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Censorship of media center materials by principals of Iowa secondary schools

Helen C. Bush

University of Northern Iowa

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Censorship of media center materials by principals of Iowa secondary schools

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Abstract
The purpose of this study was to determine the extent of censorship of school library media center materials by principals in Iowa secondary schools. A proportional stratified sample of 200 principals was chosen to receive the survey instrument from a computerized list of all the school districts in Iowa arranged according to size.
CENSORSHIP OF MEDIA CENTER MATERIALS
BY PRINCIPALS OF IOWA SECONDARY SCHOOLS

A Research Paper
Presented to the
Faculty of the Library Science Department

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Helen C. Bush
July 10, 1979

Read and approved by
Leah Hiland
Mary Lou McGrew

Accepted by Department
Elizabeth Martin
Date July 18, 1979
When I died, the circulating library
Which I built up for Spoon River,
And managed for the good of inquiring minds,
Was sold at auction on the public square,
As if to destroy the last vestige
Of my memory and influence.
For those of you who could not see the virtue
Of knowing Volney's "Ruins" as well as Butler's
"Analogy"
And "Faust" as well as "Evangeline,"
Were really the power in the village,
And often you asked me,
"What is the use of knowing the evil in the world?"
I am out of your way now, Spoon River,
Choose your own way and call it good.
For I could never make you see
That no one knows what is good
Who knows not what is evil;
And no one knows what is true
Who knows not what is false.

--Edgar Lee Masters
The Spoon River Anthology
1914
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Chapter 1
THE PROBLEM

Censorship has been practiced for many centuries, in every nation, under every form of government. People in positions of authority have long recognized the power of the printed word to influence behavior, and have consequently attempted to manipulate written communication in a way that would bring about the behavior desired by those in power. Frequently censorship has been directed toward the stifling of independent thinking in an attempt to make people obedient, unquestioning servants of the state. From the Chinese emperor Tsin Chi Hwanti's book burnings and executions of authors in 213 B.C. \(^1\) to Richard Nixon's "enemies list" of journalists in the late 1960's and early 1970's, one purpose of the censors has been the same: to silence dissent and produce unthinking acquiescence to the government's decrees.

Censorship, of course, has not been limited to unorthodox political ideas. Common targets of censors today include books which are alleged to contain profanity and obscenity, descriptions of anything related to sexual behavior, portrayal of parents in an unfavorable light, racism, sexism,

anti-war sentiments, drinking, drug-taking, and many other realities of life which some people consider objectionable.\(^2\)

Alarm over such books, according to Eli M. Oboler, stems from the conviction that the word is the thing:

The idea that the name of a thing and its essence have a necessary and invariable relation to each other is one of the most basic considerations behind the whole idea of censorship. . . . If it were recognized that the words themselves are no more than verbal symbols and cannot work magic by forcing people to commit presumably socially awkward or dangerous sexual or other acts, this would go a long way toward solving the problem of censorship.\(^3\)

Librarians and teachers, as members of the professions most involved with bringing together books and readers, often find themselves in the front lines of the battle against free dissemination of ideas. The official position of the professional organizations to which people in these occupations belong is that censorship must always be resisted, and that the individual's right to read materials of his own choosing is to be constantly reaffirmed.\(^4\) But in the real world of school libraries and classrooms, librarians and teachers may find that, although their lives are not at stake as they might have been in Tsin Chi Hwanti's

\(^2\)Lecture by Dr. Gerald Hodges at the University of Northern Iowa, September 22, 1978.


time, their livelihoods may very well be jeopardized if they refuse to comply with demands for removal of certain materials. According to L. B. Woods, "the librarian is caught in a 'no-win' situation. . . . If the librarian agrees to remove objectionable materials, he/she has admitted an inability to carry on the selection process. If the librarian refuses, insubordination may be charged and termination of employment recommended."  

Studies have shown that many library media specialists do engage voluntarily in censorship. Whether such practices are the result of personal convictions or of outside pressures cannot always be determined, but the evidence does point to the existence of widespread in-house censorship. An intriguing question is the extent to which principals, because of personal bias, complaints from teachers, students, or parents, demands by the superintendent or school board, or because they fear objections from the community, also practice in-house censorship by removing or directing the removal of certain controversial materials. Because this kind of censorship would have a direct influence on the censorship done by school library media specialists, it is important to know just how widespread administrative censorship is. This study was undertaken in an attempt to obtain

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the following information:

1. The percentage of the principals in Iowa's secondary schools who have censored, or caused to be censored, library media center materials within the last two school years.

2. The relationship between the size of the school district and the amount of censoring done by secondary principals.

3. The relationship between the grade levels included in the school (7-12, 9-12, or 10-12) and the amount of censoring done by secondary principals.

4. The types of materials (books, periodicals, filmstrips, films, records or tapes) that are most frequently censored.

5. The most frequently cited reasons for censorship, using Donelson's eight categories of objections (sex, politics, religion, sociological, language, drugs, war, or adolescent behavior).6

A survey instrument, directed to secondary school principals, was designed to obtain data to test the following hypotheses:

1. Over 50 percent of the principals surveyed have engaged in some censorship of school library media center materials within the last two school years.

2. School district size will make no significant difference at the .05 level in the amount of censorship done by the principal.

3. The grade levels included in the secondary school will make no significant difference at the .05 level in the amount of censorship done by the principal.

4. The age of the principal will make no significant difference at the .05 level in the amount of censorship he does.

5. The number of years of experience of the principal will make no significant difference at the .05 level in the amount of censorship he does.

6. Over 50 percent of the materials censored are books.

7. Over 50 percent of the materials censored are censored on the basis of explicit sexual descriptions or references to sexual behavior.

Definitions

For the purposes of this study, censorship refers to the following activities:

1. Physical removal of materials from the school library media center by the principal.

2. Directives from the principal to the school library media specialist to remove materials from the school library media center.
3. Directives from the principal to the school library media specialist to place materials on restricted access (e.g., under the desk or in the office).

Secondary principal refers to public school principals who are administrators of secondary schools that include grades 7-12, 9-12, or 10-12.

Materials refers to items, either print or non-print, provided by school library media centers for instructional or leisure time use by students.

The terms school library media center and school library media specialist are used to refer to either the school library or school media center, and the school librarian or school media specialist, since the use of these terms is not uniform throughout Iowa.

Population

The population that was surveyed consisted of Iowa secondary principals listed in the Iowa Educational Directory for the 1978-1979 school year, published by the Iowa Department of Public Instruction.

Limitations

This study was limited to the censorship behavior of secondary principals in Iowa schools comprising grades 7-12, 9-12, or 10-12. The censorship of school library media center materials only was studied, not the censorship of classroom or curriculum materials.
Because of the sensitive nature of the subject, great care was necessary in the wording of the questionnaire in order to elicit the desired information from principals. The use of "trigger" words, such as "censorship" and "intellectual freedom," was avoided. Both the cover letter and the questionnaire reflected neutrality toward the practices of removing or restricting access to school library media center materials.
Chapter II
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Since an enormous number of articles and books on the subject of censorship exists, it was necessary to be selective in choosing a portion of the literature for inclusion in this paper. The analysis in this review will briefly consider the case for and against censorship and proceed to research studies relevant to this study.

To assume that all would-be censors are fanatics would be wrong. Gerald Snyder, in *The Right To Be Informed*, links the apparent increase in censorship to the fears and frustrations of people caught up in the on-rushing momentum of change, in a society so complex that no one can hope to understand it, much less control it. Beset by a feeling of helplessness, people view the school as one last place where they can exert their influence, especially when it comes to school library and classroom materials. Snyder sees the attempt to ban materials which realistically portray contemporary life as an effort to hold back modernity and change.7

James Kilpatrick, in *The Smut Peddlers*, defends these attempts:

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Of course... an author has rights. But what of the community? Does the community have no rights? Does freedom of speech exist only for the writer, publisher, and peddler of salacious books? Or do those who object to filth have some freedom of expression also?8

The Supreme Court, in the Roth-Alberts decision of 1957, insisted that "obscenity is not within the area of constitutionally protected speech or press."9 Furthermore, says K. R. Fielding in an article in American Libraries, "liberals demand citizen control of the police: Can they then argue that schools and libraries do not need such discipline?"10 Leonard Revkind, special assistant state attorney of Florida, said, "We need a strong ordinance. Sex should not be a spectator sport. The law is not an infringement of First Amendment rights. The First Amendment is intended as a highway, not a sewer."11 Moreover, the 1973 Supreme Court decision in the Miller v. California case stipulated that community rather than national standards should be used to determine whether a work is prurient, thus allowing local law makers to act as censors.12

But the preponderance of written opinion is squarely on the side of the freedom of the individual to choose for

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9Ibid.


12Snyder, pp. 44-45.
himself what he will read, view, or hear. In "The Intellectual Rights of Children," Pamela Procuniar maintains that "to give democracy a chance of success, we need to develop adults who are capable of choice and decision making. . . . The more we protect and shelter our children, the less they will be able to participate meaningfully in the democratic process. . . . We must decide to risk exposing our children to knowledge of mankind's ideas and history, its mistakes and its successes." 13

Ms. Procuniar's article points out the paternalistic attitude of many censors: their censorship activities most often seem to be directed at protecting others. Oboler continues this theme:

Censors always work on the assumption that they, presumably, are safely immune to the moral perils of the materials they must examine in order to pronounce them morally dangerous for someone else. . . . They usually elect to protect someone who has no power to answer back--someone who is younger or politically impotent, for example--and who must accept the status of being unable to make his own decision. 14

In fact, he continues, their true motivation may be somewhat different: "People who feel themselves secretly attracted to different temptations are eagerly bent on removing these temptations out of other people's ways." 15 Mark Twain, many years earlier, said virtually the same thing: "To the unconsciously indelicate all things are delicate. . . . For


14Oboler, p. 239.

15Oboler, p. 95.
11

it is not the word that is the sin, it is the spirit back of the word."16

Studies carried out on the effects of pornography have never been able to link conclusively exposure to pornography with anti-social sexual conduct. The President's Commission of Obscenity and Pornography, after reviewing in detail contemporary studies related to the effects of pornography, reported in its majority findings that home environment and peer groups were more influential than pornography in affecting deviant sexual conduct and recommended that all legislation on sexual materials be repealed.17

In spite of the abundance of materials written about censorship, only a small percentage of the literature is based on empirical investigations. Charles Busha says, "Most censorship studies...entertain the reader rather than allowing a comprehensive understanding of issues...and concentrate on ridiculing censors."18

A study done by John J. Farley, entitled "Book Censorship in the Senior High School Libraries of Nassau County, New York," attempted to determine the amount and source of censorship in secondary school libraries and the librarians' attitudes toward censorship. The researcher


18Busha, p. 193.
interviewed the head librarian of each secondary school library in the county during the 1961-62 school year. He reported that the majority of the librarians had experienced censorship attempts by parents, but the librarians said the attempts were not organized or sustained, and were ineffectual. The majority said they performed censorship voluntarily, on their own initiative, because of their own convictions, but only 10 percent said they habitually censored and 30 percent said they rarely censored. The majority reported little pressure from boards of education or administrators. The candidness of the replies of the librarians to the interviewers' questions, however, was not determined. It is possible that the librarians did not wish to admit their own censorship behavior to the interviewers, and were fearful of admitting to pressures from administration and school boards, or that they did not consider administrative suggestions to be censorship.

Rozanne Knudson's study, "Censorship in English Programs of California Junior Colleges," surveyed the English departments of California's seventy-seven public junior colleges. One hundred sixty questionnaires were sent to members of the English departments and a 98.12 percent participation rate was achieved. The questionnaire included questions regarding the nature of censorship attempts, the extent to which censorship was voluntary or the result of administrative pressure, and the librarians' response to these situations. The study found that censorship was widespread in the junior college English departments, with 70 percent of the librarians reporting that they had experienced censorship attempts by parents or students. The majority of these attempts were not organized or sustained, and were ineffectual. The librarians themselves performed censorship voluntarily, on their own initiative, because of their own convictions, but only 10 percent said they habitually censored and 30 percent said they rarely censored. The majority reported little pressure from boards of education or administrators.

return was reported. Fifty-two percent of the teachers said they refrained from using works that they felt might cause trouble from supervisors or parents, and 13 percent said they had been told by administrators not to require or recommend certain works.\(^20\) With in-house censorship this prevalent even in junior colleges, it seems likely that it would be practiced much more frequently in high schools.

Charles H. Busha's study on the attitudes of midwestern public librarians toward censorship, conducted in 1970-71, revealed considerable ambivalence on the part of the librarians. Using questionnaires to survey a randomly selected population of 900 librarians in Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin, with a return rate of 76 percent, Busha reported that although almost all the librarians agreed with the concept of intellectual freedom expressed in the Library Bill of Rights, they also tended to agree with censorship. Only 22 percent of the librarians surveyed had attitudes which were classified as anti-censorship; the other 78 percent expressed some degree of pro-censorship attitudes. An even higher pro-censorship attitude was shown by their supervisors. Library directors obtained the highest mean pro-censorship score.\(^21\) This might suggest that, like

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school administrators, library officials who must be accountable to the public are fearful of public criticism.

The results of Busha's study which had implications for this research study lay in the close correspondence found between attitudes toward censorship and age of the librarian as well as size of the community in which the librarian was employed. The mean score obtained on the censorship attitude test by librarians in the smallest population size category was significantly higher than the mean score obtained by the next highest-scoring group. This indicated that librarians in very small communities tended to look more favorably upon censorship practices than other librarians did, and that there was a significant overall relationship between the size of the community and the attitudes of librarians toward censorship. In addition, Busha found that as the ages of librarians increased, there was a tendency for librarians to look more favorably on repressive censorious acts.22 The relationship between the size of the school district and the principal's censorship behavior and between the principal's age and his censorship behavior are factors considered in this research study.

All three of the foregoing studies showed a lack of firm commitment among librarians and teachers toward resistance to censorship. A fourth study, conducted by

22Busha, pp. 144-145.
L. B. Woods in 1977, compiled data from the Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom to determine the amount, kind, and source of censorship attempts in educational institutions from 1966 to 1975. Over 900 censorship cases were tabulated. The study showed an increase in censorship attempts of 322.2 percent during the period, part of which may have been accounted for by the growth in reputation and number of contributors that the Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom experienced during this time. Woods found that administrators and trustees accounted for 38 percent of the censorship attempts.  

Three recent studies were conducted by candidates for Master's degrees in Library Science at the University of Northern Iowa on different aspects of the censorship problem. Andris Kaupins' study of sponsorship biasing effects on a school library censorship survey, involving 200 randomly selected Iowa high school librarians, showed that librarians responded differently to a questionnaire with the stated sponsorship of a pro-censorship organization than to those with a stated sponsorship of the UNI Library Science Department. Librarians reported more pro-censorship attitudes on the pro-censorship sponsored questionnaire than on the UNI sponsored questionnaire. In addition, only 55

\[23\]Woods, pp. 1561-1566.
percent of the surveys having pro-censorship sponsorship were returned, but 85 percent of the UNI sponsored surveys were returned.\(^2\)\(^4\) The results of the study suggested that the librarians were likely to be more candid about their feelings toward censorship with researchers they assumed would sympathize with their views.

A study conducted by Janet Tibbets during the summer of 1976 showed an apparent increase in the number of censorship attempts between the 1974-75 and 1975-76 school years in Iowa school media centers. Using a questionnaire sent to 120 randomly selected Iowa school media specialists, Tibbets asked them to respond to the following questions: (1) Whether they had censored media center materials by removal or restriction during the 1974-75 and 1975-76 school years; (2) the reasons for censoring and the title of the item(s) censored; (3) if the censorship was initiated by someone in the school other than the media specialist, his/her position and reasons for objection; (4) if the censorship request was made by someone within the community, the person or group's description and reasons for requesting removal; and (5) how the request was handled. Thirty-eight of the questionnaires were returned in time to be included in the study. Twenty-one of the media specialists reported at least one censorship incident for the two-year period. Eight of these were initiated by people within the school

\(^2\)\(^4\)Andris E. Kaupins, "Sponsorship Biasing Effects on a School Library Censorship Survey" (University of Northern Iowa, 1976).
other than the media specialist and ten were initiated by persons or groups within the community. The majority of the objections were on the basis of sex. The number of censorship incidents increased 133 percent between the 1974-75 and 1975-76 school years; however, the low response rate made the results inconclusive.25

Mary Jane Martin's study of Iowa school librarians' perceptions of the support they had received in the past or might receive in the future when faced with censorship attempts showed 74 percent of the librarians indicating support from principals during past incidents, and 83 percent expressing confidence that they would receive support from the principals in the event of future incidents. The questionnaire was sent to 210 randomly selected school media personnel, with a return rate of 62 percent. Interestingly, the expressed confidence in administrative support from principals during censorship incidents was paralleled by prompt removal of challenged materials by the librarians in 59 percent of the censorship incidents.26 Whether the apparent discrepancy was the result of the librarians' lack of commitment to resistance to censorship, or lack of faith in the success of resistance, even with principals' support, was not clear.

Ken Donelson, who conducted a survey of censorship involving public high school English programs in Arizona,

25Janet Tibbets, "Censorship in Iowa Schools" (University of Northern Iowa, 1976).

26Mary Jane Martin, "Protection against the Threat of Censorship" (University of Northern Iowa, 1976).
concluded that English teachers and librarians could safely make some assumptions about censors and censorship. The first assumption is that no material is immune from the threat of censorship; someone, someplace, sometime will find reasons why it should be censored. Second, the newer the material, the more likely it is to be censored. Third, censorship almost always comes without warning and often catches the school unprepared. Fourth, censorship almost always produces a rippling effect. The publicity produced by a censorship battle leads to a climate of fear in nearby schools; then that climate spreads to schools farther away. Fifth, censorship is capricious and arbitrary; a book which comes under attack in one school may be used without incident in another. Sixth, teachers and librarians too often have the attitude, "It can't happen to me," and then are unprepared and defenseless when censorship strikes. Seventh, a significant number of censorship attacks come from administrators, librarians, teachers, and students, and policies developed for handling challenges may be powerless to deal with these situations.27

The school board has the final word on the development of policies for handling challenges as well as for materials selection. In The Discretionary Powers of School Boards, a report of the results of a study regarding the

powers of boards of school control as revealed in cases tried or reviewed by the courts, the control of school boards over the contents of the school library is plainly stated:

Libraries are held to be a part of public education and are controlled in accordance with the policies of education. There is probably a wider discretion allowed school board members in the selection of books for library use...than in any other integral part of the educational program.28

Clearly, the need is indicated for more research on this vital subject. Information about censorship in all its forms is essential if it is to be resisted successfully. The school library media specialist who is uninformed is unprepared to deal with the very real threat of censorship.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

A mailed questionnaire (Appendix B) with accompanying cover letter (Appendix A) was used to obtain data for this study.

The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section asked the principal to indicate school district size category as of January, 1979 (0-499, 500-999, 1000-2999, 3000 or over); grade levels included in the secondary school (7-12, 9-12, 10-12); principal's age at most recent birthday (under 30, 30-39, 40-49, 50 or over); and years of experience as a principal in any school, including the current year (1-4, 5-9, 10-19, 20 or over). The information requested regarding the principal's experience concerned only his years of experience as a principal, not his total years of experience as an educator, since this study was concerned with the censorship behavior of principals only.

The second part of the questionnaire dealt with the censorship of library media center materials. The principal was asked to indicate how many items he had removed or asked the school library media specialist to remove or to place on restricted access during the 1977-1978 and 1978-1979 school years in each of the following categories: books, periodicals, records or tapes, filmstrips,
films, kits, or other. He was asked to include the title if possible.

The last part of the questionnaire asked the principal to categorize the number of items removed or placed on restricted access according to the reason for their removal or restriction: sex, politics, war, religion, sociological or racial, language, drugs, inappropriate adolescent behavior, or other.

The questionnaire and accompanying cover letters were sent to a randomly selected, proportional stratified sample of 200 secondary principals in Iowa public schools. A computer printout of all the school districts in Iowa in order of size had been prepared by UNI Library Science Professor Mary Lou McGrew for her study of selection policies in Iowa secondary schools from information obtained from the Iowa Educational Directory for 1978-1979 published by the Department of Public Instruction. This computerized list was divided into the four school district size categories previously stated, the school districts were numbered, and the percentage of schools which fell into each size category was selected from a table of random numbers. The percentages were distributed as follows: 66 schools, or 33 percent, from the 0-499 category; 72 schools, or 36 percent, from the 500-999 category; 40 schools, or 20 percent, from the 1000-2999 category; and 22 schools, or 11 percent, from the 3000 or over category. The name of
the principal for each school selected to receive the survey instrument was taken from the *Iowa Educational Directory for 1978-1979*.

Two hundred questionnaires with accompanying cover letters and return envelopes were mailed on March 30, 1979. Of these, 142 were returned, for a response rate of 71 percent. Because the anonymity and confidentiality of the questionnaires were stressed in order to elicit the highest possible rate of response, and no coding device was used to identify the responses, no follow-up was done.

The responses were tabulated, and the number of respondent schools in each size category is listed below. Three questionnaires were not included in this tabulation because the size categories of the school districts were not specified.

**TABLE 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School District Enrollment Size</th>
<th>No. of Schools in Population</th>
<th>Questionnaires Sent No.</th>
<th>% of Schools in Category</th>
<th>Questionnaires Received* No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-499</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500-999</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000-2999</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3000+</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>463</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*% does not equal 100 due to rounding error.*
The highest rate of response came from the smallest school district size category, with 86 percent of the principals contacted responding. The lowest response rate came from the second smallest size category, with 58 percent of the schools contacted responding. The percentage of responses received in each size category, however, was close enough to the percentage of schools in that category for the sample to be considered representative.
Chapter IV
ANALYSIS OF DATA

Because of the caution required in the wording of the questionnaire and cover letter, one principal included in the 26 books placed on restricted access in his school's library media center some highly popular items, such as car repair manuals and books about motorcycles, which were frequently stolen. Since he did not specify how many of the books were restricted for this reason—which cannot be considered censorship—and the number restricted for other reasons, all 26 books had to be subtracted from the total number of censored materials to avoid contaminating the data. Two other respondents also included materials restricted for reasons unrelated to censorship, but did include the number restricted in each category of objections. For these two questionnaires, only those items restricted for reasons unrelated to censorship were subtracted from the data on censored materials.

Five categories for the number of items censored had been set up: 0, 1-5, 6-10, 11-20, and 21-30. Because only three respondents reported more than five items censored, however, and the majority of respondents reported only one item censored, the categories were collapsed into two: 0 and 1 or more.
Hypothesis 1 stated that over 50 percent of the principals surveyed had engaged in some censorship of school library media center materials over the last two school years. Table 2 shows 67 percent of the respondent principals reporting no censorship and 33 percent reporting some censorship. Hypothesis 1 is therefore rejected.

**TABLE 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Items Censored</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One or more</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The remarkably low percentage of principals who reported doing any censorship may be accounted for in part by a reluctance on the part of principals to report censorship behavior to members of a profession known to oppose censorship. In addition, those principals who do actively censor school library media center materials may be less likely to respond to a questionnaire of this nature than principals who do not censor. Comments written on the questionnaires, however, seem to indicate that censorship is in large part practiced indirectly--through the selection process. Some comments by principals who professed to do no censorship included the following:
We have not removed anything. Reason: More select in our purchases.

All materials are thoroughly screened before purchase.

Do not purchase questionable materials.

We do not purchase materials with explicit sex descriptions.

If you keep a moderate theme in your library you do not have to worry about book censorship.

My librarian does active censorship through our purchasing policy.

Still undetermined is whether this pre-purchase censorship is done by the school library media specialist or by the principal, or whether, if it is done by the school library media specialist, the censorship is really her own idea or the result of pressure from or fear of the administrators.

Hypothesis 2 predicted no significant difference between the size of the school district and the amount of censorship done by the principal. An equal distribution in the number of responses indicating no items censored and 1 or more items censored was expected. The Chi Square statistical measure was used to test for significant difference at the .05 level. Table 3 shows the number of censored items reported by the principals of schools in the different size categories. Three respondents failed to indicate the size of their school districts; these responses are not included in Table 3. The Chi Square value was 8.60, which was higher than the table value of 7.815. Null hypothesis 2 is rejected.

Confirming earlier findings on size difference, principals in the largest size category reported the least censorship. Contrary to previous findings, however, principals in the smallest school districts, who might be supposed to be the most vulnerable to public pressure, reported slightly less censorship than principals in the third school district size category. Respondents in the two smallest school district size categories accounted for most of the difference found by using Chi Square.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that the grade levels included in the secondary school would make no significant difference in the amount of censorship done by the principal. An equal distribution in the number of responses indicating no items censored and 1 or more items censored was expected. The Chi Square statistical measure was used to test for significant difference at the .05 level. Table 4 shows the number of censored items reported by principals of schools comprising the different grade levels. On five of the questionnaires the grade levels included in the secondary school were not specified, so these five
responses were not included in Table 4. The Chi Square value was 7.41, which was higher than the table value of 5.991. Null hypothesis 3 is rejected.

**TABLE 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. Items Censored</th>
<th>Grade Levels Included</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7-12</td>
<td>9-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1+</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi Square = 7.41  df = 2

Principals in secondary schools which included grade levels 7-12 might have been assumed to practice the most censorship because of the presence of younger students. Table 4 shows, however, that principals in secondary schools comprising grades 10-12 practiced the most censorship. The rather surprising distributions might be accounted for by the way the selection process is carried out at secondary schools of different grade levels. School library media specialists in secondary schools in which there are junior high age students may be more cautious about ordering materials which may be found objectionable for the younger students. In the 10-12 grade level schools the school library media specialist may feel freer to order materials for a more mature level of students, only to be overruled by the principal after the materials have been purchased.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that the age of the principal would make no significant difference in the amount
of censorship he does. An equal distribution in the number of responses indicating no items censored and 1 or more items censored was expected. The Chi Square statistical measure was used to test for significant difference at the .05 level. Table 5 shows the number of items censored by the age of the principal divided into three categories. The two lowest age categories, under 30 and 30-39, were collapsed into one category, under 39, because of the small number of respondents under age 30. Six of the respondents did not indicate their age, and these six responses were not included in Table 5. The Chi Square value was 9.31, which was higher than the table value of 5.991. Null hypothesis 4 is rejected.

TABLE 5
Number of Items Censored by Age of Principal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. Items Censored</th>
<th>Age of Principals</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Under 39</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>50 or over</td>
<td>Totals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1+</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi Square=9.31  df=2

Earlier studies on age difference seemed to indicate that the oldest principals would be the most conservative and do the most censoring, while the youngest principals, with more liberal philosophies, would do the least. The opposite proved to be the case, with a higher number of respondents under age 39 reporting censorship than was true of the other two age categories. A possible explanation for principals in the youngest age category reporting
the most censorship might be a greater feeling of insecurity on the part of the younger principals. Often newcomers to the community, and without the benefit of many years of experience, they may be overly cautious in assessing the mores of the community or more susceptible to pressure from the community than the older principals.

Hypothesis 5 predicted that the number of years of experience of the principal would make no significant difference in the amount of censorship he does. An equal distribution in the number of responses indicating no items censored and 1 or more items censored was expected. The Chi Square statistical measure was used to test for significant difference at the .05 level. Table 6 shows the number of items censored by the principal's years of experience. Six of the respondents failed to indicate their number of years of experience, and these six responses were not included in Table 6. The Chi Square value was 10.79, which was higher than the table value of 7.815. Null hypothesis 5 is rejected.

**TABLE 6**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. Items Censored</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1+</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi Square = 10.79  df = 3
Table 6 shows results similar to those in Table 5. The amount of censorship a principal does shows an inverse relationship to his years of experience, with the less experienced principals doing much more censorship than the more experienced principals. Again, the less experienced principals may feel less secure and be more vulnerable to community pressures than principals with the advantage of established reputations and years of experience. Inexperienced principals may prefer to err on the side of caution.

Hypothesis 6, which predicted that over 50 percent of the materials censored would be books, is accepted. Table 7 shows the number of materials censored by format.

**TABLE 7**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formats</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>66.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Periodicals</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamphlets</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Records</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Films</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the reasons for the large percentage of books censored might be that many school library media centers are still largely book oriented and have a much larger number of books than any other kinds of materials. Also, books go home with the students, where parents may
look through them and find words or passages to which they object, whereas other kinds of materials are not as often checked out from the media center. Another reason may be the reputations certain books acquire because of publicized censorship incidents; censorship controversy usually centers on books rather than other kinds of materials. Furthermore, audiovisual materials are used differently in classrooms, most often to introduce or conclude a unit rather than to teach content.

Respondents were asked to give the titles of items censored when possible, and a number of them did so. Thirty-six different book titles were given, many of them in the young adult category. Some titles mentioned were *Forever*, *I Never Loved Your Mind*, *Magic*, *For All the Wrong Reasons*, and *He's My Baby Now*. Four titles were listed by more than one respondent: *Go Ask Alice*, *Jack the Bear*, *Dictionary of Slang*, and *Male and Female under Eighteen*. A number of non-fiction books concerning human sexuality were listed, including *Understanding Sex*, *The Young Person's Guide to Love*, and *Female and Male*. No titles were listed more than twice. A complete list of titles is included in Appendix C.

One periodical was singled out as the favorite target for censorship: the "swim suit" edition of *Sports Illustrated*, which was listen ten times. The other periodicals censored were *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Mademoiselle*, *Glamour*, *Rolling Stones*, *Apartment*, *Ms.*, and *Health*. 
Two respondents said they cut out lewd, obscene, or nude pictures or covered them with a black magic marker.

The censored pamphlet, whose title was not given, concerned homosexuality. George Carlin's *Class Clown* was identified as the record that was censored. Films on biology and family living, whose titles were not given, were restricted by one school to use with parental permission.

Hypothesis 7, which predicted that at least 50 percent of the materials would be censored on the basis of explicit sexual descriptions or references to sexual behavior, is accepted. Table 8 shows how many times each category of reasons for censorship was checked by respondents. Although the directions on the questionnaire requested respondents to indicate the number of items censored in each category, the majority of respondents only checked the reason without indicating numbers. For this reason Table 8 shows only the number of times each of the reasons was checked rather than the number of items censored in each category. As expected, sex was indicated most often as the reason for censorship, with language and inappropriate adolescent behavior trailing far behind in second and third place. It appears that politics and war are not presently considered highly controversial subjects as far as reasons for censorship are concerned. The ending of the Vietnam War may have defused these issues. Only one
anti-war book, *Slaughterhouse Five*, was censored, and the reasons given were sex and religion, not war.

**TABLE 8**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>52.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>War</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociological/Racial</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate Adolescent Behavior</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many of the principals appeared to be aware that the study was concerned with censorship, and one wrote across the questionnaire in a large hand, "We do not censor anything!" Another principal stated flatly, "I would not hesitate to remove anything for the reasons you have listed below." The tone of most of the written comments, however, was courteous and friendly. A complete list of comments written by principals is found in Appendix D.
Chapter V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was undertaken in an attempt to gather data regarding in-house censorship of school library media center materials in Iowa secondary schools. Earlier studies have yielded conflicting information about administrative censorship practices. Farley's study (1971) reported that most librarians felt little pressure to censor from administrators. Knudson's survey of California junior college English teachers (1968), on the other hand, revealed that the teachers felt considerable pressure from administrators not to use certain works. In addition, Woods' study of censorship attempts in educational institutions (1977) showed administrators and trustees accounting for over one-third of the censorship attempts.

Most of the research done by Master's degree candidates in Library Science at the University of Northern Iowa concerning censorship of school library media center materials has utilized survey instruments sent to school library media specialists. None of the studies has directly surveyed administrators or singled out administrative censorship as the subject under study.

It was hoped that finding out the extent to which secondary principals censor school library media center
materials would contribute to the fund of information which school library media specialists must have to deal with censorship. The first hurdle in obtaining this information was thought to be the difficulty of getting principals to respond to this kind of survey. The questionnaire was for this reason kept as short and simple as possible, requiring a minimum of writing on the part of the principal, and the cover letter was phrased in a tactful way. Any "trigger" words which might have aroused the principal's resistance to questions pertaining to censorship were carefully avoided. The questionnaires contained no identifying markings of any kind, and respondents were assured that replies would be confidential. Even with all these precautions a low response rate was expected, both because of the nature of the subject and because a population consisting of secondary principals might be considered less likely to respond than a survey population of school library media specialists.

Several unexpected outcomes resulted. The response rate was much higher than expected, well over 50 percent in every school district size category, and a remarkable 86 percent in the smallest size category. Another unexpected outcome was the large number of principals--67 percent--who reported doing no censorship of any kind. Although considerable censorship can be accomplished through the selection process, it seems extraordinary that selection
could be carried out so meticulously that only 33 percent of the principals ever felt called upon to censor anything in the school library media center. Furthermore, the assumption that schools can avoid censorship problems by an edict from administrators that no questionable materials are to be purchased would contradict Donelson's conclusions that nothing is immune from censorship. Although a cautious selection policy may prevent controversy over certain books which have acquired reputations as being likely to arouse objections, no one can predict what the next target of censors will be. The results of this survey, if taken at face value, might suggest a much lesser cause for concern about censorship than the results of other studies would indicate.

The results of Busha's study of the censorship attitudes of public librarians, which showed librarians in the smallest communities and in the oldest age categories most favorable to censorship, were not paralleled in this study. The oldest principals and those with the most experience reported far less censorship than the youngest and least experienced. Principals in the smallest school district size category reported less censorship than principals in the third school district size category.

Based on the results of this study, more research seems to be indicated concerning the way that censorship is accomplished through the selection process. Such a study might require a questionnaire which tests attitudes toward selection and censorship rather than actual censorship.
behavior. More research also needs to be done concerning the relationship between what school library media specialists say about administrative censorship and what the administrators themselves say.

Researchers who use questionnaires in future studies that ask respondents to categorize reasons for censorship might consider omitting the "other" category, since this can result in respondents including reasons unrelated to censorship which contaminate the data.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Hodges, Gerald. Lecture at the University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, September 22, 1978.


Dear Mr.

As part of the requirements for a Master's degree in Library Science at the University of Northern Iowa, I am conducting a research study regarding the materials being used in Iowa school library media centers. My study will attempt to determine what kinds of materials are most often considered unsuitable for use in the school library media center, and for what reasons. Recognizing that a conflict sometimes exists between a principal's commitment to an educational philosophy which exposes students to a wide divergence of ideas and the principal's responsibilities to the community, I am asking you and other Iowa principals to indicate the following: Which materials, if any, have you deemed it in the best interests of the students, the school, and the community to remove from the school library media center or to place on restricted access during the past two school years?

Since principals are extremely busy people, and since spring is an especially hectic time of year, the enclosed questionnaire has been designed to require as little of your time and effort as possible. Replies will be held in complete confidentiality, and no names of school districts or school district personnel will appear in the study. If you will take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire and return it in the addressed, stamped envelope, it will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Helen Bush
Graduate Student

Enclosures (2)
APPENDIX B

Questionnaire

PRINCIPAL'S EVALUATION OF SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA CENTER MATERIALS

A. Please write the correct letter in the blank at the left of each number.

1. Size of district by number of students enrolled as of January, 1979:
   (a) 0-499  (b) 500-999  (c) 1000-2999  (d) 3000 or more

2. Grade levels included in the school of which you are the administrator:
   (a) 7-12  (b) 9-12  (c) 10-12

3. Years of experience as a principal (in any school), including the current year:
   (a) 1-4  (b) 5-9  (c) 10-19  (d) 20 or more

4. Your age at most recent birthday:
   (a) under 30  (b) 30-39  (c) 40-49  (d) 50 or over

B. Materials. This questionnaire refers to school library media center materials only, not to classroom materials. Please indicate below the number of items in each materials category that you have removed or requested the library media specialist to remove or to place on restricted access during the last two school years (1977-78 or 1978-79). Include title if possible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Item</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Periodicals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Records or Tapes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filmstrips</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Films</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Please specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C. Below are eight reasons most often given for removing or restricting access to materials. Please indicate how many of the items from Part B fall into each category. Some items may fall into two or more categories.

1. Sex (suggestive or immoral situations, homosexuality, explicit sexual descriptions, anything related to sexual behavior)
2. Politics (extreme left or right ideas, un-American attitudes)
3. War (anti-war attitudes or activities)
4. Religion (anti-Christian or sacrilegious attitudes)
5. Sociological or Racial (stereotyping of minorities or social groups, portrayal of unusual life styles, such as communes)
6. Language (profane or vulgar language)
7. Drugs (drug-taking or addiction and its effects)
8. Inappropriate adolescent behavior (disrespect for parents or other authority figures, drinking, misbehavior in school, premarital pregnancy, juvenile crime)
9. Other (please specify)
Appendix C

TITLES OR SUBJECTS OF CENSORED BOOKS

Listed once:

Animal House

A book about street gangs
(no title given)

Book by a black about blacks
(no title given)

Book on abortion
(no title given)

The Chisholms

Conception, Birth, and
Contraception

Daddy Was a Numbers Runner

Female and Male

For All the Wrong Reasons

Forever

Gay

Growing Up Straight

Hard Feelings

He's My Baby Now

I Never Loved Your Mind

If Beale Street Could Talk

Looking for Mr. Goodbar

Magic

Menstruation

Millie's Boy

Naomi in the Middle

Nigger

On Being Different

Oscar Wilde (biography)

Sex and Birth Control

Sex and Sensibility

The Sixties

Slaughterhouse Five

Something Happened

Understanding Sex

Vaginal Health

When All the Laughter
Died in Sorrow

A Woman Called Moses

You

The Young Person's
Guide to Love

Listed twice:

Dictionary of Slang

Go Ask Alice

Jack the Bear

Male and Female under Eighteen
Appendix D

COMMENTS BY RESPONDENT PRINCIPALS

We do not censor anything!

We have not removed any materials from the library. Books such as Go Ask Alice are kept in a special file. Books of this type are used by mature students for research and reports. None of our magazines have been removed. However, any lewd or obscene pictures are cut out of the periodical.

When they (Sports Illustrated) had their bikini show, we took it off the shelves because the kids were fighting over it!

Use black marker to cover nude pictures.

I'm very disappointed in the judgment used by groups who recommend books to schools.

The attitude of the school staff is open and acceptive. The parents are more conservative.

I don't remember the title of the book but it prompted the administration and librarian to draft a district policy on book selection and appropriate materials for the library.

The librarians do a thorough job of screening before books are purchased. I'm sure this is the reason we had only one book to remove.

Helen--I have only been principal here since August, 1978 and as such know of no materials that we have removed or requested be placed on restriction.

Librarian orders and selects all materials and we have a system for removal, which we have had none.

The school has procedures for challenging instructional materials so no one person can remove materials.

We have not removed any. Reason: More select in our purchases.

A good media director plus a well defined appeals procedure and selection process have kept us out of the censorship arena.

Do not purchase questionable materials.
No materials have been removed. All materials are thoroughly screened before purchase.

We have not removed any materials. However, it could be that we do not purchase materials with explicit sex descriptions. Common sense prevents buying some junk. However, we prefer not to be quoted on our programs—-the reason—we have books that other schools have been forced to remove. We are not questioned and so buy as we wish.

Note: If you keep a moderate theme in your library you do not have to worry about book censorship.

We have had two objections, in both cases a review committee made up of staff, students, and parents found in favor of the school.

I have an excellent librarian and rely heavily on her judgment.

My librarian does active censorship through our purchasing policy.

We have not removed anything because we have such an inadequate library now. I would not hesitate to remove anything for any of the reasons you have listed below.

Have not had to remove any materials. The librarian seems to handle very well.

In all honesty we can say: 0 (items censored)

My librarians are responsible to screen material—-they have done a good job.

I have not removed any of these materials, nor have I requested any to be removed.

We have had some complaints but we have not removed any titles at this time.

Books are screened by the media specialist before they are purchased. Occasionally a book is purchased for a specific class or study group—-for example Sybil—used by Psychology and Seminar classes.
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent of censorship of school library media center materials by principals in Iowa secondary schools. A proportional stratified sample of 200 principals was chosen to receive the survey instrument from a computerized list of all the school districts in Iowa arranged according to size.

A questionnaire and accompanying cover letter were sent on March 30, 1979. One hundred forty-two questionnaires were returned, for a response rate of 71 percent. The following results were obtained: (1) 67 percent of the respondents reporting doing no censorship; (2) a significant difference was found between school district size and the amount of censorship done by principals, with principals in the largest school districts reporting the least censorship; (3) the grade levels included in the secondary school made a significant difference in the censorship behavior of the principal, with principals of schools comprising grades 10-12 reporting the most censorship; (4) the age of the principal made a significant difference in his censorship behavior, with the youngest principals reporting the most censorship and the oldest principals reporting the least censorship; (5) the number of years of experience of the principal made a significant difference in his censorship behavior, with the least experienced principals reporting the most censorship and the most experienced principals reporting the least censorship; (6) 66.4 percent of the materials
censored were books; (7) 52.9 percent of the materials were censored on the basis of sex. The results of the study suggest that more research is needed on the relationship between what school library media specialists say about administrative censorship and what the administrators themselves say.