Library Censorship in High Schools of Delaware County

An Honors Thesis

by

Josef Hannah
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Abstract

Literary censorship and intellectual freedom are important issues within public school libraries. What is appropriate for our children to read is brought into question every day throughout America's schools. The Association for Indiana Media Educators regularly conducts empirical studies to understand the level of intellectual freedom in Indiana's school libraries. Two studies conducted in 1996 and 1997, Intellectual Freedom Survey in Indiana Schools were published by the Association for Indiana Media Educators' Intellectual Freedom Committee. My study examines school libraries in Delaware County in comparison to state-wide data. I interviewed three high school librarians in spring 2008 to find answers on library selection and censorship. My research has shown the library is still an arena for battling censorship and protecting intellectual freedom. Important to maintaining intellectual freedom, the need for qualified librarians increases as even in Delaware County a licensed librarian may be asked to provide services in more than one school at a time. I found that a fine line exists between censorship and selection that must be balanced by qualified librarians.

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Introduction

The American Library Association defines censorship as “the suppression of ideas and information that certain persons – individuals, groups, or government officials- find objectionable or dangerous” ("Intellectual Freedom and Censorship Q & A," par. 6). Censorship of novel ideas has caused controversy and debate for centuries. The philosopher Socrates was put to death in 399 B.C. for “corrupting the youth” with his dissenting opinions of the religion and the politics in power ("Socrates," pars. 5-6). After the invention of the printing press, the Roman Catholic Church strictly monitored literature, censoring materials that contradicted their doctrine ("Censorship," pars. 12-13).

The ALA defines intellectual freedom as “the right of every individual to both seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction. It provides for free access to all expressions of ideas through which any and all sides of a question, cause or movement may be explored. Intellectual freedom encompasses the freedom to hold, receive and disseminate ideas” ("Intellectual Freedom Issues,” par. 1). Intellectual freedom has come a long way since the advent of mass-printed literature. In the modern United States, an adult citizen can read just about any book he or she likes without fear of punishment or persecution by church or state. In the context of the public school, the picture is slightly different. For teenagers, high school is a critical time to progress towards adulthood as well as construct new schemas in order to better understand the world around them. Literature is one avenue of assimilating and personalizing this new information. In the school library, library media specialists help guide students in their quest for literary knowledge. They take on the mighty task of selector and censor for the impressionable minds of each new generation which fascinates me.
Libraries are the cornerstone of intellectual freedom according to Mary Watkins, librarian at Yorktown High School, but censorship in school libraries is often overlooked because classroom censorship is what makes the news. For example, Connie Heermann, a teacher at Perry Meridian High of Perry Township, Indiana, was recently suspended for a year and a half due to teaching the controversial nonfiction book, *Freedom Writers Diary*. This suspension came after she was ordered not to incorporate the book in her teaching plan by the school administrator (McCleery, pars. 1-6). Whether this was more a case of insubordination or censorship is debatable; however, censorship is at the forefront of a long-running battle in the classroom. Thankfully, librarians often avoid controversy of this nature because they are not necessarily assigning students what to read on a regular basis, but they do have to work closely with teachers, principals, and administrators in order to maintain a library collection that is considered acceptable for their school and community.

Libraries are continually evolving to cater to an ever-changing world. From kindergarten through the twelfth grade, I had always known the person running the library as a “librarian.” With the growth of utilization of the internet in education, the role of the computer has expanded and infiltrated school libraries as a new and incredible resource. Today, libraries are often called “media centers.” Consequently, librarians are now licensed as “library media specialists,” sometimes called teacher-librarians. This title requires at least a baccalaureate degree in elementary or secondary education. With the library constantly evolving in its function within schools and in students’ lives, I wonder how much different the role of books are compared to decades past.

In my junior year of college, I took an Honors Colloquium course titled *Banned and Challenged Literature of the 20th Century*. We studied several popular selections that have faced
censorship in schools and the general public including *Farenheit 451, The Color Purple, Lolita,* and *Slaughterhouse-Five.* One of our assignments was to contact the librarian of the high school from which we graduated and ask him or her about instances of censorship in the library. From this experience, I felt other students could benefit from learning about what goes on behind the scenes of school libraries. If nothing else, I wanted to learn firsthand how school librarians work to maintain a place of protected intellectual freedom. My thesis idea was born.

The primary objective of this research is to anecdotally analyze the censorship/selection process in the high school libraries of Delaware County in the context of state-wide and national data. A secondary objective is to promote awareness and appreciation for the delicate balance of protecting students’ intellectual freedom and maintaining a collection that fits within the standards of the community. I also want to examine what other difficult and intriguing issues are important to librarians in Delaware County. Teachers, students, principals, and librarians of this community can use this small-scale research report to analyze their own ideas about literary censorship and community standards.

**Methods**

To complete my objective of comparing data from Delaware County with state and national data, I had to conduct primary and secondary research. I opted to interview librarians versus simply mailing surveys because I wanted to take full advantage of open-ended questions and personally experience the public school libraries in the area. I did, however, use the *Intellectual Freedom Survey in Indiana Schools* reports from 1996 and 1997 as a basis for topics of discussion surrounding library organization, selection, and censorship.
Quite possibly the most difficult part of my primary research in literary censorship was the process of obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Ball State University to conduct the interviews. I had to be approved by the IRB because my research involved human subjects. Prior to review, my advisor and I had to complete an online course, Human Participants Protection Education for Research Teams, sponsored by National Institutes of Health (NIH). The tutorial provided clarity of an Institutional Review Board's role in protecting human subjects in research and understanding informed consent. It also presented historical precedents to explain the necessities of ethical evaluation that have shaped the current standards for research involving human subjects. The national website for the Institutional Review Board utilizes an online study designer where researchers can post all necessary materials for review. Along with posting a completion certificate for the NIH's online course (see Appendix A), I filled out a Human Subjects Research Application, wrote a Research Narrative detailing my plans for my interviews, wrote interview permission request letters to Principals/Administrators and Informants (library media specialists), and compiled a list of interview questions.

The Research Narrative assisted me in analyzing and planning every major aspect of my primary research. Using the guidelines provided by the IRB, I addressed the purpose of the study, rationale, description of subject population, subject recruitment, methods, informant confidentiality, potential risks and benefits, and informed consent. Through this exercise, I learned how important confidentiality and informed consent are in protecting human subjects (see Appendix B).

I prepared a list of 31 interview questions (see Appendix C) spanning several topics gleaned from secondary research. The questions moved from general to specific. The first few
questions cover background information on the Library Media Specialist being interviewed, including education level and time spent at the library. If it was the librarian's first year working at the school, there would probably be few experiences to talk about. The second set of questions covered collection organization, purchasing guidelines, and influences, including school boards. Adding to and maintaining a collection can be a very delicate process because the librarian must account for the needs and expectations of the students, administration, school board, and overall community. The third set of questions addressed the issues of handling potentially controversial materials and censorship in their libraries. The fourth set of questions addressed complaints, challenges, and requests from parents, students, teachers, the administration, and local action groups. The final set addressed the censorship of popular contemporary authors such as Kurt Vonnegut, Judy Blume, J.K. Rowling, and J.D. Salinger. Many authors like these spark controversy in the classroom but not necessarily in the library. The questions were always asked in order.

After completing and submitting all the necessary materials for the IRB, I waited approximately two weeks before being approved. I learned that I had received exempt status approval (see Appendix D). Exempt studies do not require ongoing review because they pose minimal physical and psychological risk to the human subject. The second task was to seek approval from the prospective schools' principals and/or administrators to conduct an interview within school facilities. My approval requests letters (see Appendix E) disclosed the purpose, objectives, and rationale for my study. I sent the requests via email to eight schools in Delaware County: Cowan High School, Muncie Southside High School, Delta High School, Muncie Central High School, Wapahani High School, Yorktown High School, and Burris Laboratory School, and Wes-Del High School. Seven schools responded. Three schools allowed me to
contact their library media specialists without further inquiry, two being Yorktown High School and Burris Laboratory School associated with Ball State University. One principal spoke on behalf of his or her librarian, stating the employee was too busy reorganizing the library collection and dealing with structural programs to allow time for an interview. Another principal wanted more details about my study and appeared put-off by the use of the word, "censorship." After providing the list of my interview questions, he or she also spoke on behalf of the librarian, stating they were not interested in the process of my research. The Muncie Community School system was unique in that it has a review process in place similar to an Institutional Review Board. At the moment, my approval is still pending for interviews at the Muncie Schools of Central and Southside.

Of the three schools that responded positively to my request, the library media specialists seemed very willing to participate. The request letter (Appendix F) to the informants provided similar details as the letter to principals and administrators. To protect the confidentiality of the informants, they were given the option of remaining anonymous. Also, anything they said could be kept "off-the-record" if they requested. Taking guidance from the NIH course, I informed the librarians they could withdraw from participation at any time and could refrain from answering any questions that caused them discomfort. I provided the informed consent statements verbally prior to beginning the questions at each interview. I also asked for permission to audio record the interview for the purpose of recalling accurate statements. My primary source of data collection was a digital voice recorder. The interview times ranged from one half-hour to one hour and fifteen minutes.

I analyzed the data via transcription onto Word documents. The files were stored on my computer by school name in order to keep the informants' names confidential. The interview was
organized by the answers to every question so the similarities and differences could be easily distinguished between each informant. Also, the data could then be compared to questions similar to previous surveys, such as the *Intellectual Freedom Surveys* of 1996 and 1997.

The analysis of the interviews was limited by the small population size. Selecting to only interview public high school librarians in Delaware County left a sample size of eight. To compare to AIME's sample size, in 1997 and again 1998 the Intellectual Freedom Committee of the Association for Indiana Media Educators published their reports of a library censorship survey sent to approximately 2,650 Indiana schools in the *Indiana Media Journal*. With regards to sample size, it is clear that choosing to conduct face-to-face interviews versus sending surveys comes at a cost in total sample size. For this reason, my report was analyzed non-empirically, but compared to empirical data from secondary sources.

Previous studies have focused on similar issues, such as the previously mentioned *Intellectual Freedom Surveys of Indiana Schools*. Closed and open-ended questions in a questionnaire were posed to “Media Specialists” in public and private elementary and secondary schools of Indiana. Questions pertained to topics including board-adapted policy, materials reconsideration form, potentially sensitive materials, parental permission, patron complaints, collection organization, and a list of challenged materials. Therefore, my project is based on previous scholarly research. It is especially relevant to the surveys because both pertain to Indiana schools. The subjects in my research are qualified as well. All of the research subjects have obtained their library or media services certification. Competent and thorough responses could be expected from these qualified and experienced informants.
Results

I was able to interview three informants out of the eight schools contacted. Each of the three schools had a different story to tell. It became evident that, even in a single county, much diversity exists from school to school. Yorktown high school is situated a little outside of Muncie, but far away enough that it was in its own separate community. Burris Laboratory School is located in Ball State’s south campus, near Ball Memorial Hospital. It is heavily tied with Ball State University’s Teacher’s College. The other school will remain anonymous at the request of the informant from that institution. The questions are titled “Library Censorship in Delaware County Interview Questions” (see Appendix C). I will report the differences and similarities in responses to key questions next, while comparisons to national data can be found in the Discussion section of this paper.

All librarians reported having a library certification (or school media certification) of at least a baccalaureate level, which is a teaching degree. Total librarian experience varied greatly. The librarian at Burris Laboratory School, Kim Carr, has been a librarian at Burris for three years, with thirteen years total experience. She has worked in eleven different school buildings. Mary Watkins of Yorktown has spent thirty-five years as a librarian within Yorktown school system, with thirty-six years total experience. The anonymous librarian has spent all six years at his or her current school.

Library organization extends beyond where the books are situated on the shelves. Purchasing new books to enhance the current collection is an important, ongoing process that is affected by factors like budget, community standards, reviews, outside influences, and possibly librarian preference. All three librarians reported having a tight purchasing budget that must be supplemented by donations and income from book fairs. Mary Watkins of Yorktown also noted
that using paperback books also helps stretch the budget. Watkins elucidated on Yorktown’s money flow, which is normally from January to December; however, last year she didn’t get any money until October. All three librarians also reported that, at the very least, the nonfiction section of their library collections was very outdated.

Purchasing constraints affect the delicate process of selection. Kim Carr (Burris) stated, “I would never buy something with taxpayers’ money that is not reviewed well.” She utilizes reviews from the School Libraries Journal and Booklist published by the American Library Association (ALA). She often refers to American Association of School Librarians (AASL), a division of the ALA. Watkins referred to the ALA as the backbone for library support: “If they aren’t the building blocks, they’re the mortar that holds the blocks together.” Of the selection process, she explained, “Just because a book is an award winner does not mean it is appropriate for your community. You have to know your community. You have to know what’s going to send them over the edge.” All three schools reported the absence of a written purchasing guideline. The anonymous librarian said he or she keeps the guidelines in his or her head. Carr stated that, “Ideally, all schools should have a selection policy in place.” She did not find one in place at Burris when she arrived three years ago. All three schools also reported the absence of a board to help in guiding the selection process. However, they do rely heavily on student input to shape their collection. Watkins stated, “I have 711 students on that board.”

I also asked about the current collections overall and placement of different types of books. When asked about how grade level affects library organization, Watkins said, “How can you promote a love of reading if you don’t allow [students] to select the books?” The only librarian that shelves by grade level is Carr’s, but this is mainly due to the fact that her collection is in a K-12 school. She expressed that, “My policy is that kids can pretty much go where they
want to go, with some guidance.” Her library is organized with about two-thirds dedicated to young adult and adult literature. As the laboratory school of Ball State, the library is also accessed by student teachers and college students. Yorktown’s library appeared to quite a large collection overall. Watkins places emphasis on a collection geared towards the “non-reader.” The various sections in this library include classics, a senior English collection, graphic novels, as well as newly purchased encyclopedias. The anonymous librarian reported that his or her collection contained about a fifty-fifty balance between fiction and non-fiction materials.

The responses to questions regarding controversial material and censorship varied slightly more than in previous questions. The anonymous librarian cited the author Stephen King as the most controversial material on the shelves. The other two librarians said there was plenty of controversial material because nearly any book could offend someone. When asked about specific criteria for censorship, the anonymous librarian responded that community standards, language, and sexual content all played a role in determining what should be censored. Watkins of Yorktown stated, “There is a fine line between censorship and selection.” She reported having removed very few books from her shelves in her thirty-five years at Yorktown. Carr of Burris stated she would censor books that seemed inappropriate. The novel, *Rainbow Party*, came to her mind due to its sexual content, the title referring to an act of group oral sex.

When asked about holding books for specific ages or having a “by-request-only” reserve, it was unanimous that books in danger of theft are kept on reserve, including optical illusions books, some sports books, and some books about drugs. Carr said she would not want to keep any age-sensitive books on reserve because it defeats the purpose and causes more student interest simply because it is restricted. Regarding age appropriateness, she said there were some books she might not direct a child toward due to subject matter, but she wouldn’t restrict them if
they found these books on their own. The other schools did not report having reserve sections.

All three librarians reported the absence of a board that reviews controversial or challenged literature, but that one would be formed if a necessary occasion arose. They also reported never removing a book on their own accord; however, some books were removed once parents or administration became involved.

Parental involvement is a critical part of maintaining an acceptable collection. After all, they are part of the community which school library directors serve. Two of the libraries do not require parental permission to check out any books. At Yorktown, Watkins stated she had a policy that students must obtain parental permission before checking out sexual education materials, but it was not specified at what grade level this restriction applied. The anonymous librarian reported having a written complaint system through which parents could voice concern. Kim Carr stated that she has not implemented a written complaint system at Burris. She listens to a complaint and says parents have every right for their child not to read the book. If they want to go further she gives them a complaint form. Watkins responded similarly saying she tries to talk with the parents over the phone or in person rather than result to handing out written complaint forms.

When asked about recounting instances of parental complaints, the anonymous librarian recalled a time that a parent made a child return a book, and additionally threatened to keep the book if the librarian didn't take it off the shelf. It turned out to be an empty threat. Watkins has a positive outlook on parental involvement. She recounted two stories when a parent pointed out books that she agreed should be removed. One father said he read a Judy Blume book his child had checked out and felt it had no redeeming qualities or morals. Mary Watkins agreed after reading it herself, and took the book off the shelf, stating there were plenty of other Judy Blume
books left to read. Also, one mother, a counselor for anorexia, was concerned about a specific beauty book her child checked out, because it stated that girls, when standing sideways, should see their ribs. Of all three librarians, Watkins was the only one to report having occasional complaints from church groups (about one a year). She recalled one time a mother brought a large part of her congregation with her to support a complaint against a book.

When asked, "Is there ever a time the principal or administrator influences what sensitive material should be removed from library shelves?" the anonymous librarian mentioned that at the beginning of his or her time at the school, the assistant principal made him or her aware of a Stephen King book he or she found offensive. The librarian decided to read the book and agreed with the principal that the book should come off the shelf. Carr could not recall any administrative influence. Watkins said if the principal or administrator wanted a book off the shelf, she would remove it. If she felt strongly opposed to the removal, she would perhaps talk to the superintendent. Surprisingly, she also said that she gets more complaints about books from teachers than anyone else.

The final set of questions addressed controversial popular authors such as Kurt Vonnegut, Joseph Heller, J.D. Salinger, Judy Blume, Lois Lowry, J.K. Rowling, and Philip Pullman. The anonymous librarian stated her library has books from all the authors; however, those were the most vulnerable to theft. Carr said she has had to replace *Catcher in the Rye* and *Catch-22* a few times due to theft, but all the authors were represented on her shelves. Watkins said she looks at every book separately and most parents are not concerned with controversial books at the high school level. Regarding the well-reviewed *Golden Compass* series, none of the librarians reported any note-worthy complaints about having these books on their shelves. It was
essentially a unanimous feeling from all the librarians that it is one's choice not to read a book or for one's child not to read it, but one's feelings cannot extend to other people's reading choices.

**Discussion/Conclusions**

Comparison between interview results and data from surveys of Indiana schools:

One of the primary objectives of this study was to compare my results to state and national data. Unfortunately, data on library censorship at a national level was hard to come by. The National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) posts instances of key censorship controversies from across the country on its website, but national statistical data beyond general organization of library and media centers remains a mystery ("Issues"). Ironically, the most relevant source of information came from Indiana. As far as I am aware, the *Intellectual Freedom Survey in Indiana Schools* of 1996 and 1997 are the only empirical surveys concerning intellectual freedom, at least of those posted to the public.

Of a total population of 2,650 public and private elementary and secondary schools surveyed, only 208 forms, or 7.8 percent, were returned in 1997 with a similar number occurring in 1996 (Association for Indiana, "1997" 19). This statistic encouraged my decision to conduct interviews versus sending surveys. As my advisor pointed out, a request for an interview is a lot harder to ignore than a mailed survey. An intellectual freedom survey was also conducted in 1992, but the report could not be obtained (Association for Indiana, "1997" 19). Although the data pool may or may not be representative of Indiana schools in general, it is still an insightful publication. Many of my interview questions were constructed similarly to the surveys for the purpose of comparing data from nearly ten years ago to my own. To make things simpler, I will
refer to statistical data from the 1997 *Intellectual Freedom Survey in Indiana Schools* unless otherwise specified.

Regarding school policies, the survey reported 92 percent of schools having a written, board-adopted policy on material selection or the collection development in place (Association for Indiana, “1997” 19). The three schools I interviewed did not have any written policies. One question from the survey allowed for comments and asked, “Do you treat sensitive materials in your collection any differently than other materials in your collection in regard to shelving or circulation?” With varying rationale, 36 percent responded yes, compared to one out of three in my research (Association for Indiana, “1997” 19). In the surveys of both 1996 and 1997, sex education was cited as a reason for shelving some books in a restricted area. Often, it was not stipulated at what age level this restriction occurred. Also, theft was another possible reason for withholding some materials, along with drug content and witchcraft. Of those responding “no” to the question about sensitive materials in the survey, some librarians explained they specifically keep potentially sensitive material off their shelves (Association for Indiana, “1997” 19-20; “1996” 22-23).

Regarding complaints, nineteen percent of schools in the survey reported having a patron complaint during the 1996-97 school year, all but one complaint coming from individuals. Fifteen percent of the complaints resulted in written challenges. Of the questioned or challenged material, 35 percent were intermediate level books and 24 percent were young adult or adult books (Association for Indiana, “1997” 20). In my interview, I did not ask about instances of complaints within a specific timeframe. For comparison, most materials receiving complaints were considered young adult books and periodicals, such as those of Judy Blume, Stephen King, one book about the holocaust, and *Seventeen* magazine. Interestingly, *Seventeen* was also
challenged in one of the schools of the 1997 Intellectual Freedom Survey (Association for Indiana, “1997” 24). From my interviews, none of the complaints resulted in written challenges. This was mainly due to the policy of all three librarians to handle a complaint in person or on the phone before a written challenge became necessary measure for concerned patrons.

According to the 1997 Intellectual Freedom Survey, 54 percent of the materials that received any complaints, oral or written, were retained, while 42 percent were removed, restricted, or relocated (Association for Indiana, “1997” 21). Even more alarming, in 1996, 38 percent were removed and eighteen percent were restricted or relocated (Association for Indiana, “1996” 24). If only fifteen percent resulted in written challenges, why were so many not retained in the general collection (Association for Indiana, “1997” 20)? Perhaps the fear of causing further controversy or problems prompted these librarians to remove certain books. From my interviews, virtually none of the complaints from parents resulting in material removal came without a logical explanation. For instance, Watkins of Yorktown High School explained she would only remove material if she agreed with the patron's concern about the book being on the shelf. In the 1997 Intellectual Freedom Survey, however, one librarian stated their “principal informed her that the book would be taken off the shelf” (22). It is a tragedy when a library media specialist has to live in constant fear of job endangerment due to their collection content.

Other issues in school libraries:

When I asked the question, “Is there ever a time the principal or administrator influences what sensitive material should be removed from library shelves?” one librarian responded, “Absolutely. Your job might be on the line.” While this response made sense, it was also quite unsettling. Fear is a great motivator. In this case, fear could be motivating librarians across the country to keep “potentially sensitive” books off their shelves. When national media outlets
frequently report about high school teachers being fired or suspended for teaching from controversial books, why wouldn't librarians be frightened of the same fate? Of course, it must be recognized that principals and administrators face a lot of pressure too. Controversy surrounding censorship can put them in the hot seat as well. It seems obvious the only way to fight undue intimidation from upset parents and organizations is for the administration to unite with the teachers and librarians to protect intellectual and academic freedom.

A few of my interview questions pertained to a general philosophy about libraries and censorship. Because of this, some topics surfaced in my interviews that I did not expect, such as the issue of the purchasing budget. When asked, "Do you feel your collection reflects the average public school library? Why or why not?" every librarian brought up the school library budget. The anonymous librarian answered, "No. Because I don't get nearly the budget that most schools get." Consequently, their nonfiction section is very outdated. He or she also stated the school's teachers often rely on public libraries for non-fiction teaching materials, rather than their own library. Kim Carr said she feels Burris' library reflects the average school library as far as content is concerned, but the nonfiction collection is outdated due to lack of funding.

Mary Watkins of Yorktown Schools Corporation had much more to say when addressing the topic of budgeting. She responded, "We're all struggling." She feels small schools all face the same funding difficulties. I sat back and listened to an intriguing explanation of the changes that have occurred in the "average library collection." According to Watkins, libraries in the 1960s and '70s had much more money, or at least the dollar stretched much further in purchasing. In fact, many of her schools books date to those decades. She stated that when she started thirty-six years ago, the average book with library binding cost around $1.99. The same books published today could cost between twenty-five and thirty dollars. Also, elementary books
are now full of colorful illustrations, a far cry from the simplicity of *The Dick and Jane Series*, which raise prices further still. This is why she turns to purchasing paperbacks whenever possible. How can school libraries maintain their collections if the budgets remain the same or get even smaller while inflation cause the prices of all books to rise? Collections under budget strain will continue to get further and further outdated until budgeting for schools like these is reconfigured.

Through my secondary research, I noticed some other general issues regarding censorship of literature in the United States. One that came to my attention is the ongoing battle between organizations for and against censorship. Leading the charge for intellectual freedom is the American Library Association with the National Coalition Against Censorship right behind. Opposing the ALA and NCAC are organizations like Parents Against Bad Books In Schools (PABBIS), supported by local groups across the country. Under the headline, “The American Library Association (ALA) Successfully Pushes Smut On Your Children,” a PABBIS news post stated that the ALA’s “power and influence is dangerous. They have a clear agenda and most scary of all it involves America’s children” (“Pabbis News” par. 20). And yet, it is worth noting that to be a licensed media specialist, school librarians must now obtain master’s degrees accredited by the ALA.

All three librarians I interviewed supported utilizing ALA’s resources. Would PABBIS support these librarians? Certainly, there is nothing wrong with being concerned about *your* child’s education, but how far should the concern go? PABBIS goes so far as to continually update an exhaustive list of books that contain any bit of objectionable material, no matter whether the rest of the book has redeeming moral quality. The list currently stands at 1350 books that “may, or may not be appropriate for your child.” Examples on their list are *Slaughterhouse-
Five and Catcher in the Rye ("What is"). It seems the more attention a book receives for controversial content; the more likely it is students want to read the book. Perhaps making a public fuss about a book being on the shelves is only defeating the goal groups like PABBIS had in the first place.

In order to fight to keep books on the shelves, Indiana schools must properly staff their libraries. A study by the Association for Indiana Media Educators expressed concern that library media specialists are on the decline in Indiana schools ("Surveys" 4). If this is true, who will replace them? Are there enough young people in the current generation replacing retiring librarians? Perhaps the concern could be extended to the national front. The following is from a news post concerning reasons for the decline in qualified librarians:

"The job's too hard," says American Association of School Librarians President M. Ellen Jay, the media specialist at Damascus Elementary School in Maryland. She cites a nearby district where only four teachers among thousands accepted the county's offer of free library-science school tuition. "Why leave [a job] where you are responsible for one grade or content area to master all manner of topics and all manner of technologies--for the same teacher's salary?" (Lord, par. 5)

School boards should cherish the licensed librarians their schools have because there is no guarantee they will be around for long. Perhaps the decline in licensed librarians is simply because it is no longer a cost effective job.

**Final words on censorship:**

In my interview, I asked every librarian about their personal beliefs on censorship of literature in schools and in the public arena. The anonymous librarian stated, "I don't think that books should be censored because of their ideas, but I do believe there is an appropriateness of
age.” At the adult level (general public), he or she feels there is no need for censorship and stated, “The free exchange of ideas is what we’re supposed to be all about. That has to be maintained.” Kim Carr doesn’t think it’s appropriate for a parent to infringe on other children’s right to read, but “you have to be much more selective at the school level” due to budgeting. Mary Watkins reiterated her feeling that “libraries are the cornerstone of freedom.”

I could not agree more. If every concerned parent or organization were allowed to remove every book they found offensive in their school libraries what would be left? As Watkins said, “I should have something in my collection to offend everyone. If I have offended everyone, then that means I have a very balanced collection.” With this in mind, I wonder how balanced the average public school library is in Indiana.

In conclusion, I have learned a fine line exists between selection and censorship. Librarians have a lot to consider before making the decision between selection and censorship with every book they come across that could potentially enter their collection. For some, it may be a quick judgment call, a matter of deciding if the book is more appropriate for their library than another. Over time, however, factors such as school board pressures and limited budgets might produce an unbalanced collection. Censorship at this level may not be as evident as a public challenge presented to the school board or an executive decision from a principal, administrator, or librarian to swiftly alter the collection. Could a slower-moving, silent censorship be occurring in many schools that simply keeps some scintillating books off the shelves?

The delicate balance of maintaining an unbiased and complete collection makes the job of the librarian so important. What I have gained from this research is respect for trained librarians who recognize what is needed to maintain a balanced collection. Our schools will soon
need a new generation of dedicated library media specialists who will further the cause of intellectual freedom. I have also learned censorship itself is not intrinsically bad or good. The context of the present and community standards must be considered before selecting or censoring any material for a library. The role of the censor is a powerful position that must not be taken lightly. This is why I appreciate all the librarians or library media specialists dedicated to free exchange of ideas.

**Recommendations**

The importance of a qualified librarian in every school cannot be emphasized enough. Every school deserves its own licensed library media specialist. School boards should recognize that librarians are a critical resource in students’ education. Libraries are worth an ample budget that allows librarians the means to provide appropriate and challenging materials to students while maintaining a balanced collection. Students at every grade level should be encouraged by all their educators to use the library as the authoritative resource for research and personal growth in reading. Just because the resource is available does not mean students will automatically find what they need. A trained librarian can guide a student to appropriate resources they need because they are not just guardians of the school’s reading materials, they are an active part of each student’s education.

Secondly, it struck me that problems often occurred when communication between educators, students, and parents is not open and clear. Over time, written guidelines for purchasing new materials and maintaining a collection is critical for protecting intellectual freedom and jobs in school libraries. When a guideline is in place, precedents for handling challenges can be set so every librarian who works in a library will know what to expect if they
buy or keep potentially sensitive materials. This way, principals, administrators, teachers, and school boards are all well aware of what is approved for their schools library before any major problems occur.

**Important Links**

- American Library Association: [www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org)
- Association for Indiana Media Educators (of the Indiana Library Federation):
- National Coalition Against Censorship: [www.ncac.org](http://www.ncac.org)
- Parents Against Bad Books In Schools: [www.pabbis.com](http://www.pabbis.com)
Works Cited


<http://www.acrl.org/ala/oif/basics/intellectual.cfm>.


Works Consulted


Reflection

Choosing a thesis topic outside of your major can be a challenge. For me, it was a joy. I am a biology and pre-medicine major so people I talked to about my thesis were often surprised that I did not choose a scientific research project for my honors thesis. This is because I have a desire to be a well-rounded student and include the non-sciences in my education.

It was quite a personal journey to pick my thesis topic on library censorship. I went to a small private school from third grade through the end high school which contained one K-12 library collection. I wondered how much different a public school’s library could have been, and my project offered me the chance to see what I may have missed.

This was my first time approaching the subject of censorship outside of class. Also prior to this project, I had never conducted an interview for primary research. I was challenged by the learning process of developing comprehensive interview questions that flowed together and allowed for open-ended answers. As a clarification, because this research is approved by the Institutional Review Board, I cannot share all of the data I collected in order to protect informant confidentiality. It is my hope that all readers have found this information on library censorship as eye-opening as I did.
Appendix A

Completion Certificate

This is to certify that

Josef Hannah

has completed the Human Participants Protection Education for Research Teams online course, sponsored by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), on 12/11/2007.

This course included the following:

• key historical events and current issues that impact guidelines and legislation on human participant protection in research.
• ethical principles and guidelines that should assist in resolving the ethical issues inherent in the conduct of research with human participants.
• the use of key ethical principles and federal regulations to protect human participants at various stages in the research process.
• a description of guidelines for the protection of special populations in research.
• a definition of informed consent and components necessary for a valid consent.
• a description of the role of the IRB in the research process.
• the roles, responsibilities, and interactions of federal agencies, institutions, and researchers in conducting research with human participants.
Appendix B

SECTION 1 – TITLE, PURPOSE OF THE STUDY, AND RATIONALE

1.1 Title. Library Censorship in Delaware County High Schools

1.2 Purpose of the study. The American Library Association defines censorship as “the suppression of ideas and information that certain persons – individuals, groups, or government officials- find objectionable or dangerous.” The primary objective of this study is to generate a better understanding of censorship that occurs in a representative sample of the public high schools of Delaware County. The secondary objectives are to investigate if censorship has changed over the past few decades and to see how Delaware County schools fits into the national picture in terms of library censorship.

1.3 Rationale. In 1996 and 1997, the Intellectual Freedom Committee of the Association for Indiana Media Educators posted their reports of a library censorship survey sent to approximately 2,650 Indiana schools in the Indiana Media Journal. The data collected was extremely helpful in understanding how controversial materials are handled in Indiana elementary and secondary schools overall. Though similar empirical studies most likely continue, I want to summarize the thoughts and feelings of the librarians in one of the ninety-two counties of Indiana. I would also like to see if this county’s school libraries, home of Ball State University, are representative of the rest of the counties in Indiana and the national public school system, and if much has changed since the publications in 1996 and 1997.

SECTION 2 – DESCRIPTION OF SUBJECT POPULATION

2.1 Number of subjects. Approximately seven librarians from seven high schools will be interviewed. If a high school has more than one librarian, then the subject population will be larger.

2.2 Describe the subject population. The subjects will be librarians for the secondary schools. They may or may not be certified librarians, meaning they may not have obtained a bachelor’s degree in library science.
2.3 **Describe any specified inclusion/exclusion criteria.** Three points of criteria that will be taken into consideration before the interview process will be possession of a library science degree, general education level, and years of experience within the current library. While a library science degree will not be a required for subjects to be interviewed, it will be taken into account when considering motivation for censoring materials in their library. The same consideration will be taken over the subjects' general education level. These will simply be in the form of inventory questions to better understand each subject's library background. One point of consideration that may affect the interview process is the librarian's years of experience within the current library. If it is the librarian's first year, arrangements may be made in order to attempt to contact the previous librarian. A situation like this, of course, would change the total number of subjects and require re-initiating contact with subjects outside of the high school facility. Finally the subjects will need to be librarians in the following high schools: Cowan High School, Muncie Southside High School, Delta High School, Muncie Central High School, Wapahani High School, Yorktown High School, and Burris Laboratory School.

**SECTION 3 – SUBJECT RECRUITMENT**

3.1 **Describe the method of subject recruitment.** Before contact with any subject is made, the administrator of each school will first be contacted for permission to conduct the interview at their school. An introductory letter will be sent to the library of each high school, including Cowan High School, Muncie Southside High School, Delta High School, Muncie Central High School, Wapahani High School, Yorktown High School, and Burris Laboratory School. The subjects will be notified in the letter that they will be contacted by phone in a few days. The introductory letter is attached with this document. The letter's purpose will be to introduce the primary investigator and the intention of the interview. It will also allow the subject to think about time that can be set aside for the interview at their respective high school facility. If the subject does not respond to the letter, attempts to contact the subject will be made via phone calls to the high school. After contact is made, the subject will be allowed to ask any questions and a prospective interview date will be scheduled. If the subject claims to have little experience at the high school to discuss, then an attempt to obtain information about the former librarian will be made. The former librarian would be the replacement subject, if available. All recruitment procedures will be done by the primary investigator.

**SECTION 4 – METHODS AND PROCEDURES**

4.1 **Describe the methods and procedures to be used.** The interviews will take place at each high school, presumably within the library, within the timeframe of January 28, 2008 to February 29, 2008. They will most likely take from a half-hour to an hour to conduct. After an introduction and clarification of the agreement to participate in the study, the interview questions will begin. I will inform the subject that I will be tape-recording that interview for accurate future analysis. The general categories of questions within the interview will include instances of censorship of library materials, protocol for handling controversial materials, including purchases, and
instances of challenges to materials, and self-censorship. The list of questions can be seen in an attached document. The questions will be formatted to be mostly open-ended so that the subject may reflect openly and contribute to the anecdotal style of the study. Throughout the study, the subject will be reminded that their identity can remain confidential if they choose. Also they may state if they want any information to be kept "off the record." Once the list of questions is answered, the subject's time for interviewing is over, or if the subject wishes to cease questioning earlier, the interview will come to a close. The investigator will give the subject contact information in case the subject has any future questions or concerns. All interviews will be conducted by the primary investigator.

SECTION 5 – ANONYMITY/CONFIDENTIALITY OF DATA

5.1 Describe how data will be collected and stored. The data will be collected through an audiotape-recorded interview. The data will then be analyzed and summarized on paper by the primary investigator. Privacy of the subject will be maintained if the subject wishes. The primary investigator will ask the subject if he or she would like his or her name to remain confidential in the research report. The audiotapes will be labeled by high school, rather than subjects' names. The privacy of the subjects will be maintained private after the interview takes place. Only the primary investigator and faculty advisor will have access to the data. For all subjects wishing to have their identities kept confidential, no quote or analysis of data in the final report will be tied to any name or school.

SECTION 6 – POTENTIAL RISKS AND BENEFITS

6.1 Describe the potential risks and discomforts. The only potential risk in this interview is that a subject may feel uncomfortable divulging information about censorship in his or her library. Balancing between students' rights to read and parents' rights to guide their children's education may be a touchy subject for school administrators and other employees. This is viewed as a minimal risk because no physical harm is done, and the questions do not intrude into the subjects' personal life.

6.2 Describe how the risks will be minimized. If the subject ever feels discomfort about answering questions during the interview, the investigator will allow for the subject to skip uncomfortable questions or stop in the interview altogether. The subject will be allowed to withdraw from the study at any point up until the study is submitted for a grade. The possible psychological damage will be minimized by the questions being centered on the subject's professional environment.

6.3 Describe the potential benefits. This study's findings will hopefully benefit society. In general, readers of the published research will better understand literary censorship within high school
walls. Parents will better understand what literature is selected and censored to become the books that are available to their children. A lot of attention is put on literature taught and censored in the classroom, but this study will provide insight into censorship in the other parts of the school. It will also contribute to the ongoing research on censorship in public high schools.

SECTION 7 – SUBJECT INCENTIVES/INDUCEMENTS TO PARTICIPATE

7.1 Describe any inducements/incentives to participate that will be offered to the subject. Not Applicable.

SECTION 8 – OTHER FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 Describe any financial expense to the subject. Not Applicable.

8.2 Describe any provisions for compensation for research-related injury. Not Applicable.

SECTION 9 – INFORMED CONSENT

It must be emphasized that obtaining informed consent is a conscious process, not merely a perfunctory signature on a piece of paper. It is the researcher’s responsibility to make sure that the subject fully understands his or her involvement as a subject in the research project. The consent process, ensuring that the subject understands the procedures and what is expected of him or her, is an ongoing process throughout the duration of the research project.

9.1 Not Applicable.
9.2  Not Applicable.

9.3  An introductory letter will be sent to each high school library prior to all interviews. The letter will provide information about the intent and structure of the research. It will provide the subject with contact information for the primary investigator and faculty advisor. It will also notify the potential subject that the primary investigator will attempt to contact him or her by business phone within a week or so in order to answer any questions and set up an interview date at the school’s facility.

SECTION 10 – ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

10.1 The following materials will be attached with this document: introductory letter to informants, permission letter to school’s principal or administrator, and interview questions.
Appendix C

Library Censorship in Delaware County: Interview Questions

1. How long have you been a librarian?

2. How long have you worked at this library?

3. Do you have a library certification?

4. What is your overall education level?

5. Can you describe your selection process in general, including what types of books you look for, how often you purchase, and what outside influences help the process?

6. Do you have written criteria or guideline for purchasing new literature? If so, do you have a copy I could look at?

7. Do utilize materials like Kirkus Reviews while considering books to purchase for your collection?

8. Does the ALA influence what you add or keep in your collection?

9. Do you have a board or other people help you with the selection process for the library?

10. What effect does grade level have on how you organize your collection?

11. What percentage of different types of materials (young adult, adult, periodicals, audiovisual) would you say make up your current collection?

12. Do you feel your collection reflects the average public school library? Why or why not?

13. What possibly controversial materials do you have on your shelves?

14. What specific criteria do you have for censoring books that go into your library?
   - How would you define literary censorship?
15. What books would you relocate to a different area, or a "by-request-only" reserve of the library that may be considered controversial or inappropriate for some ages?

16. Is there an example of a book that you might hold for readers of a specific age? What criteria might cause a book to be included in this category (witchcraft, violence, sexuality, drug use, homosexuality, language, racism, possibility of theft)?

17. When has censorship been necessary in your library?

18. What books have been removed from your shelves for any reason in the past few years?

19. Do you have a board that reviews controversial literature or challenges to books on your shelves; if so, did the board adapt a policy for maintaining the library collection or reconsideration of materials?

20. Do you have any materials for which you require parental permission?

21. Have there been any instances in which a parent complained or requested for a book to be removed? How do you handle such events?

22. Do you have a system for written complaints to be submitted by students, parents, etc.?

23. Is there ever a time the principal or administrator influences what sensitive material should be removed from library shelves? What about the school board?

24. How would you deal with books that are purposely defaced (i.e. words blackened out) by a student or parent as a means of censorship?

25. What kinds of complaints, concerning reading material, have you received from local groups or organizations?
26. Does literature pertaining to sensitive topics like sex education have a restricted place in your library?

27. Are there books you only make available to teachers and not students?

28. Are authors that are popular with older teenagers and college students, such as Kurt Vonnegut, Joseph Heller, and J.D. Salinger restricted from your collection?

29. Are certain young adult authors that are considered controversial, such as Judy Blume, Lois Lowry, J.K. Rowling, and Philip Pullman, ever purposely left off of your shelves? If so, why?

30. With books like the *Golden Compass* series getting a lot of attention and positive reviews, especially in Britain, do nationwide complaints of anti-Christian themes affect your choice in purchasing?

31. What are your personal beliefs on selection and/or censorship of literature in schools, public libraries, and to the general public?
Appendix D: Transcribed from PDF

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

DATE: January 28, 2008
TO: Josef Hannah
FROM: Institutional Review Board Leonard Kaminsky, Chair Melanie L. Morris, Coordinator of Research Compliance

RE: IRB protocol # 79863-1
TITLE: Library Censorship in Delaware County High Schools
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Study
ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE: January 23, 2008

The Institutional Review Board reviewed your protocol on January 23, 2008 and has determined the procedures you have proposed are appropriate for exemption under the federal regulations. As such, there will be no further review of your protocol, and you are cleared to proceed with the procedures outlined in your protocol. As an exempt study, there is no requirement for continuing review. Your protocol will remain on file with the IRB as a matter of record.

Editorial notes:

1. Your study was determined to be exempt under the second exemption category, as you propose to conduct surveys/interviews/observations with adults either in an anonymous fashion or on a topic that will not reveal sensitive information about the participants that could place the participants at risk.
2. You state in the narrative that you want to compare these data from Delaware County to state and national information. Please communicate this information to potential subjects in the introductory letter as a purpose of this study.
3. Please clarify in Section 4 of the narrative how subjects may comment "off the record" if their responses are being recorded. You also indicate that subjects will have the option of their identity being kept private. How will subjects communicate this to you? In your introduction letter to informants, please disclose that the interview will be recorded.
4.
In Question #6 of the interview protocol, please clarify if you will ask the informant to provide the written criteria or guidelines they may reference.

5.
We offer the suggestion that you may wish to review your questions for word omissions.

While your project does not require continuing review, it is the responsibility of the P.I. (and, if applicable, faculty supervisor) to inform the IRB if the procedures presented in this protocol are to be modified or if problems related to human research participants arise in connection with this project. **Any procedural modifications must be evaluated by the IRB before being implemented, as some modifications may change the review status of this project.** Please contact Melanie Morris at (765) 285-5070 or mlmorris@bsu.edu if you are unsure whether your proposed modification requires review or have any questions. Proposed modifications should be addressed in writing and submitted electronically to the IRB (http://www.bsu.edu/irb) for review. Please reference the above IRB protocol number in any communication to the IRB regarding this project.

**Reminder:** Even though your study is exempt from the relevant federal regulations of the Common Rule (45 CFR 46, subpart A), you and your research team are not exempt from ethical research practices and should therefore employ all protections for your participants and their data which are appropriate to your project.

cc: Seth Dalton
Appendix E: Letter to Administrators/ Principals

[Insert Date]

Dear [insert name],

I would like to ask your permission to conduct a study within your high school facility. I am a student at Ball State University and am working on an Honors College thesis project about library book selection/censorship in Delaware County high schools. The goal of the project is to further my education and understanding of the protocols of public school libraries. In addition, those who read my published thesis will be enlightened to this area of education in Delaware County. A secondary goal is to compare the findings of this research to state and national data. I would like to conduct a short interview with your school librarian(s) sometime in the near future.

I feel that talking with your library staff will give personal insight into the book selection process in local schools. I will be contacting you via phone in the next few days to finalize permission and ask for contact information of your library staff. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Josef Hannah
jmhannah@bsu.edu

Thesis advisor:
Ms. Beth Dalton
edalton@bsu.edu
Appendix F: Letter to Informants

[Date inserted here]

Dear [insert name],

I am a student at Ball State University and am working on an Honors College thesis project about library book selection/censorship in Delaware County high schools. I would like to conduct thirty minute interview with you in the near future. Your participation in this study can benefit the public by providing understanding of their children’s school library, a significant part of their education. I would like to compare collected data from Delaware County schools to state and national information in my thesis report.

I feel that talking with you about the process of maintaining and adding books to your library will give personal insight into the book selection process in local high schools. I would like to record our meeting with a tape recorder to ensure accurate review of our talk for my thesis report. I will be contacting you via phone in the next few days to set up an interview date at your facility if you are willing. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Josef Hannah

jmhannah@bsu.edu

Thesis advisor:

Ms. Beth Dalton

edalton@bsu.edu