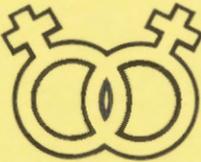


CENSORED.

I G N O R E D,

 **OVER-** 
LOOKED,

 **T O O** 
EXPENSIVE

**HOW TO GET
GAY MATERIALS
INTO LIBRARIES**

A Guide to Library Selection Policies for the Non-Librarian

CENSORED, IGNORED, OVERLOOKED, TOO EXPENSIVE ?

HOW TO GET GAY MATERIALS INTO LIBRARIES

A GUIDE TO LIBRARY SELECTION POLICIES FOR THE NON-LIBRARIAN

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-At a New England liberal arts college, the library had only twelve books on homosexuality that the college's gay group considered positive. All twelve titles were kept behind the circulation desk and had to be asked for.
-The Louisiana Gay Blade found that eight public libraries around the state had almost no material listed in their card catalogs under "Gay Liberation Movement" and very little under "Homosexuality" and "Lesbianism."
-In a western state, a lesbian librarian reported that her public library rejected most literature on lesbian themes on grounds of style, lack of demand by users, etc.
-The "Library Bill of Rights" (an official policy statement of the American Library Association) states in part: "As a responsibility of library service, books and other library materials should be chosen for values of interest, information and enlightenment of all people of the community. In no case should library materials be excluded because of the race or nationality or the social, political or religious views of the authors. Libraries should provide books and other materials presenting all points of view concerning the problems and issues of our times; no library materials should be proscribed or removed from libraries because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval."

Is a library violating the "Library Bill of Rights" when it has little or no literature on gay themes?

Does the rejection of lesbian books constitute censorship of gay materials?

If books on homosexuality are kept in a restricted-access area, does this indicate moral disapproval by the librarian?

None of these questions has a plain Yes or No answer. Selecting materials for libraries is a complex process, particularly for libraries that try to have general collections. The absence of material of special interest to gay people may not be due to any deliberate policy by the library. There are many factors in selecting materials for any library. For instance, the average cost of a book--and the cost of processing the book--has gone up rapidly since 1970, much faster than other consumer items. In general, library book budgets have not risen at anything near the same rate. Also, librarians are reluctant to buy items that do not seem to be in demand. Of course people who want materials on homosexuality often are afraid or embarrassed to ask for them, but you can hardly expect

librarians to buy titles that have never been requested or to buy materials on a topic that never seems to be of interest to library users.

None of this is an excuse for libraries' not having material of special interest to gay people. But you should realize that most libraries cannot buy all the material they would like to have. A library "selection policy" necessarily means excluding a great deal of all the available published material on all possible subjects.

This pamphlet is intended to help gay library users who want to see more material on gay issues and gay themes in their libraries. It will give you some information on selection processes in public and college libraries, and some suggestions for effectively arguing for more gay materials. This discussion deals with printed materials, but remember that most libraries have non-print materials too (such as films, filmstrips, cassette tapes, records), and much of the information given here about selection processes applies also to non-print items.

EVALUATING THE COLLECTION

Your first step is to find out what gay materials the library already has. Libraries are not immune to change, and you might find that your library has a surprisingly good collection on homosexuality. To find out, check the library's card catalog (which lists all the library's holdings under author, title, and/or subject) against a list of gay titles that represents a good quality basic collection of gay materials. For non-fiction, you can use as checklists the American Library Association Gay Task Force's A Gay Bibliography (1) and/or Gay Materials Core Collection List (2). For fiction and biography, there is a good list in the back of the book Word Is Out (3).

Only the very largest libraries are likely to have all or most of the titles listed in these three works, but you should expect to find at least a few of the items even in a very small library.

The subject headings most widely used for this topic in American libraries are "Gay Liberation Movement," "Homosexuality," and "Lesbianism." Fiction titles will not show up under subject headings, only under title and author.

To check what periodicals a library has, ask a librarian, since there are several different ways used in libraries for listing periodicals.

REQUESTING MATERIAL

Once you know what the library has, you can decide what else it should have (see section WHAT BOOKS FOR WHAT LIBRARIES?) and make a

list. You should also check to see whether the titles the library shows in the card catalog are actually available. If a title cannot be located and is declared lost, the library usually will try to replace it. If it's a positive work, you should urge the library to replace it.

Next, get down on your list the basic bibliographic information for each title you want. This means the author's full name, the complete title, place of publication, publisher, year of publication, price, and International Standard Book (or Serial) Number. Actually this is easy to do. For books, you can find most of this information right in the library in Books in Print, the major listing of books currently available in the U.S. Almost every library has Books in Print. Many small-press titles are listed in Alternatives in Print: International Catalog of Social Change Publications (Neal-Schuman Publishers, 6th edition 1979).

Next you should find at least one favorable (or at least neutral) review of each title on your list. Most librarians rely heavily on reviews in selecting books. A book that has received many favorable reviews will count for more with the librarian in charge of selection than a book that has gone unnoticed in the critical press.

You can locate book reviews--that is, find out where and when they were published--by consulting Book Review Digest, Book Review Index, and/or Current Book Review Citations. You will find at least one of these in almost any public or academic library in the U.S., usually in the reference section.

Book reviews from national publications like The New York Times Book Review, Saturday Review, Time and Newsweek are usually well regarded. Public libraries also rely heavily on reviews published in Library Journal, School Library Journal, ALA Booklist, and Kirkus Reviews. College libraries also look to Choice and to scholarly journals as sources for book reviews.

You can also use reviews from gay periodicals to back up your book requests, but you should understand that librarians rely most heavily on reviews from the sources they are familiar with.

Although it is not necessary, it's a good idea to make copies of any favorable or neutral reviews you find, to submit along with your request. You will be doing some of the librarian's work but it will give you more bargaining power.

After you have assembled the bibliographic data and reviews for the items you want, find out if the library has a regular procedure for handling requests from users. Some libraries have forms for such requests, and on the form you will have to fill in some or all of the bibliographic information. Usually the library will want

a name and address on the form so it can notify you what action is taken on your request. (Sometimes the library will even tell you in advance what procedure to follow if your request is turned down and you want it reconsidered.) Keep a record of your request(s) in case you need to follow up.

In other libraries, you may have to make your request orally. You should ask to see the selection or acquisition librarian. When you make your request in person, you should confirm it in writing (and be sure to keep a dated copy of your confirming letter). This will oblige the library to let you know what it decides, and will also prevent misunderstandings about what you requested and when.

If you made copies of favorable reviews of the books you want, remember to attach them to your letter or your form request.

If you are asking the library to subscribe to a gay periodical, you should offer sample copies with your request. As with books, favorable reviews of gay periodicals will weigh heavily with the selection librarian; unfortunately only a tiny handful of gay periodicals has been reviewed in the critical press (4).

WHAT BOOKS FOR WHAT LIBRARIES?

Keep in mind that different libraries exist for different purposes. A book suitable for one library may not be suitable for another. For example, college and university libraries exist primarily to support the school's educational objectives. They are not likely to buy popular titles unless they are relevant works that can help the library to support the course work offered by the school. On the other hand, a public library will buy popular titles, since a public library is interested in providing a wide range of general fiction and non-fiction.

For example, The Gay Academic is appropriate for an academic library since the book is a collection of essays by and for scholars. A small public library probably would not find this title very useful for its more general collection. On the other hand, Gayellow Pages, a classified directory of gay organizations, businesses and services in the U.S. and Canada, is clearly appropriate for a public library of any size.

But don't assume that all books can be labeled "for public libraries only" or "for academic libraries only." For instance, you might find The Gay Academic in the central branch of a large public library or even in a branch library in a community with a large gay or college population. Lesbian/Woman would probably be in most public libraries, but it might also be in university and college libraries, particularly if courses in sociology, women's studies or other disciplines include readings on homosexuality.

In requesting subscriptions to gay periodicals, choose those that you can make a strong case for with that particular library. Your public library should carry at least the major gay periodical serving your geographical area (examples: Seattle Gay News, The Blade, GayLife, Gay Community News, Gay Alaska) and a couple of national publications as well (examples: Lesbian Tide, Christopher Street, Body Politic (Canada), Lesbian Connection, The Advocate). Periodicals that emphasize literature and the arts (examples: Conditions (a mainly-lesbian women's literary magazine) and Gay Sunshine) may be more readily accepted in college libraries.

It would help if every library had a collection development policy that specifies what the library will and will not collect. Many libraries have not yet worked out such policies although more and more are doing so. If the library does have a written policy, you should be able to look at it in the library.

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

Your request may have more impact if it comes from a group of people, although individual requests are quite legitimate. A letter to the selection librarian asking for purchase of several titles, and signed by several people, may be quite effective. You may also increase your chances by having several individuals send in separate requests for the same title or titles.

Public libraries are sensitive to what their communities want. In addition, under the "Library Bill of Rights" librarians have a professional responsibility to supply materials on all points of view on current issues.

In academic libraries, it will help if you get faculty support for requests for gay materials. The library usually orders titles that are requested by faculty members for use by their students in particular courses. If you are in a college or university gay group, you can ask your faculty advisor to request gay materials or to help you identify those faculty members who would be most likely to want a good collection of material on homosexuality in the library to back up their teaching.

EVERYTHING ALL THE TIME?

You should keep in mind that age and availability also limit book selection. Public libraries generally don't make much effort to obtain older, out-of-print books. This is particularly true for non-fiction, since a public library is more interested in providing current and up-to-date information than in providing an historical perspective in any given subject (although this is not always the

case). Academic libraries make more effort to get out-of-print titles if they are needed for course work and if having them would give the library a more comprehensive collection of material for research purposes.

All libraries will replace worn-out books, and will consider buying reprints of older works--for example, the recent reprints of Jeannette Foster's Sex Variant Women in Literature and of Christopher Isherwood's novel A Single Man.

Some public libraries may be reluctant to buy materials from the "small presses"--those publishers that usually publish works on a special range of topics or works of one literary genre--mainly because such publishers have limited distribution capabilities. Small presses publish a lot of material of specific interest to gay people. Public libraries often will get the works of small presses located in their own area, but most public libraries will have few titles from small presses outside their area. However, as more and more small presses develop, regional and national distributors for their output have also formed (a list of these distributors was published in the September 1978 issue of American Libraries which is sent to the 33,000-plus members of the American Library Association) and even the large book distributors now carry some small-press publications. So distribution is less and less of an excuse for public libraries to omit small-press materials from their collections.

WHAT TO DO IF THE LIBRARY REFUSES

Even with all the limitations discussed above, there obviously are many works of special interest to gay people that could and should be available in public and academic libraries. If your request for gay materials is denied, there are several procedures you can use.

First try to anticipate what arguments you may need. If you suspect that the library is intentionally censoring, you can cite the "Library Bill of Rights" (5) and the "Freedom to Read" (6) statements as supporting the necessity for "balanced" collections. This means that libraries should provide information on all viewpoints about any given subject. In addition, the American Library Association went on record at its 1977 annual meeting recommending that all libraries "reaffirm their obligation under the Library Bill of Rights to disseminate information representing all points of view (on homosexuality and gay rights)" (7). Few librarians will contradict these policy statements outright.

Again, libraries respond to community demands. Laws establishing public libraries usually specify that those libraries exist

to supply information to the public. Any legal resident in a community with a public library supports that library through taxes. So you as a taxpaying resident can legitimately demand that your information needs be met.

In a college or university library, support from the faculty is essential in convincing a reluctant librarian to buy certain materials.

You may be told that there isn't enough money to buy the materials you want. In some cases this is a legitimate reason. However, as more and more works on homosexual themes appear every year, this argument gets weaker. The increase in gay materials shows that there is an audience for such works. You might well be suspicious if a public library said it couldn't buy the best-seller The David Kopay Story because of "lacks of funds." You might well be suspicious if an academic library said it couldn't buy Society and the Healthy Homosexual because of "lack of funds" when homosexuality is studied in psychology, sociology, ethics, contemporary history and other courses.

Information about library budgets is fairly easy to get. Public libraries usually come under public disclosure laws and issue their annual budgets as public documents. State library agencies also usually prepare statistics that may show the per capita spending by individual libraries around the state.

Public universities and colleges also are subject to public disclosure laws and their budgets, including the library budget, are issued as public documents. Private colleges and universities often publish budgets in alumni bulletins or in their annual reports (which are usually available in the school's library).

A look at a library's budget will at least give you an idea of how much financial support the library has and may indicate how good or bad its money situation is. Based on this, you may be able to challenge the "lack of funds" argument.

When you have gathered your arguments, you should go first to the librarian responsible for selection. She or he may have a satisfactory explanation of why a certain item was not bought. (You should ask for the reasons without first assuming there has been intentional censorship of gay materials.) Again, it helps if the approach is made on behalf of a group, but your individual follow-up should also get full consideration.

If your discussion with the selection librarian is unsatisfactory, one alternative is to go to the library's governing board. Public libraries generally are governed by a board that is elected or is appointed by a local public official. The make-up and duties of such boards are set forth in the state or local law code. A governing board may be authorized to act as an appeals committee for its library. Meetings of such boards are usually open to the public.

An academic library may not have a governing board, although some schools have faculty library committees. These committees may be only advisory. In some schools the head librarian is responsible only to the academic dean or the president.

Regardless of the type of library, there is probably at least one avenue of appeal from the decisions of an individual librarian. Whenever you appeal to a higher level, you can make a more cogent presentation if you can supply a record of events including the dates of your requests, copies of any correspondence, and memos of any telephone or in-person discussions you had with librarians. Always get the full names and titles of all the people you talk with.

Another tactic to follow if your request is denied for whatever reason, is to ask the library to get the item(s) for you on interlibrary loan.

Interlibrary loan is a system whereby a library that doesn't have a certain title can borrow that title from another library on behalf of a library user. Most libraries, if they get repeated interlibrary loan requests for a particular title, will consider buying the item for their own collections, because interlibrary loan means paperwork and expense.

DONATIONS

Most libraries gladly accept donations if the material is useful. If your library had legitimate reasons for not buying the items you want, you can consider donating them.

In New York City, for example, the Chelsea Gay Association presented the Muhlenberg Branch of the New York Public Library with a large collection of gay and feminist works at a ceremony on November 2, 1978. (The New York Public Library system had suffered drastic budget cuts.)

If you want to make a donation you should of course contact the library first. Also you should not make too many qualifications about the gift. For example, it is not a good idea to require that all the materials you donate be kept in a special section in the library because such restrictions increase the library's processing costs.

Ask if the library has a way to acknowledge the gift, such as by putting a label with the donor's name inside the book's cover. You can of course make your donation anonymous if you prefer.

You should certainly follow up to make sure that your donation gets onto the library's shelves. But keep in mind that processing routines can take from two months to a year, particularly in larger libraries, so it may take a while for your donated items to appear on the shelves.

WHEN YOU HAVE TO ASK FOR IT

You should be aware that theft is a problem in every library. Some libraries lose thousands of dollars' worth of materials every year. Books on homosexuality (and sexuality in general) are among those most liable to be stolen (or to be mutilated by pages being torn out). If your request that the library buy Rubyfruit Jungle is met with reluctance, it may be because the five copies that were originally bought disappeared in one week.

On the other hand, libraries do budget for loss. A certain percentage of the book purchasing fund is usually used to replace stolen or lost copies. That one book seems more likely to be stolen than another is hardly a sensible criterion for selecting materials for a library, and most librarians would reject a "theft index" as a rule for selection since almost any item in a library may tempt a potential thief. There are no easy solutions to this problem.

Some libraries restrict access to certain books by putting them in a locked case or behind the circulation desk so that you have to ask for them. Most librarians agree this is not an ideal solution but may be necessary. Books on gay themes are often prime candidates for this sort of treatment. Remember that the reason may be the library's concern about inroads on its budget through theft and mutilation, rather than the librarian's moral views or any community pressure to censor.

YOUR RIGHT TO INFORMATION

Librarians are very much concerned about the library user's right to information. So speak up if your library does not have a good collection of gay materials. You have a right to expect the library to supply information you need, but it may be up to you to explain what you need.

Librarians cannot buy everything for everybody. But you can help the librarian to buy something for you!

- (1) A Gay Bibliography is a selected non-fiction list of books, articles, pamphlets, periodicals, audio-visuals and directories. The 5th edition, 1975-76, with 252 entries, is still available in single copies for 30¢ prepaid but has very limited usefulness because of its date. A completely new 6th edition is due in late August 1979 for 75¢ prepaid, from the Gay Task Force of ALA.
- (2) Gay Materials Core Collection List, a list of about two dozen basic gay books and pamphlets (non-fiction only), is intended as a buying guide for small public libraries and is revised annually. For two copies, send 25¢ to the Gay Task Force of ALA.
- (3) Word Is Out: Stories of Some of Our Lives, by Nancy Adair and Casey Adair (New Glide/Delta, 1978). "Selected Bibliography" is pages 318-337.
- (4) For a list of those few reviews of gay periodicals, send 25¢ with your request to the Gay Task Force of ALA.
- (5) The most relevant part of the "Library Bill of Rights" is quoted on p. 1. For a copy of the complete text, send a stamped reply envelope to the Office for Intellectual Freedom, American Library Association, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611.
- (6) The "Freedom to Read" statement also is available for a return envelope from ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom, address above.
- (7) "WHEREAS approximately 10% of American men and women are gay, and
"WHEREAS there now exists a climate of hostility toward equal rights for gay citizens, and
"WHEREAS much of this hostility is generated by individuals and groups who perpetuate ignorance and fear through misinformation, and
"WHEREAS in 1971 the American Library Association Council and Membership adopted a resolution recommending that "libraries and members strenuously combat discrimination in services to and employment of individuals of all minority groups, whether distinguishing characteristics of the minority be ethnic, sexual, religious or any other kind,
"BE IT RESOLVED that Council reaffirms its support for equal employment opportunity for gay librarians and gay library workers, and
"BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that to combat the current campaign against full human rights for gay American citizens, Council recommends that libraries reaffirm their obligation under the Library Bill of Rights to disseminate information representing all points of view on this controversial topic." (Passed on June 22, 1977 by Council of the American Library Association)

Gay Task Force

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