

The Influence of Attitudes on Public Library Stock Management Practise

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This article reports the findings of a study of the influence of librarians', elected members', and library users' attitudes on the availability of materials in public libraries in the United Kingdom. Using questionnaires and interviews, the study identifies various factors that affect stock management practise looking most particularly at the effect of personal attitudes on the availability of materials on subjects where strong per-

sonal views are held. It concludes that librarians are under great pressure to restrict access, and that they themselves often reduce access because they are only slightly aware of the issue of intellectual freedom. They are not used to applying professional values to library book stock management. The paper concludes with suggestions as to how stock management practices in Britain can be improved.

Introduction

A study examining librarians', elected members' [1] and library users' attitudes towards intellectual freedom and the public library, and assessing the impact of these attitudes on public library stock management policy-making and practice was carried out between 1994 and 1998 at the University of Sheffield, England (Cole 1998). The definition of intellectual freedom used in this study is borrowed from the Library Association's current statement on intellectual freedom and censorship.

For a democratic, civilised society to thrive, its citizens should have the right to access all expressions of knowledge, creativity and intellectual activity ... If publicly available material has not incurred penalties under the law it should not be excluded [from the library] on moral, political, religious, racial or gender grounds ... Users of library and information services are entitled to rely upon these services for access to information and enlightenment upon every field of human experience and activity. (Library Association 1998)

The study was carried out in six British library authorities: two London boroughs, two counties and two metropolitan areas. The data were collected and analysed within a qualitative research paradigm; therefore a small number of respondents were studied in depth (Mellon 1990; Patton 1990; Creswell 1994). The primary method of data collection was in-depth interviews with twenty-four librarians, ten elected council members, and forty-two library users. The interview data are supplemented by data generated by a questionnaire that was completed by each respondent. The questionnaires comprised a series of statements relating to intellectual freedom, censorship and public library stock management decision-making; respondents indicated the strength of their agreement or disagreement with each statement on a five-point Likert scale.

In this paper, I discuss the influence of librarians', elected members' and library users' attitudes towards intellectual freedom on stock management practice in British public libraries [2].

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Librarians', elected members', and library users' attitudes towards intellectual freedom

Few respondents believed unequivocally that stock management should be conducted according to a philosophy of intellectual freedom. In response to the question, "do you think stock management should be conducted according to a philosophy of intellectual freedom?" forty respondents (seventeen librarians, five elected members and eighteen library users) answered "yes". However, only eight of these respondents (two librarians and six library users) maintained this opinion consistently throughout the interviews. In common with the twenty respondents (three librarians, three elected members and fourteen library users) who answered "no", and sixteen respondents (four librarians, two elected members and ten library users) who answered "yes", but only "to an extent", or "within constraints", thirty-two of the respondents who initially answered yes also suggested that librarians should not always manage stock according to the principle of intellectual freedom. In total, sixty-four respondents believe that only certain material should have its inclusion in the library protected by the principle of intellectual freedom (Cole 1998).

These results accord with data gathered by Claire England: the Canadian librarians she surveyed in 1974 were only in moderate agreement with the concept of intellectual freedom proposed by the professional associations (Neill 1975). Similarly, a majority of the 1,181 members of the public surveyed by Estabrook and Horak were reluctant to support full access to certain types of material, for example birth control information and books that describe how to commit suicide (Estabrook and Horak 1992). However, the data differ from the results of previous studies of American librarians (Fiske 1959; Busha 1972; Bundy and Stakem 1982) and British and Canadian library directors (Curry 1997a), in which respondents believed more favourably in the application of the principle of intellectual freedom to stock management decision-making.

Stock management practice

In accordance with the attitudes expressed by most respondents, in all six library authorities

surveyed stock management is not carried out in accordance with the principle of intellectual freedom. Librarians restrict access to certain types of material and to individual titles, and the stock management decision-making process is influenced by: the values and policies of the local council; the values of the local community; the potentially negative influence the librarian perceives that a certain item might have; pressure exerted by the local and national media; the personal views of the librarian; and the prevailing political climate.

Stock management and the local council

In all six library authorities, in accordance with the views of many of the librarians and elected members surveyed (although not with the views of the majority of library users), the values and policies of the local council influence stock management practice. Sixteen respondents (twelve librarians, four elected members) believe that stock management decisions should be made within the context of the policies and values of the wider local authority. Thirty-one respondents (fourteen librarians, seven elected members and ten library users) stated that the library's stock management policy should relate to local council policy. Furthermore, ten librarians stated that because librarians are local government officers it is acceptable for them to conduct stock management according to local council policy. For example, one librarian said:

I think there are conflicts and tensions, inevitably, with the, I mean, I work for [name of authority] City Council and [name of authority] City Council has an advanced set of policies on a wide range of issues, some of which don't necessarily agree with the policies the professional association would want to see, but I know who pays my wages. (Librarian, Metropolitan authority)

The local council can affect stock management practice through the influence of official, documented council policies, a group of council members, or the chair of the library committee. In accordance with official council policy, in the four urban library authorities (two London, two metropolitan) surveyed, racist and misogynist material currently is not selected. Racist and misogynist materials selected before the policies were created, either contain a warning label or are stored away

from the open shelves. In one county authority, official council policy prohibits librarians from displaying or exhibiting material that promotes an anti-nuclear viewpoint. One librarian said:

The council's policy is to support its [name of nuclear power plant] existence, so anything that, if we, for instance displayed or had an exhibition here that was distinctly against [name of nuclear power plant], that would be politically unacceptable. (Librarian, County authority)

When acting as a group, elected members can prevent the provision of access to material that is not actually prohibited by council policy. For example, in the mid-1980s, Rupert Murdoch relocated his News International printing works from London's Fleet Street to Wapping and simultaneously made many of his workers redundant. In support of the workers involved in the dispute with Murdoch, a number of left-wing local councils, including three surveyed for this study, took the decision to ban News International newspapers from their libraries (Library Association Record 1986a, 1986b). The bans continued for much of 1986 until legal action was initiated by News International against three London boroughs and the High Court ruled the bans to be unlawful (Cunningham 1986). In three of the library authorities surveyed, council influence prevented librarians from making *The Satanic Verses* freely available. For example,

It was not put on the shelves. Again because of the problems we had, and again because of our political masters, these are things we will serve on enquiry." (Librarian, Metropolitan authority)

These findings also reflect stock management decisions that were made by librarians around the country when *The Satanic Verses* was first published (Cole 1994; Library Association Record 1989; Curry 1997a).

The chair of the library committee is a particularly influential council member. In one authority, the chair has prevented librarians from stocking *Gay News* in the library. In another,

there was an understanding from the leader of the council that we will be sensitive to sensitive material like that [gay and lesbian oriented material]. (Librarian, London authority)

Seven librarians representing three library authorities noted that other elected members also

attempt to influence stock management practice at an individual level, either at committee meetings, or by contacting librarians personally. However, all of these librarians indicated that these attempts are neither welcome nor successful.

The local council also has a more indirect influence on stock management practice. For example, one librarian said that he does not purchase holocaust revisionist material because he believes that if he were challenged about its inclusion in the library collection, his elected members would not support him.

Although elected members can influence stock management decision-making, they no longer are involved in day-to-day stock management practice. Librarians in all authorities said that elected members play no part in stock selection, and eight librarians stated specifically that their members' role is limited to developing or approving the stock management policy and determining the budget. In accordance with the findings of research which examined librarians' and elected members' attitudes towards the relationship between the library and the local council (Usherwood 1993; Curry 1994), none of the respondents surveyed wanted elected members to be more involved in day-to-day stock management decision-making.

It is important therefore not to assume too direct a link between the local council and stock management practice. Stock management decisions are made which contradict the values of both the local council and the stock management policy, and librarians' decisions are influenced by factors other than the views of the local council. However, as previous research has also indicated, elected members can influence librarians' decision making (Usherwood 1993), particularly when the decision relates to potentially controversial or sensitive material (Minoughan 1982; Usherwood 1993). As a result, untrained, non-professionals are in a position to influence stock management decisions in the most sensitive or complex of situations. In the United States it has been suggested that censorship challenges are more difficult for library boards because their members are lay persons who have often not thought a great deal about censorship and intellectual freedom. Library board members can find themselves in a situation about which they have little knowledge (Kreamer 1994). Kreamer believes that librarians

should educate their board members and give them information about collection development, censorship and intellectual freedom in jargon-free and concise terminology so that they are prepared for the decisions they might have to make (Kreamer 1994). It is suggested here that this kind of education would be helpful for British elected members. The results of this study have shown that British elected members' views of stock management and intellectual freedom are inconsistent and different from the views of the Library Association, and that elected members are unaware of the professional association's views on intellectual freedom (Cole 1998). However, the data suggest that librarians will be unwilling to educate their elected members about stock management because they are reluctant to involve elected members more closely in stock management practice. For example, some are so reluctant that they would not permit their members to participate in this study in case this prompted any increased involvement. However, while elected members remain uninformed they will continue to make decisions that compromise the provision of access to material through the public library.

Stock management and the local community

In accordance with the views of the majority of respondents in this study, librarians consider the values of the local community and the potential effects of the content of material when making stock management decisions. Ten librarians said that stock management must be carried out in accordance with local community and commonly held societal values. Sixteen respondents (nine librarians, one elected member and six library users) said that librarians should not stock material that might cause offence or upset to others. Eighteen respondents (six librarians, two elected members and ten library users) said that the library should not stock material that might encourage the hatred of one person or group of people towards another, or that might provoke acts of violence. Six respondents (three librarians, two elected members and one library user) believe the library should not stock material that might encourage a person to carry out irresponsible, anti-social or illegal actions. Thirty-two respondents (eleven librarians, seven elected members and fourteen library users) believe that

the adult library should not contain material that is unsuitable for and accessible by children.

Access to material that is considered to be offensive to the local community

In all the library authorities surveyed, librarians have restricted access to material that they believe offends library users or, in some cases, library staff. Nineteen librarians spoke in general terms about not selecting, or withdrawing from the library, material that has been seen or is perceived to be offensive. For example,

I would think, possibly, it wouldn't be bought because nobody would want to upset anybody. You know, you've always got to weigh up satisfying one person's needs and upsetting ten people. What's more important? (Librarian, County authority)

Librarians cited the following examples of this practice. Material described as racist and misogynist is not purchased in the four urban library authorities, and material of this nature that is owned by these libraries is either labelled or kept on closed access. Neither of the county authorities stock material they consider to be promoting Satanism, and in one county authority librarians do not purchase material that they consider to be soft pornography. In one metropolitan authority, some librarians do not select material they describe as 'gratuitous', anti-Islamic, or that has 'a high sex content'.

In two metropolitan authorities, books about euthanasia are not kept on the open shelves. In one London authority a book containing what were described as Satanic passages carries a warning label. One county authority does not exhibit anti-nuclear displays, in part because of a concern not to offend the large number of nuclear power plant employees in its community. In one metropolitan authority, Halloween activities are banned [3].

Access to material that might stimulate unfavourable actions or attitudes among members of the local community

In all six authorities, librarians restrict access to material that they believe might stimulate negative or unfavourable actions or attitudes. One librarian summed up this practice by saying,

“... with librarianship you have this responsibility really and it does come back to censorship, for public protection.” (Librarian, Metropolitan authority)

In some cases the material is maintained on closed access so that people for whom the material is believed to be unsuitable do not have access to it: books about euthanasia in two metropolitan authorities, sex manuals in one London authority, and ‘sensitive’ material in one metropolitan authority. In one London authority a librarian keeps a range of books *including Jew Suss* (a Nazi publication), a book published by the Saudi Arabian opposition party, and *Mein Kampf* in his office for fear of the negative repercussions that might result from stocking them on the open shelves.

In some cases material is not selected for the library so then no one has access to it. In one metropolitan authority racist material is not selected, and in a county authority, one librarian does not buy material about handguns, and another does not purchase sex manuals. The video *Child's Play III* was withdrawn from one county authority, a guide to terrorism was withdrawn from a metropolitan authority and *The International Underground Directory* was not selected in one London authority.

Access to material in response to customer complaints

Members of the library's community can directly influence stock management decision making when librarians agree to restrict access to material to which they object.

In a metropolitan authority Halloween activities have been cancelled and an audiotope containing a racist song has been withdrawn. In one county authority two books were removed from the open shelves in response to customer complaints: one book was alleged to contain ‘obscene’ language, the other was considered to be blasphemous. In another county authority, material that receives complaints from users in one library is transferred to another library in the system. In recent years *The Satanic Verses* has been particularly problematic for librarians. Attempts to stock this book resulted in what were described as ‘deputations’ of people threatening violence to the library and librarians, and in many copies of the book being stolen and destroyed. *The Satanic Verses* carries a warning label

in two of the library authorities surveyed (one metropolitan and one county).

It should be noted that no librarian said they receive many complaints from library users and those that are received were discussed pragmatically and were not considered to be, or treated as a problem. Nine librarians, representing all library authorities, specifically said they receive very few complaints about their library stock, although many make the point that library assistants probably receive many more informal complaints that they are unaware of. Twenty librarians, representing all six library authorities, said that in most cases when an individual asks that something should be removed from the library their request is not granted. Commonly, the complaint is looked into and the complainant receives either a letter or telephone call from the library explaining why the material is being retained on the shelves. The data indicate that only material that (a) is ‘particularly’ offensive to a user, (b) causes problems for the librarian, or (c) the librarian also disapproves of is removed from the open shelves following a customer complaint.

Stock management and librarians' attitudes and personal tastes and opinions

Seventeen librarians working in all authorities surveyed said that they restrict access to material if its presence on the open shelves causes problems for them, or if material of a similar type has previously been problematic.

For this reason, in one London authority Madonna's *Sex* was not selected; in another, librarians do not purchase sex manuals. Again in a London authority, a book containing Satanic passages has been labelled and in a county authority the videotape *Child's Play III* has been withdrawn.

Ten librarians specifically noted that they take deliberate measures to prevent problems from occurring. One librarian said,

On a purely selfish basis, you're sensitive to the community because you're not looking for those sort of confrontations. (Librarian, London authority)

It is perhaps unsurprising that all ten librarians are community librarians who have daily contact with library users and who are more likely to have to meet face-to-face with complainants than their colleagues further up the library hierarchy.

Access to certain material is also restricted because of the personal, and personal-political tastes and opinions of librarians. For this reason librarians in one county and one London authority do not purchase sex manuals intended for heterosexuals. A sex manual for gay men was rejected at book selection by librarians in one London authority. Librarians in one metropolitan and one London authority keep sex manuals on closed access. Librarians in a metropolitan authority keep all glamour photography books on closed access and no longer purchase this type of material.

A librarian in one county authority does not purchase blasphemous material, another will not purchase material he considers to be 'sick'; a librarian in one London authority does not purchase homophobic material. A librarian in one county authority will not purchase a biography of British serial killer Peter Sutcliffe, or *The Anarchist's Cookbook*. A librarian in a metropolitan authority withdrew from the library system what he considered to be a particularly violent Western. A librarian in a London authority will not include material published by the anti-abortion organisation LIFE in his collection. Librarians in one London, one metropolitan and one county authority do not purchase holocaust revisionist material. These opinions are illustrated by the following quotations:

There was one of the Westerns which I actually removed ... I was reading this particular Western and it was absolutely full of torture, and it was so graphic, it was very hard to read. And we did withdraw it in the end. I don't know whether we should have done or not, but it was really horrible, and anybody who read it thought why has it been written at all? Who is it for? And that sort of thing. If somebody had complained about it, I suppose, we would have withdrawn it anyway. Having said that, nobody did complain about it. (Librarian, Metropolitan authority)

I think that we actually get stuff circulated by LIFE, sanctionious cretins who take it upon themselves to make decisions for other people. Decisions that they're unlikely to ever have to make themselves. They deal with these moral certainties which is crap. But then there's no room for it. (Librarian, London authority)

You've got something about holocaust denial material, which I personally would not stock ... so I guess I would probably go further than the law on that particular subject. (Librarian, London authority)

It is suggested here that elected members and library users would not sanction this influence on

stock management decision-making. It is also suggested that librarians' lack of commitment to intellectual freedom in general, and their familiarity with excluding material at the request of the council, community and media, or because of financial restrictions, facilitates their personal influence on the library collection.

When dislike of certain material becomes collective, this material can be tacitly excluded from a whole library authority. Racist and misogynist material is not selected in two metropolitan authorities and two London authorities. Specifically, one metropolitan authority and two London authorities do not purchase material that is published by the National Front, a British fascist organisation. In one county authority, very few Black Lace novels (explicitly sexual novels, marketed as being written by women for women) are purchased, despite repeated requests from members of the library's community for them to be made available. One librarian said,

Black Lace, we don't buy that much because of self-censorship. We ought to supply it in large quantities, so that's a sort of hidden censorship. (Librarian, County authority)

In this authority graphic novels ("works of substantial length told in a comic strip format, with frames, speech balloons, captions and the rest of the comic strip apparatus" (Hudson 1995) are not stocked at all, reflecting a more general bias against this type of material. Paul Gravett, director of the Cartoon Art Trust has observed that

Faced with some of the more 'graphic' of graphic novels, with their sometimes ugly imagery and dodgy stereotyping, it is no wonder that certain librarians take the easy option and reject the whole medium. (Gravett 1997)

At the time of the News International dispute, many librarians supported their council's decision to ban News International publications and were instrumental in excluding them from the library (Bateson 1986; Roper 1986). One respondent to this study said,

I suspect that what was going on there is that politically, the council officers wanted to censor items through the stock selection policy of the library service-acting on their own political philosophy. And that's what they wanted, and that's what we tried to do, and that's what we wanted to do as well, most of us, you know. (Librarian, London authority)

Stock management and the local and national media

Both the local and national media influence stock management practice. Five librarians observed that their stock management decisions are influenced by their desire to avoid potentially negative media coverage. One librarian said:

The book would have been bought simply because you knew the consequences of not buying it would be plenty of bad publicity, probably, or a lot of publicity, not necessarily bad. (Librarian, County authority)

Four librarians working in three different library authorities say that media response to a stock management decision has made them reverse that decision. For example:

I mean, that kind of thing [negative media coverage about a gay cartoon book stocked in the library] did make a few people here a bit wobbly, and I think it did have some people running for the shelves to look at things. I must admit that I've got a bit nervous of people, and then I start panicking and taking things off the shelf. (Librarian, London authority)

Stock management at a time of ever-decreasing budgets

Twelve librarians cited a lack of money as a barrier to conducting stock management in accordance with the principle of intellectual freedom. Although an ever-decreasing library budget will mean that less material that can be bought for the library, arguably this does not necessarily prevent librarians from conducting stock management in accordance with the principle of intellectual freedom. However, it appears that at a time of reduced finances, certain types of material will be sacrificed before others: three librarians questioned whether they would continue to buy so much 'lightweight' fiction as they have less and less money; two other librarians questioned the validity of purchasing sex manuals at this time.

In accordance with the findings of previous research (Woods and Perry-Holmes 1982) and the views of commentators (West 1983) the data suggest that when librarians have less money to spend it becomes easier for them to indulge their personal prejudices when selecting stock for the library. Twelve librarians said that they are aware that either they, or others, use financial restric-

tions to justify the non-purchase of material that they do not want to select for the library. One librarian said:

Probably people wouldn't say, the librarians here wouldn't say, sorry mate, you can't have this because it's just, this stuff is advocating something that we don't agree with, you know, I don't agree with, so you can't have it. We'd send them a note back saying, regret unable to supply, not available at this library, or something, you know. (Librarian, London authority)

Stock management and the prevailing political climate

The public library environment is becoming an increasingly corporate one. Library users are often referred to and treated as customers, customer charters are common, libraries are contracting out their services and some librarians now wear council-logoed uniforms. Working within this corporate-style context, librarians must become more accountable. Librarians are increasingly being forced to justify the funds they are given and are having to produce increasingly higher and higher issue statistics. This environment also influences stock management decision-making. Seven librarians representing five library authorities said that the need to produce high issue-statistics tends them towards selecting 'safe' stock that they know will issue well. Two librarians in two different library authorities also said that the need to produce high issue statistics makes them increasingly reluctant to offend library users and potentially lose a 'customer'.

However, the pressure to increase issue-statistics is also encouraging librarians to widen the spectrum of material they include in their collections. Five librarians working in three different library authorities observed that they are now buying material which conflicts with council policy and with their own personal and professional beliefs, and which they would not previously have purchased, because this material issues well. For example:

There was a stage when we weren't buying Enid Blyton. ... But things have changed quite a lot more recently. They are less dogmatic than they used to be ... the children's team in this library authority. Now we're getting more and more worried about book issues, they've decided that it's OK to have Point Horror and Enid Blyton, even if they're pretty awful, because people like reading them. (Librarian, Metropolitan authority)

Concluding remarks

Stock management practice in the British library authorities surveyed reflects quite clearly the attitudes towards intellectual freedom displayed by respondents in this study. Perhaps unsurprisingly it agrees most closely with the attitudes of librarians and elected members, the persons with most opportunity to influence stock management practice. Most respondents did not believe that stock management should be carried out according to the principle of intellectual freedom. They believed instead that factors such as the policies of the local council and a consideration of local community values or the potential effects of the content of material should take precedence (Cole 1998). These factors and others such as the local media, librarians' personal opinions and beliefs, and the prevailing political climate affect considerably the stock management decision making process. In all the library authorities surveyed, access to material was restricted in accordance with five or more of the factors described above, and the management of an item or type of material is often influenced by two or more factors simultaneously.

The most striking feature of the stock management practice in the authorities surveyed is its inconsistent and contradictory nature, again reflecting the inconsistent and contradictory attitudes displayed by almost all respondents (Cole 1998). The most consistent element of this stock management decision-making process is that librarians rarely consider whether or not they are facilitating intellectual freedom when making a decision, particularly when the material is especially problematic. None of the factors discussed above consistently determines the outcome of stock management decision making. Instead librarians make pragmatic day-to-day decisions which can be influenced by one or more of these factors at a time. Similarly, in their study of community librarianship in Britain, Black and Muddiman recently noted that in 41% of the library authorities they surveyed, librarians were hesitant and pragmatic and

their approaches often contained elements of consumerism, traditional public library professionalism, and mainstream community librarianship. (Black and Muddiman 1997)

Although seven librarians discussed the contradictory nature of their responses, no librarian attempted to make his or her argument more consistent; instead they accept that stock management practice is essentially contradictory in nature. One librarian simply said: "I'm making exceptions to my own rules." (Librarian, County authority)

Despite the contradictions inherent in the stock management decision-making process, the data suggest that this process is also influenced in part by each authority's organisational culture. For example, in the four urban authorities surveyed there is an authority-wide acceptance that racist and misogynist material will not be stocked. This acceptance is informed by council policies, librarians' personal and personal-political attitudes, and by the demographic make-up of the local community. In the two county authorities that have little or no stock management policy and less racially diverse communities this kind of material is neither officially nor tacitly excluded. In the one county authority with no stock management policy and where elected members are particularly distant from library operations, librarians restrict access to Black Lace and graphic novels because, as a whole, they dislike this type of material. In the two authorities that are, or have recently been under Conservative control, there is a more commercial approach to stock management and librarians more often considered customers, profit and issue statistics when discussing stock management decision making. Comments made by librarians suggest that they are aware of the different kinds of cultures that exist in different authorities and will, where possible, attempt to work in authorities that are suited to their personal, personal-political and professional attitudes.

Regardless of the type of authority a person works in, the data indicate that all librarians will impose their personal or personal-political opinions on stock management, although the extent of a person's influence depends on their position in the hierarchy: a chief librarian can influence a whole authority; librarians nearer the middle or bottom of the library hierarchy can often influence selection; sometimes branch librarians can only influence the post-selection management of material. In addition, chief librarians are more likely to link their actions and concerns with

those of the local council and, in particular, to the committee chair; 'community' librarians are more likely to carry out practices which do not create problems for them with members of the library's community. Notably there is no relationship between a person's age, gender or educational attainments and their stock management practice.

The results of this study are in accord with the picture of public librarianship that can be drawn from the few previous British studies conducted in this area and from anecdotal evidence in the professional literature. As Thompson has observed,

Censorship in public libraries is as old as the public library movement itself; and from its beginnings in the 1850s, control has been exercised over the subject matter of the material purchased. (Thompson, 1975)

Attempts to deny access have been made by elected members (Cole 1994; Curry 1997a; Malley 1990; Noyce 1977; Thompson 1975; Usherwood 1993), members of the public, either individually or collectively (Cole 1994; Clark 1986; Curry 1997a; Malley 1990; Thompson 1975), and by librarians (Cole 1994; Curry 1997a; Malley 1990; Thompson 1975). Furthermore, attempts to restrict access are made from both the left and the right of the political spectrum (Curry 1997a; Malley 1990; Usherwood 1989). The exclusion of News International newspapers and the restrictions imposed on *The Satanic Verses* have already been mentioned. To take another couple of examples, in the mid-1980s, librarians were banned from circulating *Spycatcher*, the memoir of ex-M15 employee, Peter Wright, even though many libraries owned the book (Curry 1997b; *Library Association Record* 1988). 1988 also saw the passing of Section 28 of the Local Government Act by the then Conservative government. Section 28 ruled that "A local authority shall not promote homosexuality or publish material for the promotion of homosexuality." At the time, government members declared that the passing of this Act would not restrict library provision (Malley 1990). It has been since been reported that when the Act was passed, librarians cancelled book orders from The Gay Press (Atkins 1988), exhibition material was removed (Wintersgill 1989) and librarians became more reluctant to publicise the presence of gay and lesbian material in the library (Curry 1997a). At these times few strong or spirited defences of

intellectual freedom, from library practitioners, academics or the Library Association, appeared in the professional or academic press.

Notably, these findings reveal a fundamental difference between the opinions held by professional librarians, elected members and library users, three major stakeholders in the public library, and those propounded by the professional association. In its most recent statement on censorship, the Library Association says that "If publicly available material has not incurred penalties under the law it should not be excluded on moral, political, religious, racial or gender grounds" and "Librarians recognise the need for a balance to be maintained within the materials which they make available to reflect differing views or shades of opinion on matters which might be thought to be contentious" (Library Association 1998). If the professional association wants librarians to conduct stock management in accordance with its own values of intellectual freedom, then it needs to be more proactive in this area. Only three librarians in this study said that that intellectual freedom had been discussed at library school. Similarly, only three librarians said that intellectual freedom had been discussed formally at conferences they had attended and these respondents were careful to note that they were referring to conferences that had taken place many years ago, although one respondent noted that intellectual freedom emerges as a subject cyclically at professional events. The Library Association needs to ensure that the principle of intellectual freedom and its importance to the profession is emphasised in library school curricula; it must be seen to act to defend its stance against censorship when challenges are made to library collections; and it must ensure that questions of intellectual freedom and censorship are thoroughly and consistently addressed within the profession.

As more and more public libraries facilitate public access to the Internet, it is now particularly important for librarians to address the relationship of intellectual freedom to public librarianship. If librarians decide to place a filter on an Internet terminal, this decision is far more visible than one which results in certain material not being selected, or other material being kept in the librarian's office. Librarians have to be accountable for the way they choose to manage Internet

provision and their decisions will have to be defended in a clear, consistent and credible manner. It is also important that the debate in this area is informed by current research data. The results of this study and of Curry's provide much-needed original data relating to intellectual freedom, censorship and the British public library. We know what the library directors, librarians, elected members and library users surveyed think about intellectual freedom and censorship; we know how these attitudes affect stock management practice. It is now important that further work is carried out (for example checklist-based research that is more common in the United States) to augment and develop these results and to create a significant body of data in this area.

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Notes

1. Elected members are democratically elected members of the local council. They may have a party political affiliation or be independent members. Once a person has been elected to the local council, the library committee is one of the committees they can choose to serve on. The local council provides the funding for the library and, with senior librarians, members of the library committee can determine library policies and budget.
2. For a detailed analysis of respondents' attitudes towards intellectual freedom and censorship, please see Cole (1998, 1999).
3. As we can see, there is an overlap between this and the previous section in terms of items and types of material that librarians restrict access to. This occurs throughout the paper and illustrates the way in which the stock management decision-making process is influenced by multiple and parallel concerns.

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