School Library Media Research
Research Journal of the American Association of School Librarians

Volume 5, 2002
ISSN: 1523-4320

Approved December 2002
www.ala.org/aasl/slr

Moving toward a Method to Test for Self-Censorship by School Library Media Specialists

Ken P. Coley, Librarian, Brewer High School, and Head Librarian for the White Settlement Independent School District, Texas

This paper is based on a graduate research project for the School of Library and Information Science, Texas Women's University, Denton.

The purpose of this study was to determine the potential of measuring the holdings of a school library young adult book collections and indications of self-censorship that might be practiced by the school library media specialist. The method employed, analysis of title ownership through examination of the school's OPAC, was an attempt to move away from questionnaires and interviews which might not allow for an objective description of selection decisions and acquisition practices.

A pool of recent, potentially controversial young adult books that had also received supporting reviews, awards, or recommendations for inclusion on reading lists was established. A small, random sample of high schools in Texas that are part of the state's online union catalog system was determined. Specific titles were searched in each school's OPAC to determine ownership. Based on one factor, not owning at least 50 percent of the controversial titles in the pool tested, the researcher concludes that over 80 percent of the schools in the study show signs that self-censorship has occurred during the collection development process.

The researcher acknowledges the limitations of the study and suggests other factors that should be taken into account before conclusive judgment can be made that deliberate self-censorship is widely practiced. An agenda for further research and study on censorship issues is outlined.

In the past few decades the content, character, and language of young adult (YA) literature, both fiction and nonfiction, has moved in the direction of greater realism and toward a more frank treatment of issues of interest to teenagers. Due to this shift it has become increasingly common for YA books to be challenged and often banned from public high school libraries. Whenever a work is challenged, a great deal of emotional, psychological, social, and professional pressure can be placed on the school library media specialist (SLMS) who selected, and now must defend, the material. Because of the degree of pressure inherent in these situations, many SLMSs may choose not to add controversial items to their library's collection. This decision constitutes self-censorship in the collection development process. It is therefore the objective of this study to determine if SLMSs in Texas public high schools are in fact engaging in this form of censorship.

A librarian normally begins the collection development process by determining the "subjects and specific types of material" needed for the collection (Evans 1995), then ascertains the amount of money at hand for purchases. The librarian next divides the available funds among the existing prioritized needs. A plan is formed for identifying appropriate items, followed by the actual selection process. SLMSs typically devote the greatest portion of their monies to the acquisition of materials that will directly support the curriculum. Time permitting, the actual selection process will be advised by faculty members, with input at times from parents and students. However, regardless of the degree to which advisors are included in the collection development process, the SLMS is the most responsible and influential individual in final selection decisions (Vandergrift 1978). SLMSs rely on a number of common selection aides, such as current reviews, lists of recommended books, and both print and online catalogs. In most cases, the only supervision of the SLMS's choices comes in the form of approval or rejection of the purchase order submitted for the procurement of the books.

The collection development process demands knowledge, insight, judgement, courage, imagination, and style (Vandergrift 1978). YA author Cynthia Grant suggests that, "'the best collection is one that always makes you feel slightly uneasy.' In other words, if you're doing your job, somebody won't be happy" (1995, 50). For these reasons, selectors and censors approach collection development quite differently. The selector seeks balance, while the censor does not (Asheim 1983). Selectors are inclusive, not exclusive; selectors are affirmative where censors are negative; selectors offer advice in situations where censors seek control; and selectors promote access in an effort to educate when censors will limit access while indoctrinating (McClure 1995). "The aim of the selector is to promote reading, not to inhibit it; to multiply the points of view which will find expression, not limit them; to be a channel for communication, not a bar against it" (Asheim 1953, 67). Selectors can make decisions for sound reasons and defend them (Asheim 1983). According to Vrabel, the proper basis for collection development in a school library should be "curriculum and instructional needs," . . . "quality of the literature," . . . "age-appropriateness," . . . [and the desire for] "representation of all points of view" (1997, 134). Their training, experience, and professional skills uniquely qualify SLMSs for such a task (Asheim 1983).

The current form of YA literature commonly found in school and public libraries first emerged in the 1960s (Rochelle 1991). Authors began to relate tales from the perspective of the young adult rather than that of an adult, and dealt with issues of interest and significance to teenagers (Jenkins 1996). The authors also chose to be "more explicit in terms of situations, language, and depictions of sex" (Williams 1990, 281). In essence, this shift in writing style gave birth to a new genre of YA literature now referred to as realistic or bleak fiction (MacRae 1998). Realistic fiction assumes the vantage point of the adolescent in its "portrayal of the real world, with all its troubles . . . [without] taking into account their lack of the adult's range of perspective and experience" (Rochelle 1991, 10). "Characterized by candor, unidealized characters and settings, colloquial language, and plots that portrayed realistic problems that did not necessarily find resolution in a happy ending" (Jenkins 1996, 299), these novels proved to "be literature, not propagandistic didactic tracts" (Rochelle 1991, 10). Perhaps the late Robert Cormier, distinguished as not only a founder of this genre but also one of its most successful and most often banned writers, best described this form of literature as "realistic stories about believable people, reflecting the world as it is, not as we wish it to be" (Foerstel 1994, 123).

Young adults are attracted to realistic fiction for a number of reasons. These stories are seen as truthful, inspiring, and true to life (MacRae 1998), and often enable teenagers to "see themselves or people like themselves" (Rochelle 1991, 9). Works of realistic fiction commonly address problems that teens do not feel they can talk over with their parents (Fuchs 1984). Horton (1986), in a study that analyzed the content of seventy-eight YA books, found that these books expanded learning. Such literature can demonstrate to young people that they are not the only ones facing the problems in their lives, that there are effective strategies for problem-solving, and that it is possible to rehearse certain aspects of life through vicarious experiences (Baggett 1985). Richard Peck, author of the Newbery award-winning YA novel *A Year Down Yonder*, defends the existence of cutting edge, realistic fiction when he states that, "It's hard to be young today. That's why we have YA novels to provide companionship and raise questions" (1999, 243).

Ironically, decades ago juvenile fiction, such as the Horatio Alger stories, was criticized not on the basis of an excessive level of realism as is true today, but rather because these books "were improbable and adventurous, creating 'false notions of life'"(Geller 1976, 1256) Realistic literature for teenagers has changed so much over time with respect to its forms, formats, boundaries, and perspectives that it is often viewed as unsafe (Simmons and Dresang 2001). Norma Klein (1985), the author of banned YA novels, believes that at least one reason these books are labeled as unsafe lies in the fact that they are typically reviewed by adults, rather than teenagers, and these adult reviewers often encounter themes and content they find disturbing. However, Hielsberg (1994) perceives such works as some of the best books because they challenge us and reveal aspects of our society that we do not enjoy confronting.

Thus, faced with a body of literature often perceived as a threat to young adults by their parents, their communities, and many of those who educate them, what would be the most appropriate response on the part of librarians? The library profession, as represented by the American Library Association (ALA), recognizes the existence of censorship, both external and internal, in libraries. In a misguided effort to protect young people from the culture in which they live (Dillon and Williams 1994), many external censors find it easy "to get a teacher fired, to demean the professionalism of a librarian, [or] to burn a book" (Peck 1997, 28). From an internal perspective, at least some librarians may choose to avoid the threat altogether by not selecting materials such as realistic fiction for their libraries, and this constitutes self-censorship as previously defined. Self-censorship has the potential for having almost as negative an effect on a library's collection as censorship from external sources (McKee 1977), and is described as "the most insidious form of censorship" (Watson and Snider 1981, 100). The ALA admonishes librarians via a number of venues to support intellectual freedom, to resist all censorship efforts from whatever source, and to make available to patrons resources that fairly represent all viewpoints. This position is espoused in Article II of the Library Bill of Rights (ALA 1980), Section II of the Code of Ethics (ALA 1995), and the Freedom to Read Statement (ALA and Association of American Publishers 2000). If all librarians agree with Swiderek (1996) that education is to be preferred over indoctrination, then both the classroom and the library must include a variety of viewpoints (Donelson 1987; Simmons and Dresang 2001). The National Council of Teachers of English (1978) recognizes both the "subtle censorship of 'selection' . . . [and the] deliberate exclusion of certain books" as forms of censorship, and warns teachers and librarians to be vigilant against them. Surely librarians do not agree with LaRue when he observes that, "If removing [or not purchasing] a book makes a library better, then logically, the best library has no books at all" (1994, 45). However, many librarians, particularly through the process of self-censorship, may verge upon embracing such a position.

Research Question

This article examines whether SLMSs engage in self-censorship as part of the collection development process with regard to YA literature having content that significantly increases the probability the materials will be challenged.

Review of the Related Literature

Self-censorship has been variously described by researchers as "a secret practice [that is] the least obvious but arguably most powerful and pervasive form of censorship which is informal, private, and originates with the decision maker" (Dillon and Williams 1994, 11), "a quiet kind of censorship that we try to justify with high-sounding phrases" (Waddle 1988, 66), "our greatest problem as librarians" (Evans 1995, 519), "a personally imposed limitation designed to avoid confrontations" (McKee 1977, 210), and "the restriction of resources by librarians *before* they become available to information users" (Harmeyer 1995, 102). A number of studies have confirmed that self-censorship exists for various types of libraries in different regions of the country (Agler 1964; Dillon and Williams 1994; Fiske 1959; Harmeyer 1995; Jenkinson 1994; Kerns and Bly 1987; McClure 1995; McMillan 1987; Vrabel 1997; Woods and Salvatore 1981). However, not all investigations detected the presence of self-censorship (White 1988).

In addition to confirming the existence of self-censorship in many libraries, the studies enumerated above revealed several interesting collateral findings. Smaller libraries tended to be more conservative and own fewer potentially controversial works (Agler 1964; Moon 1962), while all libraries were generally more restrictive of fiction than nonfiction (McMillan 1987). The typical pro-censorship librarian worked in a community of less than 35,000, managed their own library, was a female over forty-five years of age, and generally possessed less professional education (Busha 1972a, 1972b).

How then did the various practices that make up self-censorship originally enter professional librarianship? Historically, "the concept of social control, if not paramount, was a significant component of library selection and service policy" (Geller 1976, 1255). Josephus Larned, a prominent librarian in the late 1800s, advocated that his colleagues use the excuse of limited budget as a means of avoiding the appearance of self-censorship, and the 1881 selection policy for the Boston Public Library contained the statement that "no public library should furnish books to young readers, or to those of any age, which will influence their passions or pervert their moral sense" (Geller 1976, 1257). Early studies into self-censorship were not concerned with the appropriateness of this behavior, but rather wished only to ascertain what effect such a policy had on circulation statistics and the number of patron complaints (ALA 1881). This however does little to explain why present-day librarians, trained to value and defend the concept of intellectual freedom, choose to adopt self-censorship as part of their collection development strategy. Several investigators offer rationales. Some believe that books, such as realistic fiction, may come into conflict with the librarian's personal beliefs (Bump 1980; Callison 1990; Jenkins and Odean 1988; White 1988). Others attribute the problem, at least in part, to low self-esteem among librarians (Fiske 1959; Hopkins 1992), or to the librarian's perception of community standards (Callison 1990; Hopkins 1998). Most commonly, researchers hold that fear of anticipated challenges motivates the majority of self-censorship (Bump 1980; Donelson 1981, 1987; Jenkins and Odean 1988; Woods and Salvatore 1981).

Regardless of the actual motivation, self-censoring librarians use a wide range of reasons for rejecting books they believe should not become part of the collection. These reasons include limited budgets; lack of demand or interest; literary quality; limited shelf space; values of the community; the author's integrity; content; moral values; taste; theft; poor, unfavorable, or unenthusiastic reviews; and at times discrimination against fiction generally (Asheim 1953; Donelson 1981; Moon 1962). While materials may be legitimately rejected for reasons that involve legal, financial, selection standards, and library policy issues (Moon 1969), it is difficult to determine when such standards are applied appropriately and when they are simply being used as an excuse for self-censorship.

Investigators have identified the type of content that typically leads to the challenging of a work of YA literature. Curry's (2001) research has identified eleven types of content that often trigger challenges. These include profanity, sexuality (heterosexual, homosexual, and descriptions of sexual activity), religion/witchcraft, violence/horror, rebellion, racism/sexism, substance use/abuse, suicide/death, crime, crude behavior, and depressing/negative tone. Of these, profanity and sex/sexuality were found to be the most common bases for challenges (Curry 2001). Curry's findings strongly parallel those of many other researchers (Dillon and Williams 1994; Hopkins 1990, 1996; Horton 1986; International Reading Association 2001; Jenkins and Odean 1988; Jenkinson 1994; Kovarsky et al. 1997; Leffingwell 2000; Saykanic 2000; Swiderek 1996; Vrabel 1997; Woods and Salvatore 1981; Woodworth 1976).

Although the number of book challenges nationwide has fallen in recent years as censors shift their focus to Internet access and filtering, research suggests that only twenty to twenty-five percent of all challenges are actually reported (International Reading Association 2001). Regardless of the actual number of total occurrences, research has proven that even a single instance of a challenge creates substantial elevation in librarians' stress levels (Caputo 1991; Hielsberg 1994; Hopkins 1990, 1991, 1992, 1996, 1998). It follows logically then, that librarians in states where the greatest number of challenges occur run the highest risk of increased work-related stress. This would be the case in Texas, where the state holds the dubious distinction of experiencing the second highest number of book challenges in the nation for some years (People for the American Way 1995; Vrabel 1997). Overall, "seventy-one percent of all challenges in the 1990s were to materials in schools or school libraries" (International Reading Association 2001, 22), and one third of schools experienced at least one challenge (Hopkins 1991). It is also significant for SLMSs that school administrators are frequently responsible for adding censorship-related pressure to the selection process (Dillon and Williams 1994). Although this circumstance does not exist in all schools (Tyler-Porter 1997), it is a factor in Texas schools (Vrabel 1997).

Method

This investigation attempted to answer the research question by selecting a group of YA books, which contained content that made them potentially subject to challenges. These books were screened on the basis of several criteria that together would characterize the items as works that should be found in high school library collections. One hundred Texas high schools of various sizes were randomly chosen, and the OPAC of each was checked to determine if in fact the titles in this investigation were available to students and faculty.

For the purposes of this investigation, self-censorship is defined as the process by which a librarian chooses not to purchase a given book because of the item's potential for being challenged. Patterning this study's criteria after those of Harmeyer (1995), only a single copy of a book on the target list from any publisher and with any type binding had to be found in the OPAC of a library in the investigation for that library to be given credit for owning the book. Based on the standards established by Gies and Polhamus (1974) and Moon (1962), a library had to own at least 50 percent of the YA works on the list to avoid a self-censorship designation.

Selection of Books

Self-censorship investigations in the past have commonly used a list of twenty works as the basis for the YA books were selected as the sample utilized in the study on the basis of the following criteria:

1. **Content** commonly found to be a basis upon which challenges are tendered
2. Six or more **reviews** in book review resources commonly used by SLMSs for collection development
3. **Highly Recommended or Starred** reviews from professional organizations or journals noted for their expertise in the field of YA literature
4. **Awards** for which the book or its author was nominated, or which they won
5. Placement on a **list of recommended books** for SLMSs by an organization noted for its expertise in YA literature

In order for any given work to be included in the study sample, it had to meet the first criterion above and at least two additional criteria. These criteria and this process was followed in an effort to correct a flaw in studies using booklists noted by Serebnick, that there "was the lack of an objective yardstick for determining titles to be included in the checklists" (1981, 394). A list of potential books was created based on book awards lists, lists of recommended YA books, reviews, and the reading experiences of the investigator. Based on techniques used by Agler (1964), Rothbauer and McKechnie (2000), and Serebnick (1981), the number of reviews received by each book considered for the study was determined using *Book Review Digest*. After collating the data for each book under consideration, the twenty titles meeting the most criteria to the greatest extent became part of the study's sample list. Since works of fiction are typically challenged more often (Schrader 1995), only one nonfiction title was chosen for the investigation. In an effort to avoid titles that were old enough to possibly have been weeded from a collection, all books with copyrights before 1996 were eliminated from consideration. The novels in the Harry Potter series met or exceeded all of the criteria for selection; however, it was the opinion of the investigator that if they were included individually in the study their cumulative effect would skew the results. Therefore, these four works were included in the sample, but treated as a single title for the purposes of the research. To receive credit for owning a Harry Potter novel, a school only had to possess a single copy of any of the four titles in this series. (See appendix for a bibliography of the works selected for the study sample.)

The type of content required to meet the first criterion was determined from a number of investigations, including Curry (2001), Dillon and Williams (1994), Hopkins (1990, 1996), Horton (1986), International Reading Association (2001), Jenkins and Odean (1988), Jenkinson (1994), Kovarsky et al. (1997), Leffingwell (2000), Saykanic (2000), Swiderek (1996), Vrabel (1997), Woods and Salvatore (1981), and Woodworth (1976). Examples of this type of content

would include profanity, sexuality (heterosexual, homosexual, and descriptions of sexual activity), religion/witchcraft, violence/horror, rebellion, racism/sexism, substance use/abuse, suicide/death, crime, crude behavior, and depressing/negative tone. Consideration of the number of reviews in criterion two was based on research that indicated that books receiving the greatest number of reviews were more likely to be purchased (Harmeyer 1995; Serebnick 1981). Criteria three, four, and five were relied upon because of the degree of visibility and probable quality each suggested for specific books. Works receiving superior review ratings, recommended for purchase by prominent lists, and written by noted authors were both more likely to be noticed and favored by SLMSs during the collection development process.

Selection of School Libraries

The study included one hundred randomly selected Texas public high schools. Each school had to be a member in good standing of the Texas Library Connection (TLC). "The Texas Library Connection is a statewide technology initiative established . . . in 1993. Its mission is to provide current, relevant information equitably to school districts. . . . Currently, over 5,300 campus libraries have merged records for over 44 million items held in those libraries into 4 million unique, standardized electronic records" (TLC 2001). TLC provides member schools with a number of resources, including an extensive union catalog consisting of all the MARC records from the OPACs of the member schools.

The public high schools of Texas are organized under the state's University Interscholastic League (UIL) into five categories based on student population. The classifications 1A through 5A, based on the following breakdown of student enrollment, define each category:

1A: 169 students and below

2A: 170 to 344 students

3A: 345 to 844 students

4A: 845 to 1864 students

5A: 1865 students and above

Schools for the study were chosen utilizing the following process suggested by Rothbauer and McKechnie (1999). Using the latest available listing of Texas public high schools arranged by UIL category (UIL 2002), each school was assigned a sequential number. With the assistance of an online random number generator (Urbaniak and Plous 2002), twenty high schools from each of the five categories were selected from the list. The schools selected for the study were all also members of TLC.

Data Collection

The Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) union catalog was used to investigate the OPAC contents of California academic and public libraries by Harmeyer (1995). His use of a union catalog to gather data on the collections of several libraries was the first known use of such a

method. Following techniques patterned after Harmeyer's (1995) investigation, online searches via the TLC union catalog provided the data for this research. By examining the OPACs of the schools included in the study, it was possible to determine which books on the sample list each school owned.

Data Analysis

The data indicate that the book most often owned by a school was one of the titles in the Harry Potter series. Fifty-nine schools possessed at least one copy. This is not surprising considering the popularity of these novels. The next most often collected work was Walter Dean Myers' *Monster*, with forty-four copies represented among the one hundred campuses. The book least likely to be in one of the library media centers that were part of the investigation was *Love and Sex: Ten Stories of Truth*, edited by Michael Cart. The recent publication date for this short story collection (i.e., 2001) might well explain why only one school was able to include it in a collection development cycle. Adam Mastoon's *The Shared Heart: Portraits and Stories Celebrating Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Young People* was the next work least likely to be owned. The various collections contained only five copies. When one considers UIL categories, one generally finds that the larger the category, the more probable that titles from the sample list were owned. Table 1 reports these data.

Table 1. Schools Owning Each Title

Title	Author	Total Schools Owning (n=100)	UIL 1A Schools Owning (000-169) (n=20)	UIL 2A Schools Owning (170-344) (n=20)	UIL 3A Schools Owning (345-844) (n=20)	UIL 4A Schools Owning (845-1864) (n=20)	UIL 4A Schools Owning (845-1864) (n=20)
Bad	Ferris, Jean	33	3	5	7	6	12
Blood and Chocolate	Klause, Annette Curtis	38	4	6	7	9	12
Dancing on the Edge	Nolan, Han	33	4	7	2	10	10
Hard Love	Wittlinger, Ellen	20	2	3	0	5	10
Harry Potter Series	Rowling, J. K.	59	14	10	10	13	12
I was a Teenage Fairy	Block, Francesca Lia	15	2	1	1	5	6
Love and Sex: Ten Stories of Truth	Cart, Michael (ed.)	1	0	0	0	0	1
Making up Megaboy	Walter, Virginia	15	1	2	1	4	7
Monster	Myers,	44	3	11	5	11	14

	Walter Dean						
Pedro and Me: Friendship, Loss, and What I Learned	Winick, Judd	9	0	1	0	3	5
Rundown	Cadnum, Michael	27	2	7	4	5	9
Smack	Burgess, Melvin	32	3	5	8	5	11
Speak	Anderson, Laurie Halse	36	3	10	6	5	12
Stop Pretending: What Happened When My Big Sister Went Crazy	Sones, Sonya	18	2	6	3	2	5
Tenderness	Cormier, Robert	25	1	3	4	7	10
The Buffalo Tree	Rapp, Adam	12	0	1	1	3	7
The Facts Speak for Themselves	Cole, Brock	19	1	3	1	7	7
The Perks of Being a Wallflower	Chbosky, Stephen	16	2	3	1	3	7
The Shared Heart: Portraits and Stories Celebrating Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Young People	Mastoon, Adam (ed.)	5	0	0	1	1	3
When She Was Good	Mazer, Norma Fox	41	4	8	7	8	14
Total		**498**	**51**	**92**	**69**	**112**	**174**

The data also reveal that no school owned all the titles on the sample list. The largest number of titles owned by a single institution was a 5A school with seventeen, which represented 85 percent of the titles. Eighteen schools owned 50 percent or more of the titles in the study. Interestingly, eighteen schools also owned none of the books. There were five such high schools in both the 1A and 3A UIL categories (table 2). Of the schools possessing at least fifty percent of

the works, UIL categories 1A and 3A had the fewest with one each, while nine 5A high schools owned at least half of the books on the sample list. As a general trend, the larger the size of an UIL category the more likely it was to have schools owning fifty percent or more of the books, and the less likely it was to have institutions owning none of the titles. Table 3 summarizes these data.

Table 2. Titles Owned by UIL Category

UIL Category (n=20)	Total Titles Owned	Percentage Titles Owned*	Number of Schools Owning No Titles	Percentage of Schools Owning No Titles
1A	51	10	5	25
2A	92	18	3	15
3A	69	14	5	25
4A	112	22	3	15
5A	174	35	2	10
Total	**498**		**18**	

Table 3. Majority Holdings by UIL Category

UIL Category (n=20)	Largest Number of Titles Owned by a Single School	Number of Schools Owning 50% or More of Titles (n=20)	Percentage of Schools Owning 50% or More of Titles (n=20)
1A	14	1	5
2A	14	2	10
3A	13	1	5
4A	15	5	25
5A	17	9	45
Total	**74**	**18**	**90**

Limitations of the Study

Several factors limited the depth and accuracy of this research. The first limitation is the small number of schools investigated. Texas is a large state with many schools. A greater number of high schools would have made possible increased confidence in the outcomes. Second, in a similar manner, increasing the number of books in the sample would have offered each school a greater opportunity to purchase potentially controversial titles. Third, the inclusion of more

nonfiction titles might have revealed aspects of self-censorship overlooked by this study. Finally, while the TLC union catalog holds the records of the majority of Texas schools, not all campuses are members. Thus, there may be many fine school library media centers throughout the state with commendable numbers of controversial realistic fiction works in their collections that were unavailable for consideration in this research. While every effort was made to rely on objective criteria for the selection of books, no such set of criteria can be fully objective. However, following the techniques of Serebnick (1981), one might well elevate the level of objectivity in book selection by first creating a list of Library of Congress subject headings describing content that would suggest a work might be challenged, and then searching for titles to include in the study using those headings.

Results

To the best of this researcher's knowledge this is the first study to investigate self-censorship in public high schools using an actual search of each school's library media center OPAC, rather than relying upon a survey or questionnaire. This approach eliminated the difficulties of survey return rates, and reduced the problem of accuracy, thus increasing the reliability of the results. Based on the data concerning the fifty percent ownership criteria for avoiding an allegation of self-censorship, it would seem that self-censorship is in fact practiced by a large majority of Texas public high SLMSs in this study. Eighty-two percent of the high schools investigated engaged in the practice of self-censorship, based on the 50 percent ownership requirement. Eighteen percent of the schools owned none of titles on the sample list. Regardless of the specific motivation a given SLMS might have for engaging in self-censorship, it seems clear that criteria normally relied upon during the collection development process, (i.e., number and quality of reviews, reputation of the author, recommendation lists, awards won by the work itself, and so on), are ignored when a work might prove controversial enough to provoke a challenge.

The data patterns seemed to confirm earlier research that indicated smaller libraries tend to be more conservative and less likely to own books that had a high potential for being controversial (Moon 1962; Serebnick 1982). Twenty geographical areas designated as Educational Service Center Regions comprise the state of Texas. Although this study did not attempt to control for the geographical location of the one hundred schools selected, it is interesting to note that at least one campus represented each of these regions. This would suggest that the practice of self-censorship might not be limited to, or more prevalent in, particular areas of the state.

Implications for Further Research

A number of alternatives present themselves as fertile ground for additional research. The most obvious of which would be to increase both the number of schools in the study and the length of the book list. Texas is a large state with 1608 active public high schools for the 2002–2003 school term (Texas Education Agency 2002). The hundred institutions investigated in this study represent a small fraction of those available. In a similar manner, lengthening the title list would elevate the opportunities for schools to own works under consideration. Even if the results of an investigation incorporating these alterations were unchanged, the increases would improve the reliability of the outcomes.

The funds available at each school for the purchase of new books can vary greatly in Texas, and this study made no attempt to control for this variable. This investigation could be replicated by creating a second title list consisting of works that met all the criteria of this study, except that they would lack controversial content, then testing for significant differences in ownership rates between the two lists. Such an approach would do much to equalize the effects of budget variances (Serebnick 1981).

While collection development librarians in public libraries might likewise practice self-censorship in the selection of YA works containing controversial material, they also have at their disposal the option of classifying such works as adult in an attempt to hide such material from teenagers. It could be quite revealing to essentially replicate this study with a randomly selected sample of public libraries serving different size communities, and search their OPACs to determine the classification of YA realistic fiction.

McMillan (1987) found in a study of senior high school librarians in Virginia, that they "were significantly more restrictive with fictional materials than with nonfictional materials." Using two title lists based on similar criteria for the identification of potentially controversial works, one might compare the ownership rates between fiction and nonfiction books.

Data derived for this study on the lack of ownership of "controversial titles" stands alone without comparison to data on ownership of other less controversial titles. Future studies should employ such comparisons so that several pools of book titles are measured against the OPAC holdings and then tested for significant difference. If it can be shown that the controversial titles are owned in a significantly fewer number of cases compared to those lists of less controversial titles, such would serve as additional evidence that self-censorship is occurring.

Additional investigation should also be made into issues and practices related to the local school environment on general censorship concerning controversial topics in the school's curriculum, textbooks, lesson plans. Texas may or may not be a state in which exceptionally strong pressures are brought to bear on educational curriculum content and in turn results in a high degree of influence on the final selection decisions made by school librarians. Questionnaires in which school librarians may describe such pressures and other factors which they believe influence their decisions may prove useful in telling a more detailed story than analysis of collection holdings alone. The method applied in this study, however, demonstrates that data can be extracted that indicate potentially controversial titles are not present in media center collections, even when those titles have received favorable reviews.

Conclusions and Implications

The methods used for this study allowed for the gathering of data that indicate a lack of holdings in current, potentially controversial young adult book titles in the Texas school library media collections examined. Based on this data, there is need for further investigation into what seems at initial examination to be a wide practice of self-censorship across all schools regardless of size or location in the state. The methods therefore do allow for identification of preliminary signs of self-censorship and provide the basis for additional research to validate such charges.

The data gathered for this study also indicate that the controversial titles tracked show less frequently in small schools than in large schools. Further investigation would need to be

conducted to test if this is simply a result of small budgets based on lower student enrollment, and therefore less room for a wider spectrum of young adult literature. Additional possibilities to investigate include the possibility of more extensive self-censorship taking place in smaller schools where the school librarian may not have a co-librarian who might add support to controversial selections. Size of the budget, size of the collection, and support structure among local librarians, teachers, and administrators are all factors that require further measurements. The numbers gathered for this study suggest, but one cannot conclude, that small schools function in an extremely conservative environment and restrict student access to controversial titles more so than in larger schools.

Because of the attraction teenagers experience toward realistic YA literature and the opportunities such literature offers teenagers to vicariously experience many of the more negative aspects of their culture, it is important that teens have access to realistic YA works. Therefore, all SLMSs need to begin a period of close examination of both their collections and their selection patterns. They must determine, as Asheim (1953) suggests, whether they are positive selectors or negative censors. They also must ask themselves if they seek reasons to keep a book, as a selector would do, or if they look for reasons to reject it, as with censors (Asheim 1953). SLMSs must make themselves aware that "reasons [for rejecting a book] like 'lack of funds,' 'no demand,' or 'poor quality' may be true, or they may be rationalizations for not selecting an item that might make life troublesome" (Evans 1995, 523). As SLMSs, we "must recognize our biases and struggle against them to help insure we are providing a balanced program that will help our students become not only readers, but also lovers of literature" (McClure 1995, 19). If we neglect our responsibility to give more than lip service to the precepts of intellectual freedom and to provide our students with balanced exposure to the opposing ideas in our culture, we may rob them of the opportunity to achieve their full social, emotional, and intellectual potential.

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