In 2020, when a global pandemic swept the earth, a number of large commercial publishers, who normally lock their work behind punitive copyright restrictions, temporarily lifted those barriers. Elsevier, Springer Nature, Taylor and Francis, and others pledged to make “all peer-reviewed research publications relevant to the outbreak … immediately open access, or freely available at least for the duration of the outbreak.” Naturally, even though millions of people all over the world continue to suffer from the effects of long COVID, and new variants of the virus continue to traverse the globe, all of this research is once again behind extremely profitable lock and key.

Now that Pride Month is upon us, these very same publishers have put up their perfunctory LGBTQIA+ pages, inviting readers to “celebrate” Pride Month with them. Elsevier offers us a “Pride Hub,” which does not fail to mention it was first launched during Pride Month; Taylor and Francis offers us “[i]n honor of Pride Month […] a selection of materials for institutions and academics to promote inclusivity, equality, and respect for members of the LGBTQIA+ community both in the academic workspace and spaces of higher education” – all behind a paywall of course. And Routledge’s “LGBTQ+ Pride” page even provides us with a handy definition of pride, as “a celebration of authenticity, acceptance and love in the face of societal adversity.”

And what is that “societal adversity” at present? Over 100 Anti-LGBTQIA+ laws passed in the US during the last five years, with half of those just in this last year. The introduction of the death penalty for homosexuality in Uganda, anti-LGBTQIA+ crackdowns in Russia, vicious attacks on the LGBTQIA+ community in Turkey, and an overall global shift toward extremist right-wing politics caused by an increasing divide between rich and poor, a social-media-fueled propaganda model optimized for outrage, and a bankruptcy of ideas — political and ethical — in the face of mass extinction and climate emergency. If there were any time in which nuanced, well argued, and researched scholarly work would be essential and which have the widest most possible dissemination, it would be now.

Yet what do we see from these commercial purveyors of often publicly funded knowledge? A frontal attack on one of the most important non-profit institution that aims to preserve knowledge and make it globally open and accessible: the Internet Archive. After complaining about the Internet Archive’s National Emergency Library that opened during the COVID pandemic, offering library services to all those who could no longer visit a physical library, four of the largest commercial publishers — Hatchette, Penguin Random House, HarperCollins, and John Wiley & Sons, — balked at the initiative, later filing a lawsuit which may very well spell the end of the Internet Archive as we know it. In the initial round of this lawsuit, the commercial publishers have prevailed.

With their attack on the Internet Archive, commercial publishers have joined the extremist right-wing attacks on public libraries and sit at the forefront of the fascist, anti-LGBTQIA+ culture war waged by a cynical and oppressive upper class harnessing openly homophobic, transphobic, and racist resentment to retain their stranglehold on power and prestige, with book bans proliferating throughout the US, with no little harm to
children, especially. If anything, Pride Month should be the moment in which publishers join librarians in their efforts to make as much knowledge as available as possible to as many people as possible. Open access is thus an essential tool in the fight for LGBTQIA+ rights and minority rights in general.

Spare us your Pride Hubs and paywalled “resources.” True allyship means to open those books!