https://doi.org/10.21173/newlibs/4/25>.
- Dupree, Will. (2024). Gov. Abbott directs Texas colleges, universities to ignore Title IX changes. KXAN. Retrieved from <https://www.kxan.com/news/texas/gov-abbott-directs-texas-colleges-universities-to-ignore-title-ix-changes/>
- Faller, Lex. (2023). Contemporary censorship tactics: reviewing the literature. *PSU McNair Scholars Online Journal*, 16(1), <https://doi.org/10.15760/mcnair.2023.16.1.10>
- Harris, S. (1999). Discourse and censorship: Librarians and the ideology of freedom. *Counterpoise: For Social Responsibilities, Liberty and Dissent*, 3(3/4), 14.

- Hicks, T., Gabrion, L., Lester, K., & Schoenborn, A. (2022). Standing up and pushing back: Resources from a conversation around book bans and censorship. *Michigan Reading Journal*, 54(3): 61–73. <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mrj/vol54/iss3/13>
- Hickson, M. and Jones, A. (2023, August 30). *Take control: Coalition building, crisis management and legal recourse* [Webinar]. SLJ. <https://www.slj.com/story/Facing-Censorship-Learn-Strategies-for-Coalition-Building-Crisis-Management-and-Legal-Recourse-in-SLJ-Virtual-Event>
- Justice, T. and Descovich, T. (2024, April 24). *Protect Parental Rights from Biden's Title IX Re-Write*. Email. <https://portal.momsforliberty.org/news/title-ix-will-no-longer-protect-our-children/>
- Mann J. (2017). Intellectual freedom, academic freedom, and the academic librarian. *AAUP Journal of Academic Freedom*, 8, 1–10.
- McAuliffe, B. (2021) Queer identities, queer content and library classification: Is 'queering the catalogue' the answer?, *Journal of the Australian Library and Information Association*, 70(2), 213–219, <https://doi.org/10.1080/24750158.2021.1915618>
- Hixenbaugh, M. (2022). Banned: Books on race and sexuality are disappearing from Texas schools in record numbers. *NBC News*. Retrieved from <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/texas-books-race-sexuality-schools-rcna13886>
- International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. (2019). "IFLA statement on censorship." *IFLA Publications*. <https://repository.ifla.org/handle/123456789/2633>
- Garnar, M., and Magi, T. (2021). *Intellectual freedom manual*. Tenth Edition. ALA Editions.
- Gilbert, D. "Moms for Liberty uses Hitler quote to 'scare' parents." *Vice*, June 23, 2023. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/ak3kz5/moms-for-liberty-hitler-quote>
- Goodman, D. J. (2011). *Promoting diversity and social justice: Educating people from privileged groups*, (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Greenhaus, R. (2023). Sex in the stacks: Examining the treatment of explicit materials in American libraries. *Libri*, 73(1), 77–84. <https://doi.org/10.1515/libri-2021-0133>
- LaRue, J. (2016, Sept 26). All schools need book challenge policies. *School Library Journal*. <https://www.slj.com/story/all-schools-need-book-challenge-policies>
- Leung, S. Y., & López-McKnight, J. R. (2020). Dreaming revolutionary futures: Critical race's centrality to ending white supremacy. *Communications in Information Literacy*, 14(1), 12–26. <https://doi.org/10.15760/comminfo.2020.14.1.2>
- Lopez, B. (2022). Texas has banned more books than any other state, new report shows. *Texas Tribune*. Retrieved from <https://www.texastribune.org/2022/09/19/texas-book-bans/>
- Lumley, R. M. (2019). The academic library and social justice: Exploring librarian attitudes at one HSI. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 19(4), 472–491. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1538192718823179>
- Matacio, L. R. (2003). Intellectual freedom: Challenges and responsibilities of Seventh-Day Adventist academic libraries. *Journal of Research on Christian Education*, 12(2), 171–192.
- Mathiasson, M. H. & Jochumsen, H. (2023). "The soup we are in" – reflections on post-neutrality librarianship, *Public Library Quarterly*, 42(6), 602–621. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01616846.2022.2149017>
- Moms for Liberty [@Moms4Liberty]. (2024, May 14). Today, Moms for Liberty is taking steps to continue our fight against Biden's new Title IX Regulations by filing a lawsuit, along with @slf_liberty. [Image attached] [Post] <https://x.com/Moms4Liberty/status/1790463863357342044>
- Office of Intellectual Freedom. (2023). Selection and reconsideration policy toolkit for public, school, & academic libraries. American Library Association. <https://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport/selectionpolicytoolkit>
- Seale, M. (2020). Critical library instruction, causing trouble, and institutionalization. *Communications in Information Literacy*, 14(1), 75–85. <https://doi.org/10.15760/comminfo.2020.14.1.6>
- Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC). (2023). Moms for Liberty. Retrieved from <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/moms-liberty>
- Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC). (2022). In 2022, 72 hate and antigovernment groups were tracked in Texas. <https://www.splcenter.org/states/texas>
- Spitalniak, L. (2024). Texas lawmaker ramps up oversight of college DEI ban. *Higher Ed Dive*. Retrieved from <https://www.highereddive.com/news/texas-lawmaker-ramps-up-oversight-of-college-dei-ban/711902/>
- Tewell, E. (2020). The problem with grit: Dismantling deficit thinking in library instruction. *Portal*, 20(1), 137–159. <https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2020.0007>
- True Texas Project. (2023, July 12). Here's your new flyer, Lubbock! [Image attached] [Facebook post] Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=672873304887182&set=gm.664421742241246&idortv=631746372175450>
- Xia, A., and Dey, S. (2024). UT-Austin announces round of firings in latest step to comply with Texas' DEI ban. *Texas Tribune*. Retrieved from <https://www.texastribune.org/2024/04/02/university-texas-austin-firings-dei-ban/>

Appendix A: Survey Questions

1. What is your age?
2. Are you currently working at a library or museum in Texas?
3. How long have you worked in your current position?
4. How long have you worked in libraries in your career?
5. Are you working for: Public library, academic library, special library, school library, archives and/or museums, other
6. If you work for an academic library, what kind of academic library do you work for?
7. Please share your job title (open ended)
8. In which of the following environments is your library located?
9. Are you considered to be a part of a historically marginalized group?
10. How would you describe your daily work duties? (open ended)
11. Which describes your collection development responsibilities? (May choose as many as apply): acquisitions, selectors, inventory, other, none
12. Are you aware of a materials/book challenge policy at your workplace?
13. Are you a person who would be involved with any decision-making about any materials challenges at your workplace?
14. Has your library been subject to a materials or book challenge in the past year (2022-2023)?
15. Has your library been subject to a materials or book challenge in the five years prior to 2023 (2018-2022)?
16. If so, what was the content area of the materials challenge consisted of (Select all that apply)?
17. Please share specific titles that were challenged at your library. (open ended)
18. Are you concerned about challenges to any of these content areas at your institution (Select all that apply)?
19. Do you find that you have to replace items that cover LGBTQIA+ topics more frequently than other materials? (strongly agree- strongly disagree 5 point Likert scale)
20. What goes into your decision-making process when adding materials to your collection (Please rank according 1st choice to 5th choice)?
21. What obstacles do you encounter while developing collections for your communities? (open ended)
22. To what extent are you familiar with current book and materials challenges happening in public libraries over the past several years? (extremely familiar – extremely unfamiliar 5-point Likert scale)
23. Do you feel your institution is meeting book or materials challenges in ways that align with the professional values and codes of ethics from the American Library Association? [Link to ALA Professional Ethics Tools and Publications](#)
24. Are you concerned about any state or local legislation that might impact your ability to carry out your professional values and codes of ethics?
25. What else would you like the investigators of this survey to know about what's happening at your institution regarding this topic?