

# Publisher Pulls a Textbook In Furor on Sexual Content

By SAM DILLON

A publisher has decided not to sell a health textbook in Texas rather than make hundreds of revisions demanded by state officials after the book was criticized by anti-abortion groups and others for its discussion of condom use, homosexuality and other sexual issues.

The publisher, Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc., of Austin, Tex., said it was pulling its 700-page high school health text out of the huge Texas textbook market not only because making scores of requested revisions was economically unfeasible but also because ethical issues were at stake.

"Some of the mandated revisions are in opposition to the fundamental philosophy of our program and are potentially injurious to the students of Texas," William A. Talkington, Holt's president wrote to Education Commissioner Lionel Meno. "We simply cannot produce a product that does not provide children with adequate instruction on life-threatening issues." The state released the letter on Tuesday.

The publisher's decision came after months of Texas Board of Education hearings in which family-planning, anti-abortion, gay-advocacy, fundamentalist Christian and other groups debated the merits of five health texts, written by Holt and four other publishers.

## What Was Objectionable

The board, which buys all textbooks for the state, last month requested a total of 400 revisions in the five texts, with the largest percentage of them for the Holt book, including the deletion of toll-free numbers for gay and lesbian groups and for teenage suicide prevention groups.

The state wanted to see passages on homosexuality abridged, the addition of language describing Texas's sodomy laws and the deletion of a number of clinical illustrations, including a self-examination for testicular cancer and two comparing circumcised and uncircumcised penises.

"This underlines how hard it is getting to produce a textbook that appeals to a general audience and to satisfy all the pressure groups," said Gilbert T. Sewall, director of the American Textbook Council, a private group based in New York that reviews curriculum materials. "Especially in books dealing with health and sex education, highly opinionated, sometimes obsessive people come to the table — from the homophobic to the libertine — and publishers are increasingly inclined to retreat from subjects that bring so many marketing headaches."

Holt is the only publisher so far that has decided against making the revisions for Texas, which is planning to spend \$7.5 million on the health texts. The other publishers appear to be seeking to comply with the state's requests, said Roger R. Rogalin, vice president of the Association of American Publishers, a trade organization.

## 'They Are Not Happy'

"I know they are not happy, but they may stay in there," he said.

Textbook sales in Texas represent about 8 percent of the \$2.2 billion national market for textbooks. The state is second only to California, which represents about 12 percent. Texas is also one of 22 states in which government committees must approve all texts sold in the state. Be-

cause Texas controls such a large market share, publishers often develop texts to meet the standards set by its 15-member Board of Education and then market them nationwide.

Peter Farwell, vice president of Harcourt General Inc., the corporation in Massachusetts that owns Holt, Rinehart and Winston, said yesterday that the changes would have made the book, titled "Holt Health," too expensive.

"When you look at the costs of making the changes, versus the potential sales, it wasn't feasible, especially because the changes made it a Texas-only book," Mr. Farwell said. "We created the book by talking to a lot of administrators and teachers involved in health education, who told us what they felt kids needed to know in order to deal with their health. The changes would have left out issues we feel are important."

Della May Moore, spokeswoman for the Texas Board of Education, said yesterday: "We regret that Holt has left the process, but we have a long cooperation with them and we're sure we'll be working with them again."

For a decade, Texas's official

## A Texas board demanded hundreds of revisions.

tastes in health education have swung wildly, Mr. Rogalin said. "The problem here is that the state asked for one thing and then changed their mind when the books were all done," he said. "And it was done for political reasons. This was another case in which factions of the religious right are getting more involved in boards of education all over the country."

## 'I Had No Choice'

Monte S. Hasie, a board member and a stockbroker from Lubbock, was one of those who pressed for the deletions. He said he considered the Holt book unacceptable under any circumstances. He said, "I had no choice but to try to correct them."

Mr. Hasie said he was not opposed to sex education "done appropriately," but considered many passages and sexual illustrations in the Holt text too explicit.

"I didn't think this stuff should be part of the public schools," he said. "They were promoting homosexuality as an acceptable alternative life style and promoting sex as being O.K. if you use a condom. We were going to put Playboy and Penthouse out of business."

Rosemary D. Merriam, a spokeswoman for the Texas Family Planning Association, said that there were 49,000 teen-age pregnancies in the state, the second-highest number in the nation, and that the deletion of family planning information from textbooks could worsen the problem.

"We were upset because Holt's was a well-written book that doesn't talk down to children, and this means there will be less choice for Texas school districts on health education," she said.