

Collecting Sex Materials for Libraries

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Abstract: This article analyzes data gathered over a year-long survey of library employees' opinions of sexually related materials in library collections. Surveys generally examine patron attitudes rather than the attitudes of library employees, whose attitudes and beliefs can have a strong effect on the collection. The researchers discovered themes in the data such as: varying definitions and differences between pornography and erotica, legality issues and misconceptions, differing perceptions of censorship dependent on library type, and a possible unacceptance of non-heteronormative material. The survey and analysis serve as a contribution to the ongoing discussion of appropriateness of sexually related materials in libraries.

Despite the core mission of libraries to provide access to information, collecting materials about sex and sexual health, as well as those with sexuality themes, remains contentious. Often the critics of sexually related materials in libraries claim to be against “pornography.” However, the definition is as vague as it is widely applied to those materials that go against individuals’ or groups’ particular beliefs, from items designated as “adult entertainment” to anatomy texts or fiction that normalizes gay relationships. Moreover, there is no consensus about sexually related materials for public or private consumption, or their necessity in a library setting, whether for research or personal interests. Therefore, this survey¹ serves as a contribution to the ongoing discussion of appropriateness of sexually related materials in libraries by examining the opinions of library employees on the subject of collecting sexually related materials.

¹ The survey instrument was created by Michelle Martinez, SHSU and Scott Vieira, Rice University; the data analysis and paper were written by the listed authors.

According to the survey conducted, there are many reasons for not collecting sexually related materials in libraries. Legality seems to play an important role in collection development decisions, but there are misconceptions about what is legal and what is not legal. Societal and personal bias might also impact the acceptance of obtaining certain materials for library collections, in particular material that goes against the heteronormative. Budget constraints are occurring across the industry which also aid in the possible lack of availability of sexually related materials in library collections. As library professionals, the question should be asked - what is the impact of not collecting and providing access to these materials in regards to research and personal use?

Literature Review

Selection and censorship of controversial materials has remained a fundamental point of consideration for American libraries over many decades. Writings concerning librarian censorship of controversial materials can be found in literature dating from the early 1900's (Bostwick 1908) to present day (Crook 2001; Morgan 2001; Moody 2004; Siegal 2007; Rickman 2010; Harrington and Hill 2014). The role that libraries and librarians have played in censorship has shifted over time. In the early 1900's, many librarian leaders were proud of their responsibility to act as a moral censor to the library collection. Charles Bostwick, in his 1908 American Library Association (ALA) presidential address, advocated for rejecting materials which could not be categorized as "Good, True, and Beautiful" (Bostwick 1908). In the same address, Bostwick exemplified his belief that librarians hold a strong moral obligation to reject those materials which exhibit an "undesirable moral teaching or effect," in stating that, "Books that [...] teach how to sin and how pleasant sin is, sometimes with and sometimes without the

added sauce of impropriety, are increasingly popular [...] Thank Heaven they do not tempt the librarian” (Bostwick 1908).

The belief that librarians hold an obligation to censor controversial or unsuitable materials continued to be discussed in literature through the 1930s (Feipel 1922; Carnovsky 1940); however, by the 1950s, a divergence in opinion began to emerge as librarians started seeking ways to identify a distinction between censorship and selection (Asheim 1953). The transition in librarians’ stances on censorship leading into the 1940s can also be observed in literature that either directly or indirectly discusses implications of the ALA’s movements at this time, such as establishing the Library Bill of Rights (LBR) and Code of Ethics in 1939, as well as creating the Committee on Intellectual Freedom in 1940.

By the 1960s, pro-censorship writings throughout professional discourse had begun to be supplanted with topics concerning the combating of censorship and the importance of providing works which express or detail various viewpoints on controversial topics (Harrington and Hill 2014). The anti-censorship trend continued to become more prevalent amongst library professionals throughout the remainder of the 20th century as libraries grappled with pressures of trying to remain relevant in a society exhibiting a growing acceptance of sex and sexual topics (Cornog 1991; McNair 2002). Some of the factors which contributed to this period’s anti-censorship shift as it pertained to sex-related materials included a rapidly increasing production of materials covering sexual topics—both in fiction and non-fiction—and the increasing number of prevailing issues concerning controversial topics, such as sex education, AIDS, and homosexuality (Robinson 1989; Cornog 1991). Despite the industry shift towards anti-censorship, many different types of libraries continued to struggle with various issues associated

with self-censorship and the handling of controversial materials (Fiske 1959; Broderick 1962; Moon 1962; Pope 1974; Hurych and Glenn 1987; Steinfurst 1989; Cornog 1991).

Much of the current Library and Information Science (LIS) literature concerning selection of controversial materials, particularly with regards to pornography, erotica, and other sex-themed materials, has primarily been written with a concentration on cataloging or classification schemes (Dilevko and Gottlieb 2002; Dilevko and Gottlieb 2004; Anderson 2014); cultural and academic pressures (Abel 2001; Siegel 2007; Rickman 2010; Heller 2013); ethical dilemmas (Fricke, Mathiesen, and Fallis 2000; Doyle 2002; McMenemy 2008; Sens 2010; Kaihoi 2014); legal considerations (Morgan 2001; Klinefelter 2010); or impact on collections and collection development (Crook 2001; Isaacson 2004; Adkins, Velasquez, and Esser 2006; Dunneback 2013). A limited amount of literature assesses librarian attitudes on collecting sex-related controversial materials and what effects the collection of these materials have on daily responsibilities of selecting, processing, budgeting, etc. (Adkins, Esser, Velasquez, and Hill 2008; Siegel 2007; Freeman and Hovde 2003).

User surveys have long been a staple in libraries for gauging interests and needs of patrons at various types of libraries. However, few libraries have published regarding access to materials with sexual content, with some exceptions such as the Oak Lawn Public Library report about whether or not to maintain a *Playboy* subscription (Rizzardini 2005). It is possible that surveys have been completed by patrons regarding sexual materials but have not been made available.

While library collection development policies are often broadly stated in order to allow for flexibility in serving their communities, research written on this topic often focuses on advocacy of specific genres, such as graphic novels (Goldman 2012), westerns (Perret 2012), and

romance (Sheehan and Stevens 2015), but rarely erotica or sexual materials (Martinez, 2008; Martinez 2012; Dunneback 2013). The exception has been Dilevko's and Gottlieb's (2004) call to select and catalog adult pornography websites for academic research and provision of guidelines for doing so; nonetheless, adult pornography websites do not appear to have ever been evaluated for collection in libraries.

From time to time, news stories do appear with public outcry over what is deemed to be sexually explicit or inappropriate for a particular community or school library—rarely ever an academic library—with regards to cataloged materials and what patrons view, or could view, on internet-capable computers (Sun 2015). According to the most recent (2014) ALA banned & challenged books information, “sexually explicit” content is the biggest reason for challenges, which are most often initiated by parents or patrons in public and school libraries, as well as in schools for assigned readings. However, academic library and college or university challenges remain statistically negligible in comparison (Office for Intellectual Freedom and the Public Information Office 2014). Moreover, explicitness is not the only way to describe sex materials, and appropriateness is a collection development issue. With regards to collection development in academic and special libraries, the focus has recently mostly been on policies, including electronic versus print format (e.g. Reynolds et al. 2010; Sacco 2014; Miller 2014; Silverman 2014; Lowe, Booth, and Savova 2014) and Demand Driven Acquisitions (e.g. Sinder 2016; Egan, Yearwood, and Kendrick 2016; Carrico, Cataldo, Botero, and Shelton 2015; Tyler, Melvin, Epp, and Kreps 2014).

Published surveys on reader preference rarely ask about genre preferences, and data rarely provide findings of patron interest beyond fiction versus nonfiction (Weber and Flatley 2008; Tees 2010; Stern 2011; Corlett-Rivera and Hackman 2014; Foasberg 2014; Walton 2013).

Academic libraries tend to focus on broad subject areas when evaluating library holdings or recreational reading and where to focus future expenditure (Salter and Brook 2007; Gilbert and Fister 2011; Jeffres and Atkin 1996; Van Fleet 2003). In contrast, other types of libraries, most notably public and school, are more likely to survey patrons regarding the acquisition of or continued access to particular titles, types of materials, or general interest genres, such as fantasy fiction or horror, though these results are not always published.

Pope's (1974) examination of librarian attitudes on sexually related materials is the most comparable to the present study. According to Pope, his research differed from previous research because he did not limit the respondents to library type or geographical location, so this was the first major study to include academic libraries. Pope chose not to include titles in his questionnaire due to the difficulty at the time (1970-71) to find descriptions and related information, so instead he included descriptions or "categories" representing book form only and asked about familiarity and acquisition. The acquisition scale included varying levels of not purchasing the material, only purchase if requested but restrict access, and purchase the material and not restrict access. This scale of acquisition is a trend in recent studies (as discussed below) that mainly focus on librarian attitudes about censorship in general. As far as the researchers know, there are no other similar studies about librarian attitudes specifically on collecting sexually explicit materials. Pope split his questionnaire into two versions due to the 55 categories he wanted to include, so he used this separation to compare differences such as but not limited to illustrated versus non illustrated content and female versus male content.

Most published studies focus on librarian attitudes in regards to censorship and collection development, which include materials relating to sex as well as other controversial topics and also limit the research to location and/or library type. Moody (2004) surveyed public librarians in

Queensland, Australia, on censorship and asked respondents if they would purchase, purchase and label, purchase and restrict access, or not purchase hypothetical item descriptions in order to gauge both attitudes on the topics and actual collecting behavior. The majority of respondents would purchase and not label or restrict access to items on homosexuality such as “a guide to gay parenting” and “a book which provides assistance to homosexual people in ‘coming out’” (176). On topics that appear subjective or as misinformation, such as “a book which provides advice on how to cure people of homosexual tendencies,” more respondents would not purchase than the previous mentioned descriptions (176).

Another recent study followed the trend of item descriptions and an acquisition scale but focused on attitudes of librarians who worked in Ohio public libraries (Oltmann 2016). Oltmann also used the same hypothetical item descriptions on homosexuality as Moody, along with other controversial topics, and the findings were similar. A description that also directly relates to the present study is “a graphic novel that contained some full frontal male and female nudity” in which respondents were less likely to purchase than “a guide to gay parenting” or “a book which provides assistance to homosexual people in ‘coming out’” but more likely label the item if purchased (Oltmann 37).

Kaihoi (2014) surveyed librarians working in Christian academic libraries on their perceptions of the Library Bill of Rights and included four questions on content-based acquisitions. Of the respondents who agreed that Christian academic libraries should filter or not purchase materials in regards to content, more than half thought materials with sexually explicit content should be filtered, limited, or not acquired at all. When asked the same question for public libraries, the majority of respondents thought sexually explicit materials should be

filtered, limited, or not purchased as well. One respondent commented that she would not limit materials based on “viewpoint or content” if she worked in a public library.

Another study focused on Missouri public library directors’ and staff’s attitudes towards collecting romance fiction and attitudes about the readers of the genre (Adkins, Velasquez, and Esser 2006). Most survey respondents indicated that romance novels were high-circulating in their libraries and were acquired through both purchasing and donations, but that they do not personally read romance fiction thus creating a barrier in readers’ advisory services. To assess attitudes respondents selected from a Likert-type scale on statements relating to romance readers’ assumed education level, learned attitudes and behaviors, and whether romance novels are pornography for women, with which most respondents disagreed.

In relation to surveying librarian attitudes, Siegel (2007) conducted a study that focused less on collection development and more on medical librarians’ comfort level with assisting patrons with reference interviews related to sex. The survey design consisted of three reference scenarios on gender related medical conditions, sexually transmitted infections, and sexual orientation in which most respondents selected that they were either “very comfortable” or “comfortable” with all scenarios.

Censorship and the selection of controversial materials for library collections have a long history of research, but the research is lacking on librarian attitudes towards specifically collecting sexually related materials in varying formats and library types. The authors' goal was to explore how library employees perceive the collection of sexually related materials, as well as which format types are considered acceptable based on library type.

Methodology

This survey was intended to be exploratory rather than to prove/disprove a hypothesis. The instrument was designed in 2012 and subsequently approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the researcher's university. The survey announcement was sent through various channels (Facebook; library list-servs, such as les-l and H-Net; and blogs, such as DeviantLibrarian.wordpress.com), and the survey was open from Feb. 2013 through Oct. 2013. The survey was hosted online via SurveyMonkey. An announcement via *Library Journal* was published (February 11, 2013) in an online Genre Spotlight. The survey was open to respondents 18 or older with previous or current library work experience, though the survey was only available in English. Even though the survey focus was on collecting, survey participants were not required to have collection development experience. A drawing for four \$25 Amazon gift cards was advertised as incentive to participate.

The survey required an average of 40 minutes to complete. Depending on a respondent's answers, between 45 and 47 questions were presented; all but two questions required answers. The survey instrument is available online at <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11875/30>.

The first twelve questions (Q1-12) addressed respondents' demographics and work experience. The next six questions (Q13-18) assessed respondents' attitudes towards collecting specific examples of sexually related titles, including the appropriateness of each title for different types of libraries. Titles selected were either self-explanatory (e.g., *Best Erotic Comics*) or popular enough (e.g., *Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Edition*) that most Western participants would be able to provide opinions.

The next ten questions (Q19-28) addressed respondents' opinions on the acceptability of collecting and accessing materials of different sexual content categories and in various formats. In order to compile and define a comprehensive list of categories, the researchers consulted a

variety of academic and popular sources; definitions for 14 sexual content categories were included with each question. The full list of categories and definitions may be found on page 15 of the survey instrument, available online at <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11875/30>. However, the survey designers purposely chose to not define the overarching term *sexually related materials* in order to allow participants to define such items for themselves.

Four questions (Q29-32) asked participants to differentiate between erotica and pornography and to provide definitions and examples of each. The next three questions (Q33-35) ask about opinions regarding historicity, preservation, and educational intent of sexually related materials. Another nine questions (Q36-44) assess personal values regarding collection development and access. In Q45, participants were asked to define *pornography*. The last two questions (Q46-47) served as optional feedback regarding the survey itself.

Upon completion of the survey, respondents were offered the opportunity to enter the optional prize drawing, and winners were selected by an online number randomizer. Contact information provided for the prize drawing was stored separately from survey responses to prevent identification of participants.

Results

Overview

A total of 2,325 respondents started the online survey. Because 1,160 of those respondents did not finish the questionnaire, these incomplete responses were removed from the final analysis. Of the 1,165 respondents who completed the survey, 78.9% were female, 19.7% were male, and the rest (1.5%) preferred not to answer. Those between the ages of 31-40 composed of the largest respondent group (30.0%), followed by those between the ages 51-60

(19.8%), and between the ages 41-50 (19.1%) (Figure 1). Half (50.6%) of the respondents have more than 10 years of library work experience.

Figure 1

Ninety percent of the respondents had work experience in an academic or public library setting, including 184 respondents (15.9%) with experiences working in both (Figure 2). Eighty-three percent of the respondents had some experience in collection development, although there were no discernable differences between the responses of those with and without collection development responsibilities.

Figure 2

In addition to work experience, 81.6% of all the respondents indicated some academic background in library science. However, while 78.1% of the respondents held master's (76.4%) and doctoral (2.7%) degrees, only around half of the respondents with graduate degrees indicated that their highest level of education was in the field of library science (456 or 38.5% of total respondents). Of the 407 respondents with non-library science graduate degrees, literature and linguistics (25.6%) and history (17.9%) were the most common fields of study.

The great majority of the respondents (90.7%) resided in the United States. Residents of Canada (5.7%) and Australia (2.2%) made up the next two largest respondent groups. The remainder of the respondents (1.4%) resided in South Korea, India, United Arab Emirates, and a number of European countries.

Opinions on Collecting Sexually Related Materials

Legality (55.6%) and budget (52.5%) were the two most commonly cited acceptable reasons for not collecting sexually related materials in a library by the respondents; while personal beliefs (2.7%), political/religious pressure (3.3%), and whether the collectors finds the

material personally offensive (4.0%) were the least cited acceptable reason for not collecting sexually related materials. Respondents with graduate degrees were less likely to view personal beliefs (1.7%) or personal feelings of offensiveness (3.0%) as reasons to not collect sex materials, compared to those without graduate degrees (6.2% and 7.8% respectively).

In addition, even though legality was the most cited reason for both male and female respondents to not collect sexually related materials, this view was far from unanimous: 48.3% (200 of 414) of male and 44.1% (405 of 919) of female respondents did not select legality as an acceptable reason for not collecting sexually related materials in a library environment. Moreover, 7.0% (29 of 414) of male respondents and 4.2% (39 of 919) of female respondents felt that there were “no [acceptable] reasons” for not collecting sexually related materials in a library environment.

Regarding the suitability of different types of sexually related materials for library collections, 74.0% of the respondents felt that materials depicting actual sex acts of paraphilia should be illegal, although the ratings varied between male (67.3%) and female respondents (75.7%). At the other end of the spectrum, 22.7% of the respondents (28.4% of all male and 21.2% of all female) felt that no items should be illegal to access.

Attitudes towards Collecting for Different Types of Libraries

When asked to review various titles for their suitability in different library collections, the respondents rated public libraries as a more suitable setting than academic libraries for collecting all the suggested print titles, including *The Joy of Sex* (91.4% considered acceptable for public libraries vs. 64.1% for academic libraries), Kinsey’s *Sexual Behavior of the Human Female or Male* (84.7% vs. 81.9%), the graphic novel *Lost Girls* (76.0% vs. 42.6%), and *Out* magazine (64.8% vs. 43.3%).

On the other hand, respondents felt that academic libraries would be a more suitable setting than public libraries for collecting sexually explicit films, including the X-rated *Deep Throat* (29.9% for academic libraries vs. 15.9% for public libraries) and the NC-17 rated documentary, *Inside Deep Throat* (51.1% vs. 38.6%).

While both academic and public library respondents felt that public libraries would be more suitable to collect the various types of print sex materials, those with experience working in a particular type of library were more likely to rate that type of library as a suitable setting for collecting sexually related material. For instance, 71.1% of the academic library respondents felt that academic libraries would be a suitable setting for *The Joy of Sex*, compared to 61.2% of public library respondents. Similarly, 88.1% of the public library respondents felt that public libraries would be a suitable setting for the same title, compared to 83.4% of the academic library respondents.

Attitudes towards Collecting Different Types of Materials

The majority of respondents indicated that it was either “acceptable” or “absolutely acceptable” for libraries to collect text-based (“textual”) fiction and non-fiction materials depicting nudity or sex. However, the respondents’ rating of acceptability for decreases for visual materials depicting the same topics. For instance, non-fiction material depicting explicit sex was rated 60.2% acceptable when the content is presented textually, but only 38.5% acceptable when the content is presented in photos.

In addition, respondents found it more acceptable for libraries to collect graphic novels depicting sexually related content than other visual media materials depicting the same topics. Video games were rated as the least acceptable medium for collecting sexually related materials.

Specifically, less than 40% of respondents found it acceptable for libraries to collect video games depicting any type of sexually related content (Table 1).

Table 1

Perception towards the Purpose and Access of Sexually Related Materials in Libraries

Almost three-quarters of the respondents (74.0%) felt that it was acceptable for libraries to collect sexually explicit materials for educational intent and almost two-thirds (63.5%) of the respondents felt that libraries “should have a role in preserving sexually related materials for current and future research.” A great majority of the respondents also indicated willingness to assist patrons with sexually related materials (78.5% yes, 17.3% maybe, 2.7% no, and 1.6% don’t know).

Nonetheless, opinions on providing access to these materials varied. When asked whether sex materials should be kept in an area that requires permission to access, half of the respondents answered “maybe” (47.6%) or “don’t know” (3.4%), while 16.9% said yes and 32.1% said no. Respondents’ opinions were also divisive on whether to differentiate between collecting historical and contemporary sexually related materials: 35.5% answered “maybe,” followed by “no” (28.8%), “yes” (26.6%), and “don’t know” (9.1%).

Defining Erotica and Pornography

The majority of the respondents (58.5%) believed that erotica and pornography differ, 10.9 % believed there are no differences, and the rest either were unsure (17.7% indicated “maybe”) or did not know (12.9%). A higher proportion of respondents who reported an ALA-accredited MLS as their highest level of education (64.7%) believed there is a difference between erotica and pornography than who reported a different degree as their highest level of

education (54.8%). Nonetheless, respondents' definitions for these two types of sexually related materials varied widely.

Discussion

The information gathered on library employees' opinions of the collection development of sex materials suggests a variety of issues for libraries to consider as a direct result of this study.

Pornography vs. Erotica

Respondents were asked whether they defined pornography and erotica differently and, if so, what distinguished these terms. The researchers coded 791 individual comments according to common themes. Because some comments may have been coded under multiple themes, a total of 902 categorized comments across 11 themes were analyzed.

The dominant theme that emerged was that of *Artistic and Literary Merit* (345), illustrated by comments such as “*Erotica has some cultural, scientific, or artistic merit. Pornography is 100% prurient,*” and “*Erotica has an artistic side or storytelling aspect. Porn is mechanical.*” The second most referenced theme was *Textual Versus Visual/Graphic* (137), which hinges on the idea that the use of actual imagery versus descriptive text is what differentiates pornography and erotica. Comments depicting this theme included: “*I tend to think of pornography as visual materials, and erotica as written materials,*” and “*I think erotica is more textual and insinuated rather than pornography being very explicit and illustrated.*” The third theme was *Explicitness* (115), which suggests that pornography and erotica involve different degrees of explicit content. Some of the comments coded under this theme included: “*Erotica is suggestive while pornography is explicit sex,*” and “*While both are meant to elicit arousal through visual or textual stimulation, pornography is often more visually explicit (by*

definition). *So, erotica can be pornographic but isn't always.*” The other eight coded themes can be seen in Table 2.

The researchers’ major take-away from these coded comments is that while some respondents were confident in their ability to distinguish between pornography and erotica, others found the terms highly subjective and not easily defined or measured.

Table 2

Legality

With some exceptions, libraries support researchers and field experts. While it may be against an individual’s or even society’s beliefs or laws, it is difficult to ascertain the impact that *not* having this information available would have on further progress in fields such as criminal justice, psychology, anthropology, sociology, and more. Society benefits when researchers are able to make advances in their fields, for instance, by diagnosing more effectively or developing methods to rehabilitate criminals.

When distinguishing pornography from erotica, legality was one of the less prevalent themes, appearing in only 24 responses. Nevertheless, this theme is noteworthy because legal status is a somewhat measurable characteristic, yet one about which many respondents were misinformed. Some respondents were very certain that the difference between the two terms was dependent on legal status. Comments demonstrating this opinion include: “*Obviously. Pornography is a legal definition. Erotica is designed to titillate. Pornography is illegal.*” and “*I would define erotica as descriptions/depictions of legal acts, and pornography as those of illegal acts*”. Other respondents were less certain of how the laws distinguish between pornography and erotica, though they still suspected it might play a role; for instance, one respondent wrote “*There’s probably some legal difference but I don’t know what it is*”.

These comments raise several questions about what factors may have affected respondents' perspectives on what is legal.² Society is constantly inundated with news and information which emphasizes stories with illicit aspects, such as child porn, bestiality, etc. Therefore, the researchers wonder if the media conditions people to associate porn with being illegal to an exaggerated degree. Correspondingly, public perception of pornography may be falsely skewed by illegal behaviors of some adult entertainment companies, such as illegally filming in abandoned houses or residential zoned neighborhoods, or the use of actors/actresses under the age of 18 years of old.³

The misperception that pornography is defined by its illegal status may have implications for library collection development. In other survey questions, legality was the highest ranked reason to validate not collecting sexually related materials in a library environment, as indicated by 52% (214 of 414) of male and 56% (514 of 919) of female respondents. Even so, these numbers indicate that nearly half of respondents find that illegal status should not be a barrier to collecting. Historically there have been various subject matters (homosexuality, transgender identification, bisexuality) that were illegal to publish or own/collect. However, even illegally, some individuals have collected these materials, and as social perspectives change over time, libraries are often able to acquire these previously illicit collections.⁴ This has allowed some materials to be preserved and give us perspective and information about historical societies and the lifestyles of those who lived in those times. Since libraries cannot predict how the legal status of any given material might change in the future, collecting everything could be considered a "best practice" in our role as preservationists.

² For further reading, see: Hauptman (1976); Jones (1999); and McMenemy (2008).

³ For a few examples of these activities, see, for instance, Susko and Schrader (2016) and Szep (2008).

⁴ See, for example, Wolf (2016); York (2016); Manchester City Council (2014).

Nearly 64% of respondents indicated libraries have a role in preserving sexually-related materials for research purposes. Preserving illegal sexually-related materials is a more complex matter of collection for many libraries. Compared to individual researchers attempting to own/collect or gain access to illegal materials, libraries are uniquely situated for facilitating access to materials due to existing systems and procedures, such as circulation, reserves, and closed collections. Furthermore, libraries may not be willing or able to “police” access to illegal material.

Issues of Collection versus Censorship

When developing collection development policies, libraries generally attempt to curate a collection they believe will best serve their community of patrons. However, with regard to sexually related materials, libraries must consider whether their collection development policies are tantamount to censorship. When respondents were asked “When [public or research] libraries decide against collecting sexually related materials despite patron demand are they practicing censorship?”, they answered affirmatively (49.2% in regards to public libraries vs 64.2% in regards to research libraries). Perhaps respondents felt like an academic request for a material carries more weight than a request from the general population. Also there may be a perception that public library patrons “*want*” a material whereas academic patrons “*need*” a material for research, class, etc.⁵ Collection development policies are always a matter of making choices but it is hoped that libraries base those decisions upon their patrons’ needs rather than personal preferences, biases, or beliefs.

Additionally, respondents overall indicated that public libraries were a more suitable collection setting than academic libraries for all of the specified books (81.7% vs 53.6%,

⁵ For further discussion on this idea, see: Zickuhr, Rainie, and Purcell (2013) and Hernon and Altman (2010).

respectively), magazines (52.9% vs 34.6%, respectively), and most of the specified videos (44.9% vs 36.6%, respectively). Conversely, explicit videos rated NC-17 or X were deemed more suitable for academic library collections. Perhaps respondents felt that restricting more explicit content to patrons above age of consent seems more likely in academic settings. Additionally, in academic libraries, there may be a higher likelihood of patrons using sexually related material for research versus personal gratification.

Non-Heteronormative Materials

A slight variation in respondents' acceptance of collecting *The Joy of Sex* versus *The Joy of Gay Sex* is worth pondering. Despite the fact that both works aim to provide the same sort of factual, objective manual to healthy human sexuality, the heterosexual title was deemed slightly more acceptable for library collecting than the homosexual title—however, the researchers wonder whether the socially unacceptable history of material outside the heteronormative, cisgender viewpoint might mean that the homosexual title is less well known. Despite the titles sounding parallel, did respondents have enough awareness of or familiarity with *The Joy of Gay Sex* to feel safe in assuming that the title actually did have the same objective as *The Joy of Sex*? While this study does not contain enough data to draw conclusions on this point, the issue bears further investigation, along with further discussion of the under-representation of historically marginalized communities, their space in libraries, and community and individual biases.

Effects of Graduate Education

The researchers had expected a greater division of opinions between MLS-degreed librarians and non-MLS library staff, with the idea that focused education in Library and Information Science tends to convey a stronger attitude of anti-censorship and more openness to the idea that all information may fit a context of need—as Ranganathan's second and third laws

state, “Every book its reader” and “Every reader his book.” In reality, however, the variation in responses was much starker between respondents who held a graduate degree in *any* field, compared to those with no graduate degree: as reported in the Results section, respondents with graduate degrees were less likely than those without graduate degrees to view personal beliefs or personal feelings of offensiveness as reasons to not collect sex materials. The researchers theorize that, even without library-focused study regarding contexts of information needs, a rigorous engagement with complicated ideas, varying viewpoints, and complex problems at the graduate level of study tends to decrease reliance on a strict dualistic perspective and increase sensitivity to a wider context of opinions and needs.

Attitudes towards Collecting Different Types of Materials: Distinctions Between Live Acts, Illustration, and Description

The researchers had also pondered whether respondents’ judgment of materials as appropriate for library collecting would vary significantly according to whether the material contained depictions of real people engaged in sex acts (such as video or photographs); illustrations representing sex acts (whether in a graphic novel format or in more educational drawings); or textual descriptions of sex acts lacking in any visual representation. In reality, not much difference in opinion was noted in relation to this level of depiction versus description; rather, the purpose and audience of the material seemed more relevant to respondents’ judgments concerning appropriateness for library collecting.⁶

Limitations and Further Research

Although the researchers received a sufficient number of completed surveys, approximately half (1,160) of all attempts were removed from consideration due to incompleteness.

⁶ For further discussion, see, for example: Steiner (2004) and Quinn (2012).

The researchers suspect this may have been primarily due to the length of the survey.

Nevertheless, the possibility of detrimental effects from self-selection should be considered when interpreting the results. For example, it is possible that a portion of the completed surveys may have been from respondents who felt strongly enough about the survey's topic to tolerate the lengthy time requirement. Additionally, some respondents may have elected to discontinue the survey upon encountering a question or series of questions that made them uncomfortable. Scenarios such as these risk encouraging certain respondents to drop out of the survey, which could ultimately skew results and diminish the study's transferability. Future researchers of this topic may wish to experiment with ways to help minimize attrition, such as by creating several smaller surveys or by reducing the overall length of the survey.

Of the interesting possibilities for further research is using theoretical lenses, such as feminist theory, to examine survey-takers responses to homosexual content and gender issues related to sexual materials. Examining implicit biases among a general breakdown of ages, genders, etc. may also give further clues into attitudes and choices within libraries and other institutions.

Moreover, upon analyzing the survey results, the researchers became aware of several issues associated with various elements of the survey's design. For example, respondents were asked to select their highest level of education, but only one option from a list of eight could be selected. This meant that if a respondent had earned both an MLS and a doctorate degree, only the doctorate degree would have been recorded. However, since no separate question was ever presented to the respondents asking whether they held an MLS or MLIS degree, the possibilities exist that not all MLS-holders were accounted for. This error could have reduced the accuracy of results for any data point in which answers from MLS holders were compared to non-MLS

holders. Likewise, if a respondent had earned two or more equivalent degrees in different fields of study, they would have been forced to either select only one, or select “Other” and write in all equivalent highest held degrees. While some respondents did select the “Other” option, there was no way to ensure all applicable respondents answered the question in this manner. Compounding the issue, the researchers’ level of institutional subscription to SurveyMonkey did not include functionality for written responses to be coded retroactively. This severely limited the researchers’ ability to compare raw data from write-in answers to other survey results, and could have impacted results of any question offering a write-in answer option; due to the quantity of open-ended questions and the quantity of respondents, an attempt to manually code would have been prohibitively time-consuming, although such coding was done for a few select questions. Future researchers may wish to select a survey tool that enables an efficient and intuitive way for write-in answers to be coded and implemented into the survey’s results.

Furthermore, directly after being asked to report their highest level of education, respondents were asked to select all fields of study for degrees received. The researchers’ intention was to have this data point correspond to the selection made regarding highest level of education; however, because this connection was not explicitly stated in the question’s instructions, there is a possibility that some respondents may have misinterpreted the intent of the question and selected fields of study for any degree received. Additionally, because multiple selections were allowed, the researchers found that where multiple selections were made, they were unable to accurately correspond the field of study selection to the degree received. For example, if the highest level of education selected by a respondent was a master’s degree, and fields of study selected were history and criminal justice, the researchers would have been unable to determine whether this meant the respondent held a master’s degree in each selected field of

study, or determine which field of study corresponded to the master's degree selection. Future researchers may wish to experiment with design modifications that would correlate multiple reported degrees to specific fields of study.

The researchers also allowed multiple selections to be made in questions pertaining to the respondents' work experience. While this allowed for a more inclusive method of data collection, it created an unintended overlap in selection results, which resulted in an inability to assess data points from respondents with experience in only one library type and/or collection development area. Future researchers interested in collecting information on respondents' previous work experience may wish to design their survey in such a way that years of experience could be correlated to reported areas of work experience. In this way, researchers could compare data points from respondents within a specified range of years of experience for any given branch or field.

Next, for those questions which asked patrons to assess whether certain titles were suitable for collection in various types of libraries, the researchers elected to not provide links to examples of the specified resources. However, the researchers also did not explicitly state that participants could or should consider researching those titles on their own before answering. This means that some respondents may have answered questions pertaining to the suitability of collection of these resources without actually knowing much about them. In retrospect, the researchers acknowledge that it may have been beneficial to either suggest this possibility to respondents, or implement a question that first assessed whether the respondents were familiar with the resources.

Finally, the researchers identified several survey questions in which the term "academic libraries," was switched to "research libraries." While in some contexts these two terms may be

used interchangeably, it is possible the alternating of terms in this survey may have caused confusion or interpretation variances to the respondents.

Conclusion

Libraries make collection development decisions based, ideally, on the population they serve and their needs and preferences. However, in most cases, collecting sexually related material, particularly that which falls under the paraphilia categories and is either a film or a book with photography or realistic drawings, is contentious among librarians and staff. Interestingly, in the minds of librarians and staff, it falls to academic libraries to take up the collection of those materials which library employees find contentious yet relevant to research. Without a dedicated national library to collect, preserve, and display materials that reflect our country's past, sex materials have no predetermined place to call home. While the Library of Congress may function as a national library on some level, that is neither its purpose nor goal. In survey-takers' minds, it is up to someone else, some academic library, not necessarily their own, to preserve materials for research purposes. A great deal more analysis may be done with the data to discover other relationships between library employees and various materials. Perhaps by better understanding the relationships and perspectives that librarians and staff have about the cultural work available for collection, which is often challenged or censored, librarians and staff can determine what steps are next for ensuring more inclusive collections and discussing the roles of libraries in preserving materials for research.

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