
Confirmed by the Research: *There IS Sex in the Library!*

by Pauletta Brown Bracy

Censorship thrives in the boundless realm of public opinion. Unconfined by parameters, it pervades any aspect of American life. Dichotomies of what is right or wrong, good or bad, virtuous or decadent pose little problem for those who steadfastly hold to their positions in defending intellectual freedom or practicing censorship. Ultimately, both groups of citizens consider themselves acting in the best interest of the common good—to either protect constitutional rights by ensuring access to information in varied format or to preserve the morality of the nation by eliminating and suppressing expressions of thought.

Research has documented the tremendous impact of this ongoing battle, and this article provides an overview of censorship in the state of North Carolina. At best, the research is minimal. Though many would attest that censorship does happen, for it is an all too familiar news report, the dearth of research on the topic suggests that it often is not documented. Existing findings and conclusions, however, serve to remind us of two important phenomena: (1) that intellectual freedom and censorship continue to be critical issues for other professions, and (2) that the incidence of censorship is on the rise and it is becoming increasingly successful.

Revelations and Realities: A Study of the Literature

Two studies outside librarianship focused on journalism in high schools, and also the arts. Kathleen Douglass Phillips ex-

amined freedom of press in North Carolina high schools. In a survey of statewide journalism teachers/newspaper advisors and case studies at three high schools, she confirmed that North Carolina high school journalists experience prior review, prior restraint, and censorship as basic tenets of their journalism education.¹

A crisis in the arts labeled "culture war" led People For the American Way, a 300,000 member watchdog group that gauges censorship activity and regularly publishes findings of surveys, to begin monitoring challenges to artistic expression. *Artistic Freedom Under Attack, Vol. 3* contains analyses of 104 nationwide cases that occurred in 1994 and were documented through a survey, arts publications, and press coverage.² The prevalence in thirty-three states reflected an alarming successful censorship rate of seventy-eight percent. Sexuality or perceived sexual content in art headed the list as the basis for objection.³ Of the three North Carolina case studies, two occurred in Durham and involved of photography and performance; the third incident, in Hudson, involved theater.

The nature of our profession in handling all kinds of information mandates the special attention that we pay to censorship. We have embraced allies in the classrooms of both pub-

lic and private educational institutions that have found themselves victimized by the work of the censors. In an article prepared for *Tar Heel Libraries* last year, Gene Lanier, Chairman of the North Carolina Library Association Intellectual Freedom Committee, confirmed that challenges to library and classroom materials continue to rise in the state.⁴ Reporting a total of fifty-two titles, he cited seven different locations of attacks. The greatest number of twenty-nine occurred in Charlotte. Chapel Hill followed with about half as many as the top-ranked Charlotte; and Asheboro, Canton, Durham, Goldsboro, and Elizabethtown had three or fewer complaints.

Employing mail survey and interview methodologies, People For the American Way in North Carolina⁵ sought to determine the scope of censorious activity among North Carolina English and Social Studies teachers. Two hun-

In a disturbing thirty-two percent success rate, censors removed or restricted the challenged materials. Geographically, teachers in fifty-one of the seventy-four counties [in North Carolina] reported cases; the greatest activity occurred in Wake and Guilford counties.

dred and fifty-three teachers representing seventy-four counties responded to the survey conducted during the 1988-1989 school year. Selected follow-up interviews were conducted with thirty-six teachers from twenty-seven counties.

Data led the researchers to conclude in the report, *School Censorship in North Carolina: Conflict in the Classroom*, that censorship is a serious threat to North Carolina schools because more than twenty-five percent of the teachers surveyed indicated that they had faced challenges, and an additional ten percent who had not faced challenges knew of colleagues who had faced them.⁶ Topics of realistic and contemporary perspective including sex, religion, politics, and death were those most challenged. In a disturbing thirty-two percent success rate, censors removed or restricted the challenged materials. Geographically, teachers in fifty-one of the seventy-four counties [in North Carolina] reported cases; the greatest activity occurred in Wake and Guilford counties. A final conclusion consistent with most attempts to measure the scope of the problem is the practice of self-censorship or voluntary censorship. In this research, a number of teachers admitted that perceived pressure from school administrators and the community make them self-censor their teaching.⁷

Published in November 1990, People For the American Way in North Carolina's *Censorship and Sex-Education: A Survey of North Carolina Health Educators* substantiated censorship and/or self-censorship as major concerns among 111 North Carolina health educators and health coordinators.⁸ Birth control was reported as the most challenged subject matter among the health educators. Fifty percent of the respondent health coordinators reported that they had been challenged by a parent or told by a school official that a particular subject matter was inappropriate for the classroom. Results also revealed that although challenges sometimes result in censorship of existing curricula, more often the result is self-censorship of potential subjects by the educators themselves.⁹

Considering another aspect of the problems in the classroom, Mary Ann Weathers concentrated on the role of organizations that challenge curriculum materials and instructional strategies. Her doctoral dissertation, "An Investigation of the Impact of Special Interest Groups on Curriculum and Instruction in North Carolina 1983-1988," focused on K-12

North Carolina public schools during 1983-1988.¹⁰ Documenting the increased numbers of challenges, the targets of the challenges, and the predictable sources of the challenges, Weathers also described the impact of the main groups initiating the challenges — the Eagle Forum, the Conservative Evangelical Right, and the Ku Klux Klan. A final analysis considered the threat that pertinent beliefs of those groups pose to public education.

Since its founding in 1983, People For the American Way has conducted national annual surveys of censorship. Typically, data are collected through mail surveys and individual interviews with parents, librarians, teachers, and school administrators. The reports contain summaries of the findings, identification of trends, and case studies of statewide incidents. Statistics confirming the prevalence of censorship reflect only those cases reported and investigated. People For the American Way stresses that its reports offer only a brief synopsis of the problem because the clear majority of censorial activity is unreported.

Last year's report, *Attacks on the Freedom to Learn, 1992-1993*, ascertained that attacks continue to rise and challenges were successful in 41 percent of the cases.¹¹ Nearly half of all reported challenges were to library books and the

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most frequent rationale was for religious reasons. The second most cited complaint was sexual content. In the state-by-state analysis, North Carolina ranked 16th, tied with three other states.

Much remained the same the following year except for the startling revelation of North Carolina's ranking. In the most current report, *Attacks on the Freedom to Learn, 1993-1994*, the state [North Carolina] ranked fourth nationally and experienced twice as many challenges as the previous year. A total of twenty-one incidents was con-

firmed.¹² Similarly on the national scene, censorship continued to rise, to the highest in the twelve year history of the report, with a success rate comparable to that of the previous year. The most frequent complaint lodged against materials, at a level of 31 percent, was that the treatment of sexuality was found to be offensive.¹³

Seeking public opinion regarding censorship, Ray L. Carpenter conducted a survey in Spring 1987 to determine the views of 497 North Carolinian adults about whether the local public libraries should remove books critical of church and religion from shelves.¹⁴ Seventy percent of those surveyed concurred that the library should not remove the books.

To further explore attitudes and examine differences between those who defend intellectual freedom and those who support censorship, respondents expressed opinions on civil liberty issues, sex, drugs, and alcohol. Regarding matters of sex, data revealed that library defenders are better informed than the censors about the state obscenity law, are more permissive about adult use of pornography, and are stronger supporters of freedom of speech and press where pornography is concerned.¹⁵

Both those who support intellectual freedom and those who support censorship strongly supported public school education about sex and AIDS, but considerably disagreed about the distribution of contraceptive information and products. Depicting sexual activity not identified in the context of "education" was viewed as obscene by large numbers in both groups, especially depictions of homosexual activity. About 25 percent of all respondents had seen an X-rated movie and approximately 30 percent had read a pornographic magazine.¹⁶

The emergent profile of those who defend intellectual freedom is of "a middle class, well educated, and generally tolerant majority".¹⁷

Update of the Thorson Study

In 1986, Barbara A. Thorson reviewed volumes of the American Library Association Office of Intellectual Freedom's *Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom* to present a brief overview of censorship from 1981 to 1986 in North Carolina.¹⁸ Based on reported incidents in the *Newsletter*, she provided statistical data on annual frequency, locations, complainants, reasons, affected institutions, and outcomes. In an effort to render a more current perspective, issues of the *Newsletter* dated January 1985 through March 1995 were studied, replicating Thorson's

categories of data.

The total number of cases reported during the time frame was forty-eight. The years of greatest activity were 1987 and 1994. (See Table I) A factor in the 1987 statistics could be the enactment of the state's pornography law which went into effect October 1, 1985. Under this version of the statute, "items are obscene if they violate local community standards as determined by a jury, and disseminating obscenity is punishable by up to three years in prison."¹⁹ Following subsequent lawsuits by eighty video dealers, the North Carolina Supreme Court ruled in July 1987 that the law was constitutional. It also was noted in the news report that the law was considered to be one of the toughest in the country.²⁰ The least activity of one reported case was in 1989. For libraries, the most active years were 1987 and 1993; no incidents specifically involving libraries occurred in 1989 and 1995 to date. Comparatively, about half as many library cases as cases in other settings or situations were reported.

In Table I, "Other Setting or Situation" was established as a category to identify the variety of censorious activities including the classroom, where required reading that was deemed objectionable was often substituted with alternative titles. Videos used in instructional activities were also targeted. Student press was under attack in four incidents including newspapers as well as a literary magazine. Research previously described in this article illustrates the nature of this growing phenomenon.

Art exhibits constitute another category, within "Other Setting or Situation" and included challenges made in a non-public secondary school, an arts center, and a university. "Library Exhibit" was treated separately only to distinguish it momentarily from the "Library" category that centers on materials such as books, magazines, and audio-visuals, and to alert librarians about the potential for challenge in this generally uncontested area as well. (Otherwise, it is a case of library censorship.) The two cited cases occurred in Durham²¹ and Hillsborough²² and both involved displays assembled for observance of gay and lesbian pride during the month of June.

Drama produced for school and interpretations facilitated in classroom activities were criticized for sexual content and religious reasons. Two incidents involved local newspapers and editorial censorship of syndicated cartoons.

A category called "Mass Movement"

TABLE I.
Number of Reported Cases by Year

Year	Library	Other Setting/ Situation	Total
1985*	1	1	2
1986	1	2	3
1987	4	4	8
1988	1	2	3
1989	0	1	1
1990	1	4	5
1991	2	3	5
1992	2	4	6
1993	4	3	7
1994	1	7	8
1995**	0	0	0
TOTAL	17	31	48

* The Thorson study covering January and March reported two incidents. No additional ones were reported for the remainder of the year.

** January and March only.

was created as a descriptor within "Other Setting or Situation" for collective efforts to censor. In one instance, grocery stores in Taylorsville were asked to remove five magazines that a group considered offensive "in content, anti-family, and objectionable to the general moral public."²³ A boycott of one store was announced after it failed to comply. In the other circumstance, the Catawba County district attorney sent letters to record stores directing them to remove and stop sales of a record considered to be obscene. This action followed his review of the recording, prompted by a request from a Hickory minister.²⁴ A similar kind of movement was a purgative fire that occurred in Hendersonville. Led by a minister in an anti-rock crusade, 125 to 150 people ritually burned album covers.²⁵

Clothing was the center of controversy in an incident in which Durham junior high school students were suspended for displaying the Confederate flag. Lawsuits filed by parents on behalf of the students

were settled and as a result, students were allowed to wear the battle flag.²⁶

Finally, the involvement of a state agency was noted. The North Carolina Department of Environment, Health and Natural Resources destroyed 15,000 Spanish-language anti-AIDS brochures that graphically depicted how to use a condom.²⁷ Disagreement over reasons why the brochures were destroyed fueled the controversy. A spokesperson for the agency said that the literature had been printed without proper review and denied that explicit content was a factor.

Regarding location, the incidents occurred in thirty different cities and counties throughout the state. (See Table II) The total number of five cases each was reported in Charlotte and Raleigh; Durham followed with four. The greatest frequency of one incident occurred in twenty locations.

In comparing this data to Thorson's, parents remained the most active complainants. (See Table III) Numbers reflect multiple objectors in some cases. Second ranked organized efforts included such groups as Concerned Charlotteans, Alexander County Citizens for Decency, Right to Life, Bladen County Coalition of Christians, and Orange County Coalition Against Pornography. Students acted in concert with parents or individually to constitute the third ranked category of initiator of complaint.

In an atypical case of inclusion as opposed to exclusion, at a church meeting in Raleigh, the Reverend Jerry Falwell charged that the State Department of Public Instruction would not allow copies of *Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation* by Ronald Reagan to be donated to schools because of the Department's pro-abortion leadership.²⁸ A Gaston County Right to Life chapter was unsuccessful in its attempts to donate the books to the county school libraries. A spokesperson from the

TABLE II.
*Locations of
Censorship Attempts*

Asheboro	1
Asheville	1
Burlington	2
Canton	1
Carthage	1
Chapel Hill	2*
Charlotte	5*
Concord	1
Durham	4*
Eden	1*
Elizabethtown	1*
Fayetteville	2*
Forsyth County	1*
Gaston County	1
Goldsboro	1*
Hendersonville	1
Hickory	1
Hillsborough	2
Kinston	1*
Lexington	2
Mount Pleasant	1
New Bern	1
Newton	1
Raleigh	5
Rockingham County	1*
Rutherfordton	1*
Taylorsville	2*
Wake Forest	1*
Watauga County	1*
Wilmington	1*
Winston-Salem	1
TOTAL	48

(*Indicates inclusion of a library environment)

TABLE III.
Complainants/Sources of Complaints

Complainant/Source	# of Incidents
Parent 20 (Including Grandparent)	
Organization/Organized Effort 8	
Student 7	
Minister 6	
Citizen 5	
Principal/Headmaster 5	
Newspaper Editor 2	
Superintendent 2	
Teacher 2	
District Attorney 1	
State Agency 1	
Unknown 1	

agency explained that the state had no authority to place books in school libraries. Similarly, a Charlotte-based support group for gay youth complained about a Mount Pleasant High School production of *A Chorus Line* because a gay character had been dropped from the script.²⁹ Following an organized protest to have the character reinstated and a threatened lawsuit, the production was canceled before it opened.

An examination of the reasons for objections does indeed confirm that there is sex in the library

TABLE IV.
Reasons for Objections

Reason	Frequency of Incidence
Sexuality	31
Religion	6
Language	4
Racism	3
Politics	2
Anti-Family Bias	1
Death	1
Literary Merit	1
Morality	1
Realism (Violence)	1
Values	1
Unknown	1

was the basis of concern in Rutherford County.³¹ The school board voted unanimously not to remove *Cabbage Patch Kids — The Just Right Family* from elementary school library shelves. The citizen's complaint was that the book used ungrammatical writing.

(and other places, as well). (See Table IV) Further defined for purposes of this analysis as homosexuality, lesbianism, AIDS, birth control, abortion, pornography, and rape, sex as a reason [for censorship] exceeded all other reasons combined. Religious objections encompassed Satanism, witchcraft, secular humanism, and using the Lord's name in vain. Language problems were mostly because of perceived profanity.

In a case of "Principal Discretion" involving high school press as well as sex as a reason, parents and a principal in Durham complained about an ad placed in the newspaper by a gay youth counseling group.³⁰ In a compromise, the ad was relocated in an edition of the newspaper. Continuous complaints by parents led to total suppression by the principal. Literary merit

TABLE VI.
Objects of Censorship

Books

Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation (Reagan)
Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (Twain)
Angel Dust Blues (Strasser)
Annie on My Mind (Garden)
Cabbage Patch Kids — The Just Right Family (Callen)
The Color Purple (Walker)
Daddy's Roommate (Willhoite)
Eric (Lund)
Flowers for Algernon (Keyes)
The Grapes of Wrath (Steinbeck)
Heather Has Two Mommies (Newman)
I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (Angelou)
I Want to Keep My Baby (Lee)
The Joy of Lesbian Sex (Comfort)
The Joy of Sex (Comfort)
Just So Stories (Kipling)
Loving Women (Falk)
The Martian Chronicles (Bradbury)
Naomi in the Middle (Klein)
Opus Pistorum (Miller)
Run, Shelley, Run (Samuels)

Magazines

Cosmopolitan
Glamour
Life
Mademoiselle
Playboy
Vogue

Audiovisual Materials

"Dice Man Rules"
 — Andrew Dice Clay (record)
 "DeGrassi Junior High" series (video)
 Unnamed Spanish-language video on sexuality

Comics/Cartoon

"Doonesbury" (Trudeau)
 "Kudzu" (Malette)

Drama

Bats in the Belfry (Randazzo)
A Chorus Line (Bennett)
Table Settings (Lapine)

Student Press

Falcon Cry (Durham)
Paw Print (Raleigh)
Pirate's Hook (Durham)

TABLE V.
Institutions Involved in Censorship Attempts

Institution	Frequency of Involvement
High School 19	
Middle/Junior High School 9	
Public Library 9	
Elementary School 4	
College/University 2	
Newspaper Company 2	
Arts Center 1	
Community Movement (fire) 1	
Grocery Store 1	
Non-Profit Center 1	
Record Store 1	
State Agency 1	

TABLE VII.
Disposition of Attempts at Censorship

Outcome	Frequency of Outcome
Successful (materials removed) 22	
Unsuccessful (materials retained) 21	
Partially Successful 3	
Unknown 2	

Of the institutions involved in cases, the high school was the most targeted environment, and was followed by the middle school/junior high school and public library which tied for second place. (See Table V) The elementary school was the next ranked setting. Compared to Thorson's study, this longer list reflects greater involvement of various types of institutions in attempts to censor.

Table VI contains data on the types and titles of materials involved in cases. The clear majority of books had one complaint, but *The Color Purple*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Daddy's Roommate*, and *Heather Has Two Mommies* had more than one complaint. With the exception of *Playboy*, the magazines cited were those referred to earlier in the "grocery store" case.

Resolutions of cases were categorized from the perspective of the censor. Of the reported cases, an almost equal number were successful in that the materials were removed and unsuccessful in that the materials were not removed. (See Table VII) In a couple of cases involving reading lists for the classroom, the titles were removed from the lists of required reading but retained in the school library media center. Such was the case in Lexington with *Eric*³² and in Randolph County with four videos in the "DeGrassi Junior High" public television series.³³ Those cases in which students were given options to select other titles were considered "partially successful" because the titles became alternative choices instead of remaining the originally required books to read.

Individual researchers, People For the American Way, and this up date of the Thorson examination have provided substantive evidence that our profession has cause for

concern. It is incumbent upon us to remain diligent in our efforts to promote intellectual freedom and to be alert to the expanding magnitude of the problem of censorship. Of equal importance is for librarians to keep abreast of censorship as it occurs under *all* circumstances and not isolate ourselves within the confines of library facilities and limit our thinking within the theoretical framework which undergirds the profession. None of us as professionals and citizens is immune.

(Reports, other publications, videotapes and membership information from People For the American Way may be obtained by writing the office at 2000 M Street, NW, Suite 400; Washington, DC or calling 202 467-4999.)

References

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- ⁵ People For the American Way in North Carolina which was located in Raleigh closed in 1994.
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¹¹ People For the American Way, *Attacks on the Freedom to Learn, 1992-1993* (Washington, DC: People For the American Way, 1993), 5.

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¹³ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁴ Ray L. Carpenter, "Censorship, Church, and Sex," *Library Journal* 113 (October 15, 1988).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

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¹⁸ Barbara A. Thorson, "Intellectual Freedom? Censorship in North Carolina, 1981-1985," *North Carolina Libraries* 44 (Winter 1986), 230-232.

¹⁹ *Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom* 35 (January 1986): 17.

²⁰ *Newsletter* 36 (November 1987): 233.

²¹ *Newsletter* 35 (September 1986): 171-172.

²² *Newsletter* 42 (September 1993): 144-145.

²³ *Newsletter* 37 (September 1988): 156.

²⁴ *Newsletter* 40 (November 1991): 201.

²⁵ *Newsletter* 39 (November 1990): 218.

²⁶ *Newsletter* 39 (March 1990): 58.

²⁷ *Newsletter* 39 (May 1990): 103.

²⁸ *Newsletter* 36 (January 1987): 12.

²⁹ *Newsletter* 42 (July 1993): 108.

³⁰ *Newsletter* 42 (January 1993): 14-15.

³¹ *Newsletter* 36 (November 1987): 239.

³² *Newsletter* 43 (July 1994): 115.

³³ *Newsletter* 42 (May 1993): 73.

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