



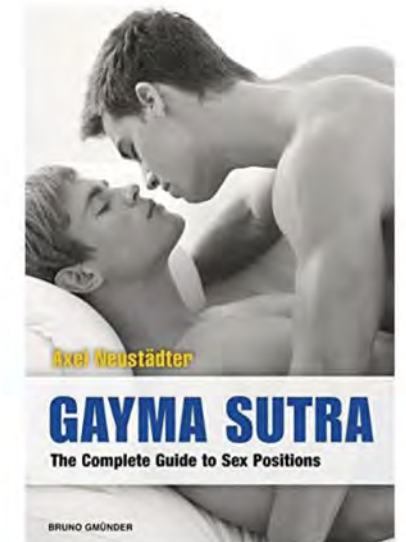
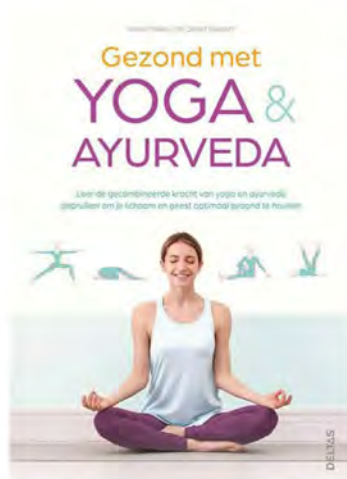
Controversy and Censorship in the Public Library

WENDY WAUTERS

Collection manager (non-fiction)
for Antwerp's public library network

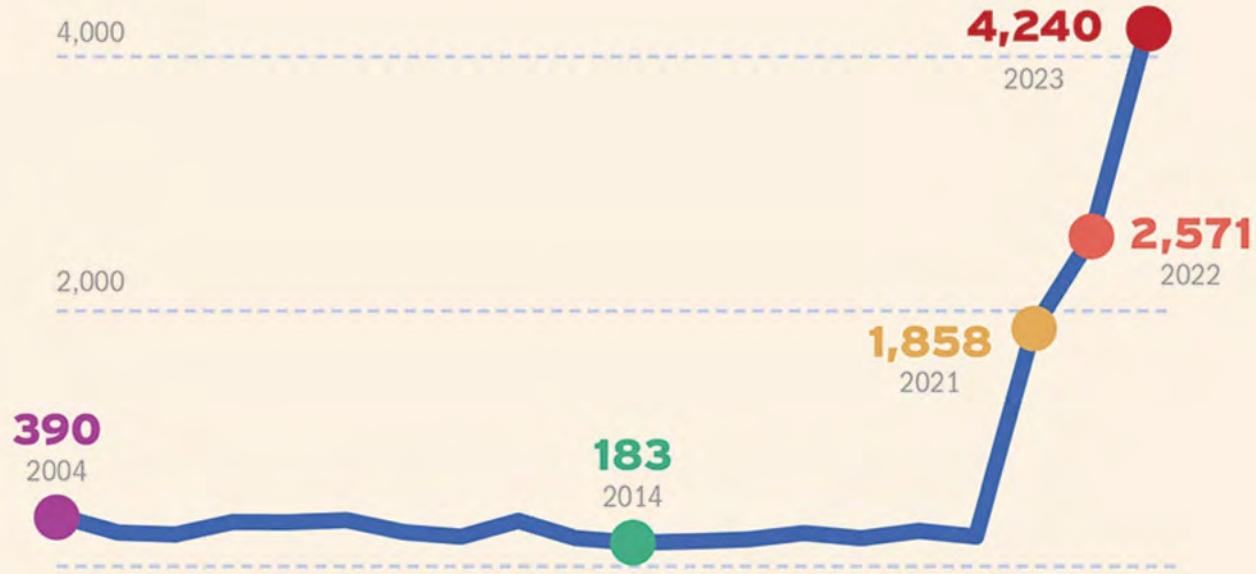


Current situation: Flanders



More right-wing and Flemish-nationalist books should have a place in our library.

Guy D'haeseleer (Forza Ninove), October 2024



Number of
unique titles
challenged
by year



54%

Public libraries



39%

School libraries



5%

Schools



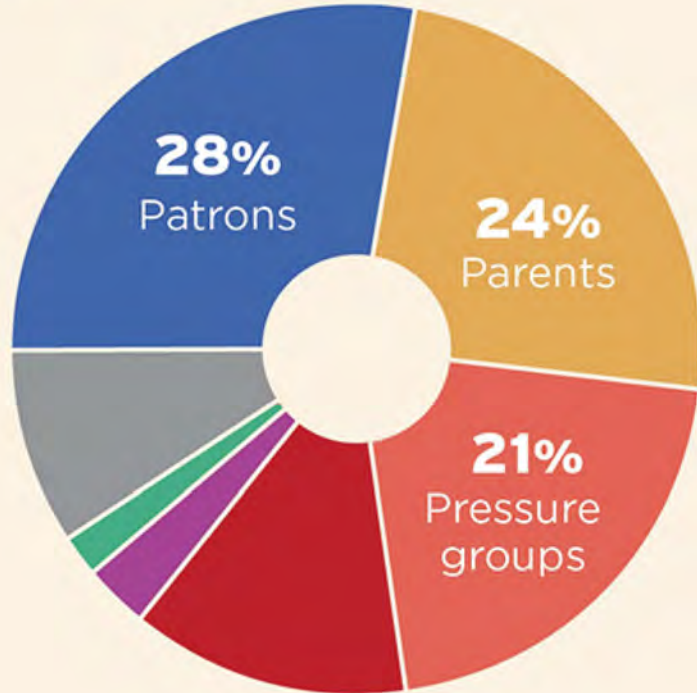
2%

Higher education / other

Where do
censorship
attempts take
place?

Statistics based on 1,247 cases with known locations

Who initiates attempts to censor books?



13% Board/administration

3% Librarians/teachers/staff

2% Elected officials/government

9% Other/unknown

Source: ALA
Statistics based on 954 cases



Julianne Moore's freckles? How Republican bans on 'woke' books have reached new level



Israeli police raid Jerusalem bookshops and arrest Palestinian owners

Mapping controversies

- Polarized **society**
- Vocal and outspoken **public** (both online and offline)
- Self-published **books** & books published as marketing tools
- **Publishing industry** has become more commercial; quality standards are uncertain



Libraries are highly vulnerable
No legal framework or protection in Belgium



Mapping controversies

Who and why

Rejection

- Fear (normalization, indoctrination)
- Concern
- Conviction (political, religious, moral)
- Power play (respect, identity)

Acceptance

- Representation (often marginalized groups)
- Censorship = reshaping reality

Mapping controversies

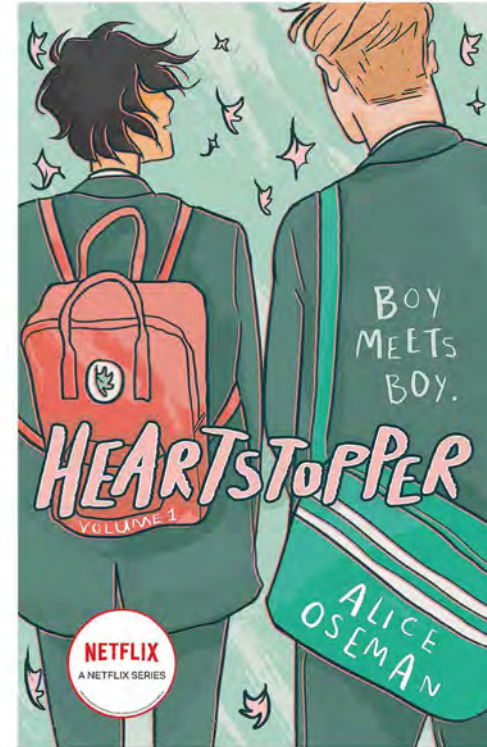
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It's not just parents who file complaints because a book has an LGBTQI+ theme; there are also parents who object to books like Heartstopper because they contain homophobic scenes.

Mapping controversies

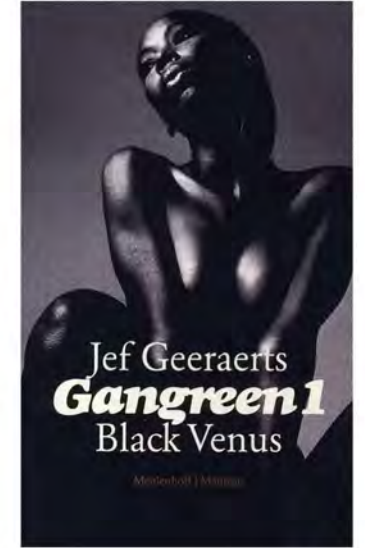
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It is necessary to keep talking about difficult themes and to engage with them creatively. Removing things from the public space because they no longer align with the changing spirit of the times is the same as denying that they ever existed. It silences societal debate. It creates a distorted image of history and, consequently, of present reality.

Solutions & Opportunities Weeding

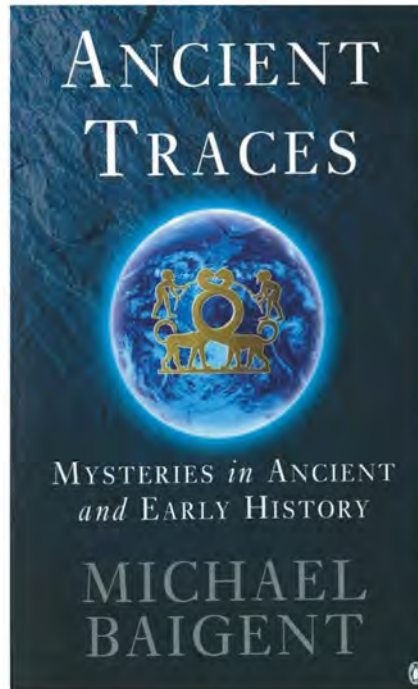


Book (2003) on natural contraception methods (e.g., drinking urine)

Twenty-year-old books on the dangers of electrosmog (outdated information)

Solutions & Opportunities

Cataloging



Michael Baigent, *Ancient Traces: Mysteries in Ancient and Early History*


In a series of different chapters the author examines a number of enigmas surrounding such ancient mysteries as Atlantis and the Pyramids.



Geschiedenis



Spiritualiteit - Esoterie

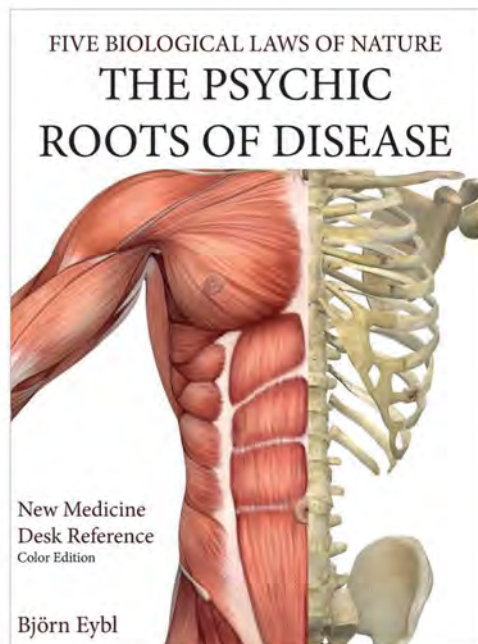


Literature provides the opportunity to study, consider, and embed the inconvenient. In this way, once it has taken root in society, it works to democratize and depolarize.

Maxim Februari, 2024

Solutions & Opportunities

Communication & programming



Belgian newspaper: This book and the movement behind it are "scandalous and life-threatening"



First step in Flanders

Charter with shared values

- **The collection** is curated independently and impartially
- Reflection of society
- Promotes intellectual freedom and critical reading
- **The library** is open to audience suggestions
- Critically evaluates self-published works, suggestions, and donations
- **The charter** is a living document to keep the conversation going

KERNWAARDEN VAN DE COLLECTIE OPENBARE BIBLIOTHEKEN

Dit charter geeft weer waar we als gemeenschap van bibliotheken achter staan. Het geeft ons de kans om op een objectieve, doordachte manier om te gaan met materialen waar controverse rond bestaat en biedt **ONDERSTEUNING** bij **COLLECTIEVORMING**.

Openbare bibliotheken herbergen een **ACTUELE COLLECTIE** die **ONAFHANKELIJK EN ONPARTIJDIG** samengesteld wordt. We laten ons niet leiden door ideologische, politieke, religieuze en commerciële belangen.



De collectie is een **SPIEGEL VAN DE SAMENLEVING** en per definitie dynamisch. De samenstelling is **MEERSTEMMIG** en **TOEKOMSTGERICHT**. We zijn er voor iedereen en zetten ons extra in voor de kwetsbaardere groepen. Binnen de collectie hebben we oog voor lokale accenten.

We promoten **INTELLECTUELE VRIJHEID** en ondersteunen **KRITISCHE LEESVAARDIGHEID**. We nemen werken op die het onderwerp benaderen vanuit meerdere invalshoeken. Titels toevoegen en context bieden, draagt meer bij aan een betrouwbare collectie dan het weglaten van titels.



De collectie wordt op deskundige wijze samengesteld door **COLLECTIEVORMERS**. Tegelijkertijd staan we open voor de suggesties van ons **PUBLIEK** en betrekken we waar mogelijk lokale gemeenschappen. De waarde van de collectie zit immers in het gebruik ervan.



Uitgaven in eigen beheer, suggesties en schenkingen worden kritisch bekeken en behandeld volgens dezelfde criteria als de andere materialen die we aankopen. De beschikbare ruimte – en dus het aantal titels dat we kunnen aanbieden – is beperkt.

