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THE DISCOURSE OF CENSORSHIP: UNDERSTANDING THE WORLDVIEWS OF  
CHALLENGERS

By

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and approved by

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Discourse of Censorship: Understanding the Worldviews of Challengers

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The primary purpose of this study is to better understand the worldviews, defined as a roadmap for action, of people who challenge books in American public institutions. Through the analysis of common themes within the discourse of censorship, the study delineated some of the contours of challengers' worldviews. Next, the study explored challengers' construction of the role of public institutions in society as well as how they understood the policies and procedures used in challenge cases. Finally, the study explored challengers' construction of the practice of reading by identifying challengers' construction of the book as a symbolic object, their interpretive strategies and reading practices as well as how these strategies shape challengers' behavior.

The study focused on 13 challenge cases in American public libraries and schools that took place between 2007 and 2011. Three sources of discourse were used in the study. The first consisted of documents, obtained via Freedom of Information Act requests to governing bodies, produced in the course of challenge cases. Recordings of book challenge public hearings constituted the second source of data. Finally, the third source of data was interviews with challengers.

There were several shared themes in challengers' discourse regarding objectionable materials in public institutions. First, with regard to social structures, challengers were concerned with reversing what they view as the moral decline of American society, parenting as a boundary setting role, and preserving the innocence of children. Next, challengers conceptualized public institutions as safe spaces for children and, according to their worldview; this is partially accomplished through careful selection of materials that children will encounter. If objectionable material is found in the institution, it is no longer considered to be a safe space and must be ritually cleansed by the relocation or removal of the material. Finally, challengers demonstrated a reverence for the books as a material, symbolic object. Challengers' interpretive strategies with regard to the practice of reading focused on mimetic imagination, common sense interpretation of the text, and short- and long-term effects of reading.

## **Dedication**

To my parents

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

On June 2, 2009, approximately 200 people gathered in the gymnasium of McLane Elementary School to offer testimony regarding the selection policies of the West Bend (Wisconsin) Memorial Library. The meeting, which had been postponed from an earlier date in order to secure a larger venue, came at the end of a dispute that began with a single letter deposited in the library's overnight book drop. Citing the conservative leanings of the community, the letter requested that the library eliminate a link on the library website that recommended gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) books for young adults. Ten days later, the letter writers also requested that the library remove 37 LGBTQ books from the library's collections. Two months after the initial request, as a direct result of this complaint, the West Bend city alderman refused to reappoint four members of the library board. Over the course of four months, between March and June, the West Bend challenge case received a large amount of media attention. National organizations, including the American Library Association, the National Coalition Against Censorship, the Association of American Publishers and the American Civil Liberties Union, were eventually involved in the case.

Approximately 60 people spoke at the June 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting in West Bend. Some supported the library's position that parents have sole responsibility for their children's reading while others argued that the library should do more to protect children from materials that might be harmful to their growth and character development. One of the most striking testimonies at the hearing came from one of the original letter writers who,

along with her husband, sent the original letter to the West Bend library director. She stated that:

Let us remind each of these organizations that this library is locally controlled by the citizens of West Bend who are not required to bow to them or any other institution that has no personal, societal, or monetary stake in our library. This is our library, not theirs.

We do not agree with their disturbing standard of “all materials available to all ages.” With this said, let it be known that we vehemently reject their standards, we resent their presence and we are repulsed by their insistence on holding the door open to sexually explicit, profane and crude materials to the children in our community. We reject their standards and their principles.

Our library policy states that it “shall endeavor to acquire materials which are of current and permanent value; that meet the high standards of quality and represent the best available to meet the community’s needs and interests.” This is a propaganda battle to insure children retain access to inappropriate material despite the law, common sense, and community standards.

If you choose to reject your community’s request via the petition; the loss will not be to me, it will not be to my husband, or West Bend Citizens for Safe Libraries. It will be to the children you claim to serve and you will no longer be considered a safe library and we will strongly promote it as such. (*West Bend, WI Hearing Testimony, 6/2/2009*).

The speaker’s testimony is characterized by strong principles concerning local control of institutions as well as a need to protect children from materials that she considers to be inappropriate. Her argument clearly demonstrates a current of anxiety regarding political power, moral beliefs, and the status of children in her community. Although ostensibly about her views regarding the library’s selection policy, the speaker’s statements reveal a particular worldview or, following Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, her “natural way of looking at the world” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 8). This worldview is marked by concerns regarding the status of children, the library’s commitment to local values, and, although it is not stated explicitly, the power of reading.

Although many cases rarely reach its magnitude, the West Bend case described above is not an isolated incident. The American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF), which monitors and solicits information regarding complaints to school and library materials throughout the United States, logged 326 complaints in 2011 alone. Targeted books that year ran the gamut from young adult fiction (*The Hunger Games*, *ttyl*) to classic literature (*Brave New World*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*). The reasons for lodging a complaint were also wide-ranging and included criticisms regarding sexual content, religious viewpoint, and violence in the books. Books were targeted in all 50 states and involved the collections of many different types of libraries and school curricula.

The question of what people should and should not know is one with a long history and the testimony given above is part of a long tradition of discourse concerning the nature and circulation of knowledge. What are the consequences of reading a particular text? How does that text affect the reader's character? What if the text contains concepts that are directly opposed to those that a particular community accepts? The discourse of censorship, that is, discourse concerning the removal or relocation of text that is deemed inappropriate in some way for a particular population, both directly and indirectly addresses these questions.

### **Purpose**

The primary purpose of this study is to better understand the worldviews of people like the speaker in the West Bend hearing and others like her around the United States who employ the discourse of censorship in challenge cases. Termed "challengers"



because they challenge the inclusion or location of a particular book in public school or library, their arguments and justifications for these actions provide insight into their worldviews. A worldview is defined as the interpretive lens that provides individuals with both a framework for comprehending everyday life and a roadmap for action. It is one's typical approach to understanding the social world.

The study has four general goals that concern identifying and understanding the worldviews of challengers. First, through a qualitative analysis of the discourse of challenger, the researcher identifies common themes used by challengers to justify their requests to remove or relocate materials in public libraries and schools. Second, through these themes, the researcher identifies similarities among the worldviews of challengers. Third, the study demonstrates that the concepts of intellectual freedom and censorship as well as the status of public libraries and schools in communities are strongly intertwined with how people construct the practice of reading. Challengers are considered to be part of an "interpretive community" who share common strategies, practices, and discourse regarding written texts. Following from this, the fourth objective elucidates challengers' conception of the practice of reading.

This study contributes to the literature of intellectual freedom and censorship research within the field of library and information science and it is hoped that it will help librarians better understand and engage in dialogue with the people who bring challenges against materials in public schools and libraries. The study also contributes to the sociology of knowledge, a field that studies the social circulation and classification of knowledge, as well as research on the practice of reading and print culture.

### **Justification**

When book challenges become public people are often willing to take vocal stands both for and against the challenge. In such cases, community members who have never attended a school or library board meeting will go to the meeting to voice their opinions during the allotted public comment time periods on the agenda. When one looks at the number of challenges and the intensity and passion that surround them, it is clear that issues of intellectual freedom, reading, and public institutions are more salient to these communities than one might initially suspect.

This prominence becomes particularly acute when one considers that challenging books in public libraries and schools can be understood, in some respects, as an exercise in futility. Most books are available online or through interlibrary loan and their removal or relocation does not mean that the book is no longer available to those who wish to read it. Rather it seems that challenges to books in school curricula or library collections has less to do with accessibility and more to do with what they wish their children to know and how they wish their public institutions and communities to be perceived by the wider society on a symbolic level. To challengers, it is possible that the presence of a book in a library collection or school curriculum means that those institutions and by extension their communities—approve of the concepts found in the text written inside it. This study is an attempt to show that challengers believe in shaping the development of children's identities through the regulation of materials for personal development in both public libraries and schools and also to understand the arguments that they use to justify this regulation.

Research on intellectual freedom and censorship in the field of library and information science tends to focus on librarians and the policies and procedures that they use to mediate challenges to their symbolic power within their institutions. There has been only a small amount of research on the people who bring the challenges against the materials. In fact, as argued in Chapter 4, the preponderance of research on intellectual freedom and censorship in LIS can be best understood as a practical philosophy that often results in mitigating the voices of challengers rather than addressing the censorship itself. This study applies social theoretical frameworks to analyzing the discourse of challengers in order to demonstrate that they are engaging in rational, systematic behavior and that their actions are closely tied to both their construction of public institutions as sites of antagonistic symbolic power and to their understanding of the practices of reading.

## **Context and Background**

### **About Censorship**

Since the primary purpose of this study is to better understand challengers' worldviews as well as their construction of public institutions and the practice of reading, it is important to understand how these concepts relate to the practices of censorship. Broadly understood, censorship refers to control over the production and distribution of texts and other cultural goods. It is important to note that censorship is not a single action but an amalgamation of practices and behaviors that take place within a particular institutional context. These practices can be reactive wherein an entity physically removes, redacts, or relocates material or they can be proactive. An example of a reactive censorship practice is when administrators remove items from library after

receiving a complaint from a patron. Proactive censorship occurs when the censor does not allow the material to be produced or distributed in the first place. A common example might be when librarians choose not to order certain materials for fear that they will engender controversy among their patrons.

In some respects, the idea of censorship is itself a modern construction. Even though censorship practices have a long history that can be traced back to the ancient Roman office of the *censor* (“one who monitors morality”), the *Oxford English Dictionary* dates the word “censorship” in its modern sense to the general circulation of information throughout society to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. This modern idea of censorship is tied to a particular type of circulation of materials that would have been difficult to achieve before the proliferation of written texts across the Western world.

For the purposes of this study, the act of censoring written texts is understood as a practice that is rooted in one’s assumptions regarding the effects of reading. That is, if one believes that the reader will be able to maintain critical distance toward a text and will not be affected by it, one is less likely to censor it. If, however, one believes that the reader is unable to maintain this critical distance, it is more likely that the text will be proscribed for the reader. Along with the idea of reading effects, the practice of censorship also concerns who or what has the power to proscribe texts and the status of the knowledge contained within them.

One frame that can be used to understand the cases that are discussed in Chapters 6, 7, and 8 is Challengers Challenge cases are as a struggle over how one should classify a particular type of knowledge. According to Burke (2000), different types of knowledge

can be classified as dichotomous pairs: Theoretical knowledge is commonly paired with and against practical knowledge while high and low, liberal and useful, as well as specialized and universal also form dichotomous pairs of knowledge. For this study, two such dichotomous pairs of knowledge are particularly relevant to understanding challenge cases. First, public and private knowledge concern knowledge known to all and knowledge that is limited to only a few. The delineation between legitimate and forbidden knowledge is also salient for understanding challenge cases. Forbidden knowledge is *arcana Dei* or knowledge for God alone stands against legitimate knowledge that can be known by all. Challenge cases often focus on whether or not particular knowledge should be classified as public or legitimate.

### **Models of Censorship**

The flow of information and the intricacies of the circulation of texts are, of course, related to power. When someone is labeled as a “censor,” he or she is implicitly understood as an individual who has power to exert control over the production or distribution of information. Through a series of cultural and social changes that began in the early modern era and continue to resonate today, individuals were able to engage in the practices of censorship. When one views the scope of Western censorship, it is possible to see a wide array of censorship practices and behaviors and, as will be demonstrated below, historical research presents a trend from the state and institutions as the primary agents of censorship practices to individuals taking roles as censors. Although used anachronistically, the term “model of censorship” is employed to

demonstrate how various societal structures, including institutions and individuals, operated within a particular historical framework.

An example of state-sponsored censorship is found in accounts of the distribution of print during the *Ancien Régime* of 18<sup>th</sup> century France. All works had to be submitted to royal censors and could only be printed if they were endorsed with the royal privilege. That is, the power to censor rested in the institution of the monarchy. In his famous history of the *Encyclopédie* and the print trade, Robert Darnton writes that

By granting a privilege, the king did not merely allow a book to come into being: he put his stamp of approval on it; he recommended it to his subjects, speaking through one or more censors who expatiated on its importance and even its style in long-winded permissions and approbations that were usually printed in the book along with a formal *lettre de privilège* from the king (Darnton, 1979, p. 27).

It should also be noted that the inherent push and pull between what is acceptable and unacceptable for the reading public is an important aspect of censorship practices.

An example of institutional censorship is the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* published by the Roman Catholic Church between 1559 and 1966. This list of banned books included material the Vatican considered to be heretical, impure, or obscene. The punishment for publishing or owning books on the lists was excommunication. According to Peter Burke, the *Index* was an attempt to “fight print with print” (Burke, 2000, p. 141). Church leaders intended it to be a corrective to both Protestantism and the spread of printing.

In contrast to the institutional nature of censorship in Old Regime France and the Catholic Church, in the United States, censorship is often associated with a particular individual’s influence over society rather than the state. However this is a change that

took place over time. One example of a liminal figure in this process is Anthony Comstock who, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, used his position as Postal Inspector to determine which materials would be allowed through U.S. ports. Although his position was part of government institution, the obscenity laws from this era bear his name and are more associated with his persona rather than the U.S. government (Beisel, 1997). An example of censorship that is not connected to the state is the work of the anti-vice societies of New York and Boston in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century who used their social influence to censor museum and library collections (Beisel, 1997). This shift from direct institutional censorship to individuals using the tools of institutions and public opinion to censor is important for understanding the actions and arguments of challengers that are the focus of this dissertation.

### **The Discourse of Censorship**

Since the language used to justify the removal or relocation of materials within the library is an important aspect of censorship and a rich source of understanding the particular worldviews of challengers, the discourse used by challengers is the primary focus of this study. This discourse—designated here as the discourse of censorship—demonstrates an intimate relationship between power and knowledge. To use Pierre Bourdieu's terms, discourse operates in two modes. First, it is a *structuring structure* that provides the means for people to know and construct objects in the world. That is, it operates as a framework for cognition that, for example, leads to challengers' arguments regarding recognition of what they consider to be inappropriate material in books. Second, discourse, such as the discourse of censorship, also operates as a *structured*

*structure* that provides signification or meaning to objects in the world (Bourdieu, 1991).

In this framework, discourse is most easily understood as a type of poetic—defined here as the creative practices of individuals that take place within a structured space.

Individuals work within an institutionalized structure imposed by librarians and other administrators in public institutions to craft a justification for censorship.

The discourse of censorship is most closely related to what Reiner Keller (Keller, 2005)<sup>1</sup> calls culturalist discourse wherein social actors use both language (such as the terms “inappropriate” or “innocent” which are common in the discourse of censorship) and symbolic power (e.g., citizens within a given community) as a means for affecting the distribution of particular types of knowledge. In the United States, clashes over censored materials, although they are often discussed in the media as yet another aspect of the ongoing “culture wars,” are, in fact, struggles over knowledge itself. As Keller notes, discourse is a “power struggle or struggle for truth, for symbolic and material ordering of social practices from which historically contingent power knowledge regimes emerge” (Keller, 2005, section 2, para. 2). The discourse of censorship informs a reality wherein only some members of a given community should have access to certain types of information while others should be excluded. This study explores the use of language and symbolic power in the discourse of censorship. The following research objectives are based on the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that guide the study as well as prior research described in more detail in Chapter 5.

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Iulian Vamanu for introducing me to Keller’s work.



## **Research Objectives**

### **Primary Research Objective**

The primary purpose of this study is to better understand the worldviews of people who challenge materials in public libraries, school libraries, and classrooms. Through analysis of common themes within the discourse of censorship, the study identifies the contours of these worldviews. In particular, the study identifies challengers' understanding of the practice of reading as well as their construction of the role of public institutions in society.

### **Secondary Research Objectives**

1. Delineate the worldviews of challengers through an exploration of
  - a. the “structuring structures” of challengers’ worldviews
  - b. the meaning systems or “structured structures” of challengers’ worldviews
2. Explore challengers’ construction of the role of public institutions in society by identifying
  - a. the role of public libraries and schools within society as understood by challengers
  - b. policies and procedures used by library and school administrators as understood by challengers
3. Explore challengers’ construction of the practice of reading by identifying
  - a. challengers’ understanding of the idea of the book and print culture
  - b. challengers’ interpretive strategies and reading practices
  - c. how these interpretive strategies shape the challengers’ behavior

## **Definitions**

In the mainstream media, terms such as banning and censorship are used fairly loosely for many different types of behaviors. These terms often depend on one's point of view and are therefore highly political. In light of this, terms and concepts used throughout the study are defined below.

### **Worldview**

As noted above, worldview is defined here as one's normal approach to understanding the world. It is both a roadmap for action and a framework for understanding everyday life events. The term is based in the work of Berger and Luckmann who defined worldview as a "natural way of looking at the world" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 8). Although it is possible that challengers do not share similar worldviews concerning other realms of life and experiences, it is possible that many of them have common views regarding the role of public institutions in society and the practice of reading implicit in the discourse of censorship.

### **Challenges**

A challenge occurs when an individual or group asks library administration to remove, restrict, or relocate materials within libraries and schools. Challenges do not always lead to banning, that is, the removal of materials, or to a change in status such as restriction or relocation of the materials from library shelves. The cases generally follow a standard procedure in both libraries and schools: When an individual encounters objectionable material, they lodge a complaint with either the librarian or teacher (in schools sometimes the complaint goes to the principal). Challenges are often resolved at

this point. If they are not, the challenger is given an opportunity to file an official complaint usually in the form of a written Request for Reconsideration (Appendix A). This is generally a standardized form used throughout the public institution's governance system. Following the filing of the request with the governing body, a series of meetings are held between administrators and challengers. If the matter is not resolved then, the challenge is escalated up the bureaucratic hierarchy, sometimes even concluding in a public hearing in front of the governing board for the institution. In other cases, governing bodies send the matter to a committee whose purpose is to discuss and determine the fate of the material.

As noted earlier, the ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom tracks challenges to books throughout the country and makes the data publically available on their website. Between 1990 and 2010, the OIF's statistics show that most challenges were initiated by parents and were for the following reasons (in descending order): sexuality, language, and "unsuited to" a particular age group (<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/banned/frequentlychallenged/stats>). The OIF, along with collecting statistics, also produces supporting material such as information on how to conduct a challenge hearing for libraries and librarians who are experiencing a challenge. In addition, the office also provides institutional support for librarians who respond to challenges including advice and monetary support if warranted.

### **Challengers**

In this study, people who request the removal or relocation of materials within public institutions are called challengers. The ALA's statistics are somewhat vague in

their characterization of challengers. The data set on the ALA's website titled "Challengers by Initiator" notes that challengers are administrators, board members, clergy, teachers, parents, pressure groups, and patrons. However, one might argue that the category "patron" overlaps significantly with the other categories.

There are some organizations, including Parents Against Bad Books in Schools (PABBIS) and Focus on the Family, that provide institutional support for challengers. However, it seems that many challenges are *sui generis*. News accounts of challenges share a general storyline wherein a child brings a book home that his or her parent finds objectionable. The parent then files a complaint with the library or school. It is only after this complaint reaches the news media that the challengers are contacted by supporting organizations.

In this study, challengers are constituted as an *interpretive community* that shares a particular symbolic universe and worldview—especially with regard to texts. First introduced by Stanley Fish in an essay written upon the publication of a new edition of Milton's poems, a community of interpreters is made up of those who share certain interpretive strategies for understanding texts. Fish argues that it is people's experiences that give text structure and meaning is only created through interpretation. He specifically addresses literary critics by noting that they must also acknowledge that they are always interpreting and that they use specific strategies to do so. It is these interpretive strategies, which are shared by groups of people that create the practice known as "reading" as well as the act of "writing." "These strategies exist prior to the act

of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around” (Fish, 1980, p. 171).

### **Intellectual Freedom**

The ALA provides a straightforward definition of intellectual freedom: “intellectual freedom is the right of every individual to both seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction. It provides for free access to all expressions of ideas through which any and all sides of a question, cause or movement may be explored” (<http://www.ala.org/offices/oif/basics/ifcensorshipqanda>). However, this definition is overly focused on information transmission. In her article on the state of intellectual freedom research in the early 21st century, Eliza Dresang defines intellectual freedom as the “freedom to think or believe what one will, freedom to express one’s thought and beliefs in unrestricted manners and means, and freedom to access information and ideas regardless of the content or viewpoints of the author(s) or the age background, or beliefs of the receiver” (Dresang, 2006, p. 169). This definition is more expansive than the one put forth by the American Library Association (ALA) and highlights freedom of thought, belief, and expression.

In this study, intellectual freedom is defined as a right to access the whole of the information universe without fear of reprisal from the “powers that be.” This definition approaches intellectual freedom as a social justice issue and is based on the work of Peter Lor and Johannes Britz (2007). Following from their work in their native South Africa, Lor and Britz argue that knowledge societies cannot exist without freedom of access to

information and that impeding the distribution of information ultimately leads to corruption of institutions including the state.

### **Censorship**

Censorship is more difficult to define and the term itself is highly charged and political. Merriam-Webster defines censorship as “the institution system, or practice of censoring” or “the actions or practices of censors.” The ALA defines censorship as “suppression of ideas and information that certain persons—individuals, groups or government officials—find objectionable or dangerous” (<http://www.ala.org/offices/oif/basics/ifcensorshipqanda>). It is this definition that some people both within and outside of librarianship find problematic. Is it possible for an individual to censor? Some argue that they cannot and censorship is solely the purview of governments. James LaRue, a public library director, states that “censorship is the action by government officials to prohibit or suppress publications or services on the basis of their content” (LaRue, 2007, p. 3). Censorship is defined in this study as any action that results in impeding a particular group of people’s access to ideas or information. However, since the definition of censorship is both unsettled and calling certain individuals or groups “censors” is highly political and somewhat pejorative, the term will not be used to describe the individuals in this study. As defined above, those who request the removal or relocation of materials within library collections will be described as “challengers” as defined above.

## **Boundary Object**

The term boundary object is defined as forms and other written communication documents required by the challenge process. These include the requests for reconsideration that are initially filed by challengers as well as the policy documents approved and publicly published by governing bodies. Boundary objects allow for communication across various information contexts and social objects. As Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star note, boundary objects “inhabit several communities of practice and satisfy the information requirements of each of them” (Bowker & Star, 1999, p. 297). This study demonstrates that challengers do not always view these objects, such as the request for reconsideration forms, in a positive light and staff and administrators in public institutions often use boundary objects to mitigate the voices of outsiders.

## **Outline of the Study**

The study first presents two frameworks for analysis: Chapter 2 is a theoretical framework for socially situating challengers’ worldviews while Chapter 3 is a conceptual framework that focuses on historical models of reading practice that are used in the analysis to help understand the current interpretive strategies of challengers. Chapter 4 offers an overview of existing literature on the concepts of intellectual freedom and censorship as well as previous research on challengers. The methodology of the study is described in Chapter 5. Chapters 6 through 8 present the analysis of various aspects of themes in challengers’ discourse. Finally, the concluding chapter presents a summary of the study.

## **Chapter 2: Practice, Ritual, and the Public Sphere**

The discourse of censorship, as defined in this study, is a type of culturalist discourse that uses both language and symbolic power as a means for affecting information access and distribution. In order to more fully situate its analysis, this chapter presents a social-theoretical framework for positioning challengers' worldviews concerning society, public institutions, and the procedures used in challenge cases. This framework is rooted in a social constructionist metatheoretical foundation and focuses on three areas: the practice of individuals in social space, ritualized public discourse as a means of removing or relocating objectionable materials, and the construction of public institutions within the public sphere.

First, the chapter discusses social constructionism in order to explore how language shapes individual worldviews. Second, the chapter discusses Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice which provides some terminology for understanding discrepancies among the symbolic universes of stakeholders in challenge cases, the use of symbolic power by administrators, librarians, and staff members, and how individual worldviews influence symbolic classification struggles. This section also focuses on the library as an institution within what Bourdieu designates as the fields of power and cultural production as well as the institution's organization of space. Third, the chapter presents Mary Douglas's theory of purity, classification, and ritual purification. This section provides a framework for understanding the procedures of challenge cases as a kind of ritual used to relocate or remove ambiguous or anomalous knowledge from the public sphere. Finally,



the chapter discusses both public libraries and public schools as institutions within the public sphere.

These theories position the discourse of censorship within a broader social-theoretical framework. As noted in the previous chapter, this discursive domain reveals the relationship between knowledge and power and the combination of theoretical frameworks concerning individual practice, ritual cleansing, and the public sphere all aide the researcher in understanding why and how challengers justify their actions.

### **Social Constructionism**

In the book *The Social Construction of Reality*, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), investigate the idea of reality in society by drawing on the work of Max Scheler, Robert Merton, and Alfred Schutz. In their foundational treatise in the sociology of knowledge, Berger and Luckmann explore how everyday knowledge operates in people's lives and through institutions. They seek to understand how reality is constructed and particularly how knowledge is transmitted and maintained within society. Two concepts found in their work are particularly salient for this study: the stocks of knowledge used for navigating the social world and the development and maintenance of symbolic universes.

### **Stocks of Knowledge**

Berger and Luckmann begin by positing that the foundation of reality in everyday life is created through language and social interaction. Language, including written language, is used for the *objectivation* of things and is a bridge for the organization of everyday life. It is a system of signs through which we build up a stock of knowledge

that is socially distributable. These stocks of knowledge are based in language and include both everyday knowledge, such the ability to read, as well as specialized knowledge that is the domain of experts within a particular field.

In their book, *Structures of the Lifeworld* published after Schutz's death in 1959, Schutz and Luckmann proposed that people live in the world using a stock of knowledge made of both *types* and *typical actions* (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973). *Types* refer to people's constructions of objects in the life-world including their fellow human beings. These types are abstract, incomplete, relative, and relevant to the situation at hand. Types can change depending on the intimacy and relevance of the involved object. To use the example of a book as a type of object: I might have a general perception and construct of "book" in my head, but it will change when I encounter an actual book in the life-world. I will use my construct of "book" to perceive that the object in front of me is, in fact, a book and this encounter might also change my overall typification of books. It should be noted that typifications can also apply to institutions such as a library (i.e., what a library does and should be), and they are developed through the process of socialization. For Schutz and Luckmann, *typical action* denotes ways of responding to other's actions and information regarding how to get things done. A typical action, for example, might be the interpretive strategies that a particular individual uses when reading a text. Another example of a typical action that directly relates to this study are the actions of challengers as they are perceived by librarians: To be a challenger, one must go through a particular process that begins with lodging a formal, written complaint with a public or school library. This "typical action" (in the ideal sense) makes one a "challenger."

According to Berger and Luckmann, stocks of knowledge are learned through the process of socialization where types and typical actions are passed down from one generation to the next through social institutions such as the family and schools. These types and typical actions that constitute one's stocks of knowledge all operate within what Berger and Luckmann call the symbolic universe which both produces new meanings for objects and makes these meanings credible through the process of socialization. As will be discussed in more detail below in the section on theory of practice, both types and typical actions can be linked to Pierre Bourdieu's *structuring structures* which influence cognition and how a particular individual perceives the world around him or her.

### **Symbolic Universe**

The symbolic universe, as described by Berger and Luckmann (1966), is particularly important to this study of the worldviews of challengers. Objective reality is constructed through a process of institutionalization and legitimation. *Institutionalization* describes the processes of socialization that take place throughout childhood. People become "selves" through a process of social integration with both their environment and other humans. The "self" is the outcome of all of these interactions. *Legitimation*, on the other hand, allows this institutionalization to be passed from one generation to the next. The symbolic universe, through which meaning is created, emerges from this process of legitimation. In particular, it makes the stocks of knowledge that are passed down plausible to succeeding generations. The symbolic universe encompasses all levels of legitimation including the incipient or "things are just like that" level, theoretical

propositions, and explicit theories. Through these legitimating functions, the symbolic universe plays an important part in constructing an individual's worldview by allowing individuals to imbue meaning to various unexplained or random events.

Symbolic universes perform important functions within objective reality. First, they are nomic or have a "law-giving" quality and allow for the integration of everyday life. They also order individual biographies and legitimize death. In short, symbolic universes are an integral part of an individual's worldview as they provide a basis for rationalization of events. For example, religion operates as a symbolic universe *sine qua non* since it is able to order reality in a totalizing fashion. It is also an exemplary conceptual machinery of universe maintenance, a construct theorized by Berger and Luckmann that helps keep chaos at bay. That is, it provides the foundation for an institutional order for the universe and helps individuals fill in gaps for aspects of life that are not readily explained.

As noted above, social constructionism provides a metatheoretical foundation for this study because it offers a framework for understanding how language shapes an individual's worldview on the deepest levels of legitimation and rationalization. For Berger, Luckmann, and Schutz the constitutive view of language is axiomatic. As will be discussed in the following section, while he is less explicitly focused on theories of language, Bourdieu also refers to stocks of knowledge and the symbolic universe in his theory of practice.

### **Bourdieu's Theory of Practice: Worldviews and Symbolic Violence**

The symbolic plays a major role in Pierre Bourdieu's philosophical project, the development of a theory of practice. Bourdieu describes his theory as a "constructivist structuralism" and views theories of structuralism and subjectivism as being in "dialectical relationship" (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 15). For example, even though social classes do not "really exist" (i.e., they are constructed through social interaction and political work), people act as if they do exist. It is called a theory of *practice* because it is midway between structuralism and subjectivism and focuses on how individuals conduct themselves within both institutional and personal constraints. In other words, the theory focuses on the practices of individuals who themselves operate in dialectical relationship between the objective and the subjective. It endeavors to explain why and how people act as if social classes actually exist even though they do not. For Bourdieu, people are neither wholly controlled by the structures of the social world nor are they only subject to their inner lives. This theory is formulated by Bourdieu as: [(habitus)(capital)] + field = practice (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 101). Each of these facets is described in further detail below.

One focus of Bourdieu's work is on symbolic systems such as the symbolic universe of religion as described by Berger and Luckmann. Using the terminology first introduced in the previous chapter, these systems operate in two different ways. First, they operate as *structuring structures* that provide the means for people to know and construct objects in the world. That is, they are symbolic systems that allow for cognition. As noted above, these can also be understood as the *types* and *typical actions*

described by Schutz and Luckmann. They are tied to the *stocks of knowledge* that people apply to a particular object or event. Second, symbolic systems are also *structured structures* that provide signification to the objects in the world. That is, the “meaning” aspect of objects and events. It should be noted that these systems are always socially determined and never universal (Bourdieu, 1991). In this study, the discourse of censorship used by challengers operates as a symbolic system by both providing a framework for perception and a system of meaning to the arguments that they make in challenge cases.

### **Habitus**

According to Bourdieu, constructions within the social world have three attributes: First, they are always subject to structure. Second, cognition is socially structured. Finally, practices are both individual and social. The idea of *habitus* comes out of these three points—it is what produces structure for classification within the world. For the purposes of this study, it is important to note that the world is not seen by people as being completely structured—individuals have “space” in which to operate and interact within the symbolic system.

The concept of habitus is crucial to understanding Bourdieu’s theory. It describes how individuals operate within the “space” between structuring and structured structures. As Bourdieu notes, practice is never automatic and people do not always know that they are operating within socially constructed boundaries. By turning “history into nature” and “nature into common sense,” an individual’s habitus offers a collection of repertoires on which an individual can draw throughout a particular event (Bourdieu, 1987, p. 78).

In this study, one set of repertoires on which challengers' interpretive reading strategies are based on a strong correlation between the written word and the idea of truth. In Bourdieu's terms, challengers' habitus provides the structures for interpreting text in this manner. The concept of habitus is similar to the idea of worldview. As noted previously, a worldview is a roadmap for action and is the preferred term in this study. One's habitus operates in a similar fashion to a worldview as it is the embodiment of the structures that one uses for cognition and meaning in practice.

Recall that Bourdieu calls his theory a theory of "practice" because it attempts to explain the poetic actions between the structured structures and structuring structures. That is, it is not wholly deterministic theory and this poetic space of action (that is one's worldview or habitus) provides for the emergence of and divergences between differing worldviews. The "poetic" in this framework refers to two different concepts. It is both the different repertoires available to an individual as well as the combination of these repertoires used in, for example, the discourse of censorship. "This objective of uncertainty...provides the basis for the plurality of visions of the world...provides the base for symbolic struggles over the power to produce and to impose the legitimate vision of the world" (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 20).

In this respect, the discourse of censorship can be understood as a symbolic struggle over who determines the boundary of legitimate and illegitimate knowledge in the public sphere. Bourdieu calls these struggles for domination *symbolic violence*, a term that will be defined in more detail below. These struggles are also based in the idea of "capital," a concept that refers to an individual's "accumulated labor which, when

appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 241). In other words, capital is a form of currency broadly understood.

### **Symbolic Capital**

Throughout his work, Bourdieu describes four different types of capital that people possess: cultural, social, economic, and symbolic. Cultural capital exists in three different states. One is an embodied state exemplified by manners and dispositions of the body. Another is an objectified state that is represented by art, books, and other objects. The third state of cultural capital, its institutionalized form, is most easily exemplified by academic qualifications. While many types of cultural capital can be converted into economic capital, institutionalized cultural capital is often converted into the networks that exemplify social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Social capital primarily consists of one’s social networks as well as inherited capital. The latter is most clearly illustrated by the nobility. Economic capital is, of course, one’s monetary worth.

Symbolic capital is the most important for this study. It is “a transformed and thereby disguised form of physical ‘economic’ capital that produces its proper effect inasmuch and only inasmuch, as it conceals the fact that it originates in ‘material’ forms of capital which are also, in the last analysis, the source of its effects” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 183). It relates most strongly to concepts of prestige and authority in society. For example, the title “library director” conveys a certain amount of authority within the institution of the library and is associated with the symbolic power of the director in the library.



## **Symbolic Power**

For Bourdieu, symbolic power is extremely important because it is misrecognized by individuals as something entirely different—common sense or legitimate actions, for example. Symbolic power consists of those symbolic instruments that are used by one social group to dominate another social group (Bourdieu, 1991). In this category Bourdieu includes both the division of labor and ideology. Symbolic power is one of the primary building blocks for a social group. In order for a social group to exist, it must meet two conditions. First, the group must have symbolic capital. Second, this symbolic capital must in some way match the reality of the social world (Bourdieu, 1989). As described below, symbolic power is most easily understood in its relationship to the structuring structures of institutions and expertise.

Although there are many sources of symbolic power, one common type is produced and imposed by institutional experts. This is one way to understand how the library operates; that is, it is an institution sustained by a group of specialists, such as the library director, who have a large amount of symbolic power when it comes to the establishing the overall organization of the institution. Librarians, who are generally educated in the specialized area of information organization and access, are domain experts within public and school libraries and therefore have symbolic power within those institutions. (This is especially true of professional librarians who not only have bachelor's degrees but also master's degrees in library and information science.) Librarians generally have complete control over the materials in their collections; they design collection development policies, control acquisitions budgets, and select materials.

These institutionalized procedures consolidate librarians' symbolic power over their collections. However, it must be noted that unlike museums or theatres, libraries, as public institutions are supported by taxpayers and are often viewed as a public good. A library's patrons, board of directors, and community members view themselves as essential stakeholders in the institution.

It is the combination of symbolic capital and symbolic power that informs the classification struggles found in challenge cases which pit librarians and their institutional expertise against the challengers' views of classification, collection development, and selection. Although public institutions often offer deliberative forums for dissent, the accumulated symbolic capital and power of administrators and staff in public libraries and schools leads, in many cases, to the mitigation of challengers' voices. Bourdieu calls this struggle among social actors for dominance symbolic violence.

### **Symbolic Violence**

This study argues that challenges to materials in public institutions are an integral part of symbolic struggles or—to use Bourdieu's term—symbolic violence, between the worldviews of institutional actors and challengers. Although challengers and institutional actors operate within different symbolic systems, both groups work to enforce their own ideas of legitimacy regarding how the library should operate and what materials it should have in its collections. These ideas are directly related to individuals' understanding of common sense regarding what is considered to be legitimate knowledge.

As noted above, symbolic struggles, including those in libraries and schools, are described by Bourdieu as a form of symbolic violence. Symbolic violence refers to

hegemonic norms and procedures that are used by those in power to dominate over other voices. One example of this process, as will be described in more detail below, are the policies and procedures for challenging materials within libraries that are created and enforced by librarians to moderate challengers' voices. In his article on social space and social groups, Bourdieu notes that classification struggles, like those over the appropriateness of reading materials, are often a form of symbolic violence:

This means that one cannot conduct a science of classifications without conducting a science of the struggle over classifications and w/out taking account of the position occupied, in this struggle over the power of knowledge, for power through knowledge, for the monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence, by each of the agents or groups of agents who are involved in it, whether they be ordinary individuals, exposed to the vicissitudes of the everyday symbolic struggle, or authorized (and full-time) professionals, which includes all those who speak or write about the social classes, and who are distinguished according to the greater or lesser extent to which their classifications commit the authority of the State, the holder of the monopoly of official naming, correct classification, the correct order (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 734).

The term "violence" refers to the domination of one social group with greater symbolic capital and power over another group that has less symbolic capital and power. Although this violence takes place in the realm of the symbolic it is still a real form of suffering as it affects how a particular group is able to live out their lives. In challenge cases, librarian, administrators, and staff are able to use their symbolic capital and power to classify knowledge within their institutions as legitimate for public consumption. This study takes the position that librarians, teachers, and administrators in public institutions are engaging in a form of symbolic violence when they use their professional authority to mitigate responses to those who request the removal or relocation of these materials within library collections or from school curricula.

### **Libraries and the Fields of Power and Cultural Production**

Bourdieu uses the term *field* to designate hierarchically demarcated social spaces. One such field is the field of power which is composed of the social classes. Although Bourdieu uses European-centered terms such as the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy in his descriptions of the field of power, this concept is transferable to the social structure and space of the United States. In an article on Bourdieu's fields, Nick Couldry (2003) notes that the field of power "is better understood as a general space where the state exercises influence (very much like a general symbolic power) over the interrelations between all specific fields (in the usual sense), indeed, perhaps acts upon social space in general" (p. 666). The field of power, like many others, is a social space of domination by one social group over another one. Bourdieu positions the field of power within the field of class relations.

The field of power is useful for understanding the process of symbolic violence that occurs within challenge cases. One of the most important aspects of Bourdieu's theory is that it does not solely rest on economic capital other forms of capital are also essential for understanding how social groups operate within a given field. For example, although librarians and administrators of public institutions may not personally consider themselves to be part of the elite because of their lack of economic capital (in relation to other members of elite groups), their cultural and symbolic capital proves otherwise. As noted above, librarians and administrators of public institution overwhelmingly hold advanced degrees. This places them in an elite social group considering that, according to the U.S. Census of 2010, only 30% of all Americans have bachelor's degrees. This

cultural capital, and the symbolic capital bestowed by their institutions, often places those who are on the “other side” of challenge cases in a position of social dominance over the patrons in public libraries and the parents who are constituents of a public school.

Another field described by Bourdieu is the field of cultural production which operates within the field of power. It is unique because it reverses the arrangement of the economic field. Instead of maximizing economic power, people within the field of cultural production often maximize symbolic power by minimizing economic power. Libraries are integral institutions within this field as they collect symbolic goods (books and other media) created within the field of cultural production.

As noted above, librarians, staff and administrators in public institutions use their symbolic and cultural capital to mitigate the voices of outsiders in challenge cases. These cases, which are embodiments of differing values within differing symbolic universes, are contested by means of a series of policies and procedures that are established by the managers of public institutions that are part of a process of symbolic violence and domination. These policies and procedures operate as a kind of ritual that mediates the “struggle over classifications” by either removing or relocating objectionable material that characterizes challenge case. This ritual is a means of mitigating challengers’ voices in the process of book challenge but it also operates as an avenue for public discourse regarding the classification of knowledge.

### **Purity and Ritual**

In *Purity and Danger* (first published in 1966), a treatise on purity, dirt, order, and disorder in the operation of worldviews, Mary Douglas states that we positively re-order

our environment to make it conform to a particular idea. For Douglas, the social world is primarily made up of orders of classification. Individuals wish for these schemes to be hard and fast and for all objects to fall into place within them. She writes that “it is part of our human condition to long for hard lines and clear concepts. When we have them we have to either face the fact that some realities elude them, or else blind ourselves to the inadequacy of the concepts” (Douglas, 2005, p. 200). However we often encounter objects that do not fit within these concepts. One way to understand this is through the idea of dirt. Dirt is “matter out of place:”

[This] implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order. Dirt then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is a system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements. This idea of dirt takes us straight into the field of symbolism and promises a link-up with more obviously symbolic systems of purity (Douglas, 2005, p. 44).

In some respects, challenged books are a symbolic embodiment of dirt because they are out of place ambiguous or anomalous objects in the system of social space constituted by the public institutions.

### **Ambiguous and Anomalous Knowledge**

Douglas notes that there is a difference between anomalies and ambiguities.

Ambiguities can fit in many places within a particular classification scheme or can be given various interpretations. To use Bourdieu’s terms, the structuring and structured structures that individuals use for cognition and meaning provide frameworks for recognizing and understanding ambiguities as they may be similar to other types or typical actions one has encountered. Within a library’s classification scheme, an ambiguity may be difficult to place but can eventually be classified. An example of this

might be the genre of *graphic novels* which are long-form fiction in graphic form. When first introduced, libraries often had difficulty classifying these books as could either be cataloged into “fiction” or “cartooning.” Graphic novels were ambiguous because they could be located in many places within the library’s cataloging system. Similarly, books that challengers want to have *relocated* within a particular institution can be understood as ambiguous objects—they are currently classified as one thing but can be classified as something else. For example, curriculum challenges are seminal examples of this as often challengers argue that the book should remain in the school or on a summer list but should not be required.

Anomalies, on the other hand, do not fit in the classification scheme or system at all (Douglass, 2005, p. 47). As will be demonstrated in the study, for challengers, the objectionable materials are often anomalies because they have made the public school or library an unsafe space. Douglas states that there are several methods of treating an anomaly. First, an individual must choose whether to oppose an anomaly or ignore it. If one chooses to confront the anomaly there are several options from which to choose. Anomalous objects can be evaded, marked as dangerous, or physically controlled.

Challenges to materials in public institutions can be understood as struggles over ambiguous and anomalous knowledge. The knowledge in the targeted books has been classified as public or legitimate but, according to challengers, should actually be private or forbidden. Challenge cases are attempts to control knowledge through a ritual marked by the procedures established by public libraries and schools.

### **Ritual Purification**

Rituals of purity and impurity are not simply about removing something that is dirty. According to Douglas, rituals offer several types of symbolic enactment. First, they offer frames for focusing on a particular time or space such as a birth or the hallowing of a graveyard. Second, they provide aids for remembering. Finally, and most importantly for this study, they give participants in these experiences control (Douglas, 2005, p. 77). The fact that a ritual exists to focus, remember, or control implies that a particular object or experience is dangerous. It should be noted that challengers are using procedures already put in place by the staff and administrators of public institutions to target the objectionable books. The fact that challenge cases are anticipated demonstrates the potentially troubling nature of the knowledge found in the materials within public institutions.

To summarize, the challenge, that is the action of targeting book and going through the procedures established by the institutions, is an action that challengers take to control of the ambiguous or anomalous object. Challenges are about classification and bringing order to disorder. It is a ritual imposed by the institution and used by challengers to physically remove anomalous knowledge or to label or relocated ambiguous knowledge. The challenge can be understood as a ritual that removes the dirt to re-establish the individual's symbolic system. The procedures used within the ritual are set by librarians, administrators and staff who operate within a different symbolic universe from the challengers and have more social and symbolic capital within their institutions. The cumulative effect of the procedures and policies used in the challenge



case (that is, the ritual of public discourse employed to mitigate the voices of challengers) is a type of symbolic violence against the challengers. By going through the ritual, challengers are “heard” but the outcome of the ritual is not in their hands even though they are stakeholders within the public library and schools. It is these institutions’ placement within the public sphere and their use of the ritual of public deliberation for mediating problems that is significant for this study because they are a space of where one social group attempts to impose their own categorization on another.

Although libraries are part of Bourdieu’s field of cultural production, both public libraries and public schools are also part of the public sphere. The concept of the public sphere incorporates many social spaces that may or may not be hierarchically delineated. Instead it includes spaces and institutions, including the public library and schools, which offer a place of discourse within the community and society.

### **Public Institutions and the Public Sphere**

This study uses the term “public institutions” to collectively designate public libraries and public schools. These are institutions that are supported by the public through taxes and it is this similarity that unifies the two institutions throughout the study as sites of study. As will be shown in Chapter 7, the challengers in this study rarely differentiate between public school curriculums and school libraries. On the other hand, their discourse does contain some differentiation between school libraries and public libraries. However, what is of primary importance for this study is that these are *public institutions* within *the public sphere*. Public sphere is defined here as the social space that is created by the reflexive circulation of discourse.

“Public” is defined as an institution that is “supported by the community,” but it must be noted, however, that “publics” are also a more abstract concept that operate, as Michael Warner states, as a “social totality” (Warner, 2002). Warner defines a public as a relationship among strangers that *must* consist of strangers. Publics in this sense are self-organizing and, in modern capitalist society, often only exist because of the powerlessness of the individual. They exist as a social space created through the circulation of discourse. Administrators and staff of these public institutions deliberately choose materials that become part of the public discourse within the public sphere.

Warner (2002) notes that a public is a “poetic world-making” but, similar to Bourdieu’s symbolic power discussed above, this performative aspect is often misrecognized by individuals. The unity that one finds in the public is often ideological and, according to Bourdieu, a structured structure. If public libraries and schools constitute a social space for the circulation of a particular discourse then the challengers operate as a counterpublic in challenge cases. Warner observes that counterpublics do not have the same privilege as the public in putting forth their own “reading of text” (Warner, 2002). This is in some ways akin to symbolic violence described above. That is, staff and administrators of public libraries and schools are representatives of the public and, through the use of the symbolic and cultural capital, are able to put their own ideological mark on curricula and collections. Challengers, on the other hand, lack this capital within the public institution and must go through a series of bureaucratic procedures to be given the same privilege in public institutions.

## The Public Sphere

One of the more interesting aspects of challenge cases is the idea that a private act (deciding what one's child should read) is transformed into a public act (requesting that the book be removed or relocated so that no other children can read it). This transfer of action can be conceptualized using Habermas's definition of the public sphere. According to Habermas, the *public sphere* is the virtual space in society where public opinion is formed (Habermas, 1974). He defines the public body as "citizens confer[ing] in an unrestricted fashion...about matters of general interest" (Habermas, 1974, p. 49). This was essentially the public discussion that took place in coffee houses during the Enlightenment that provided the evidence for Habermas's thesis. *Public opinion*, on the other hand, "refers to the tasks of criticism and control which a public body of citizens informally—and, in periodic elections, formally as well—practices vis-à-vis the ruling structure are organized in the form of a state" (Habermas, 1974, p. 49). Filing a challenge case might be understood as a criticism of the state by a citizen.

Habermas notes that the public body was once the province of the bourgeoisie. After the development of the social welfare state, it moved out of their control and into society at large. "The public body lost not only its social exclusivity; it lost in addition the coherence created by bourgeois social institutions and a relatively high standard of education. Conflicts hitherto restricted to the private sphere now intrude into the public sphere" (Habermas, 1974, p. 54). The public sphere, which includes public libraries and schools, is a contested field used to regulate differing interests among private citizens. It does not act, as it did in the past, as a realm of consensus among differing groups.

The public sphere also consists of state-owned public objects including public libraries and schools. As Craig Calhoun notes:

Publicness took on a dual sense referring both to openness of access and the interaction to collective affairs as managed by the state. The public referred both to the collective subject of democracy—the people organized as a discursive and decision-making public—and as its object—the public good” (Calhoun, 2001, p. 12595).

Public schools and libraries can be best understood in challengers’ discourse as institutions which serve the public good. They are realizations of historical and contemporary collective actions, through the use of taxation mechanisms, of local communities’ investment in themselves.

### **Public Schools, Libraries, and Selection**

The history of public schools in the United States is long and complicated involving debates over, for example, taxation and religious instruction. Ira Katznelson and Margaret Weir (1985) noted that one of the most perplexing aspects of the development of public schools in the U.S. is that, unlike other systems in the West, they are locally controlled. Different communities employ different methods to determine how the investment is spread among members. However, many communities use property values to determine how much tax will be levied on a particular household to support public institutions including schools and libraries. Although this practice is commonplace, its social progressive nature should not be underestimated.

For this study it is most important to note that curricula in public schools are usually under the purview of the local school district. They are generally developed and reviewed by curriculum committee consisting of board members, teachers, and

sometimes community members. This committee is often headed by a district staff member with the title Curriculum Director or similar and the committee is charged with developing both subject matter and, in many cases, approving textbooks used in the local curriculum. After moving through a committee, curricula are then approved by members of the school board. In many locales, both subject matter and textbooks used in the curricula may be challenged by community members.

School libraries (that is, libraries whose collections are held within the school building) did not become fully established, at least in urban areas, until around 1900 (Woolls, 2009). Depending on location, collections in school libraries are often supervised at a district level but school librarians have leeway regarding what to include in local collections.

In order to better understand challengers' arguments regarding policies and procedures in public libraries and schools, it is important to have some sense of how materials are selected in these institutions. Libraries define collections as all of the items that are acquired by the institution including monographs and serials in any format. In public libraries materials are often selected by professionally trained librarians who are given the title collections librarians, selectors, or bibliographers. Sometimes these duties are given to paraprofessionals or outsourced to book distributors. Most public libraries have an official collection development policy that is often based on a community information needs assessment data. This policy guides the selection of materials for the library. There are two procedures for selecting books. Librarians may choose books individually based on reviews from various professional journals or recommendations or

they may use an approval plan where books that meet certain criteria are automatically sent to the library by a book distributor. Many libraries use some mix of these two methods.

Selection policies for school libraries are often handled at the district level but individual school librarians have some leeway when choosing individual materials. As with public libraries, professional review literature and approval plans are often used for selection. On the other hand, curriculum material such as textbooks are often selected by a Director of Curriculum and/or a curriculum committee and approved by the school board. Note that most collection development and selection policies in both schools and libraries include procedures for handling challenged materials.

This is a cursory overview of the institutions discussed in this study but it gives some basis for understanding the analysis of discourse of challengers and provides a backdrop for this study. Note that sometimes the challengers refer to the “library” without specifying whether they are referring to a school or public library. Both public libraries and public schools are social spaces that, as John Bushman (2005) notes his article on libraries and the public sphere, collect and advance the rational debate described above. In challenge cases there are multiple stakeholders engaged in debate regarding the nature of knowledge including librarians, administrators, school boards, and the challengers themselves. Each of these groups has a different position in relation to both the institution and the debate but, following Bushman, it is the nature of public institutions to offer a space in which the debate can occur. Public schools, by offering widespread access to education, hypothetically allow the debate to take place among all

members of the public. Public libraries, by circulating materials that inform the debate, do the same. It is the “public” nature of these social spaces and their contributions to public discourse that make them a target of challengers.

In order to better understand challengers it is necessary to situate them within a theoretical framework that accounts for their discourse as part of a larger world view. This chapter laid out the theoretical frameworks social constructionism as a metatheoretical framework for understanding how language shapes challengers’ everyday life used in this study. Bourdieu’s theory of practice is used to provide terminology for understanding how challengers both shape and are shaped by social structures. In particular, Bourdieu offers context for comprehending the adversarial nature of challenge case and the method in which symbolic capital is used throughout their procedures. Bourdieu’s theory also provides a framework for understanding the concept of organized and classified space that is a major issue of contention in challenge cases. Douglas’s work on defilement, ritual, and symbolic objects offers a framework for analyzing challenge cases as a ritual of cleansing. As institutions within the public sphere, challengers are stakeholders in the decisions made regarding collections and curricula in public libraries and schools. These social constructionist frameworks help situate the discourse and actions of challengers within the wider social and symbolic universe. The following chapter focuses on one aspect of the challengers’ worldviews: the conceptualization of the book and interpretive strategies for reading.

### Chapter 3: Past and Present Models of Reading

In his book on understanding and managing challenges titled *The New Inquisition*, James La Rue, a public library director in Colorado, argues that book challenges are essentially about respect for writing—an idea that can be found throughout challengers’ discourse :

Behind the challenges of many patrons is awe of the written word. This may well be rooted in the profound respect granted to the Bible, based on several factors, but not least upon its endurance. This belief, incidentally, is also shared by the secular left, which believes education—mainly exposure to the written word—is also very powerful (LaRue, 2007, p. 51).

That is, the awe for text demonstrated in the discourse of censorship is intimately tied to social and individual conceptualizations of writing and reading practices. Within this particular worldview, it is easy to see why challengers are arguing that children should not read a particular book because reading is a powerful act—one that has effects on individual character and behavior.

Grounded in this idea of the power of writing, this chapter explores how past and present reading practices can be used to understand challengers’ construction of current interpretive strategies. Since the practices of writing and reading have changed over time, it is necessary to define what these practices are and how they may influence contemporary challengers. The chapter begins with a brief overview of writing practices and a discussion of the materiality of books. It then offers an overview of historical reading practices in the West starting in the Middle Ages through to the contemporary era. Finally the chapter offers a framework for understanding how the “undisciplined imagination” is conceptualized and figures in challengers’ discourse to explain why they



attempt to remove and relocated materials in public institutions. Here, as in the previous chapter, a “practice” is understood to be the actions of an individual that take place between and among the objective and the subjective. Practices related to print culture are both the formalized structures of writing and reading and how these structures are employed by individuals.

### **Writing Practices**

Writing, in contrast to orality, is a form of symbolic authority that acquires its power through material form. Writing is a performative action and its real-world effects outstrip the physical action of putting words to page (Lyons, 2010). There are many examples of this performative power of writing. Legal contracts, for example, are often not considered binding unless they are written down. That is, there is no marriage without a signed marriage license. Another example concerns the institution of slavery. Before manumission, the act of writing someone’s name under the heading “slave” made them a slave (Finkelstein & McCleery, 2005, p. 40). When the slave’s owner struck through his or name on this list, the slave was free. These acts of writing had and have actual ramifications in the “real world.”

It is complex to conceptualize how writing produces these effects. In the Western world the writing practices described above seem to operate as *indexical signs*. A concept first developed by Charles S. Peirce, an indexical sign has a tangible link between the signifier and the signified where there is a *correlation* between the meaning of the sign, or in this case the text, and reality. Other types of signs are icons (signs that are physically similar to what they represent) and symbolic signs.

Indexical signs indicate a concrete reality: It is a sign wherein “smoke means fire, pawprints mean the presence of a cat” (Seiter, 1992, p. 36). In the example given above, the words on the page (e.g., a person’s name under the heading slave) have a direct correlation with his or her status in the lifeworld. Further, the writing imbues the individual with that status. Another example of the indexical status of writing might be the words on a legal contract and the act of signing a marriage license signify an ontological change among the signatories. The signers of the marriage license become spouses by signing the contract upon which they are now bound to fulfill the words written therein. Note that these writing practices take place within wider institutional and social contexts that construct the written word as a powerful act. As demonstrated in this study, challengers are very concerned with truth in the written word and it is possible that this is due to understanding of text in the sense of indexical sign. This concept of correlation between the sign of the text and signified reality is particularly helpful in understanding challenger’s discourse regarding the nature of truth and fictional texts.

Writing, which in its performative capacity can give shape and framework to the social world, also has a direct influence on the authority given to books in modern society. Because they “contain” writing and are a fixed medium, books also have a particular kind of “power.” They operate as a symbolic, stabilizing object within the social world that can legitimate the ideas that are contained within them. That is, the book *as a book* legitimizes and gives credibility to ideas in texts. This connection between writing and books is a major theme in the discourse of censorship.

Lisa Jardine, who titles one chapter in her monograph “The Triumph of the Book,” notes that books “revolutionized the transmission of knowledge and permanently changed the attitudes of thinking Europe” (Jardine, 1998, p. 177). It is the book as a medium for the dissemination of knowledge that is crucial here as books allowed for the spread of a limitless number of ideas across the West. As demonstrated in Chapter 8, challengers are finely attuned to the legitimating power of writing and its influence over people in the sense that this power can validate the assumption presented in a particular text.

### **Materiality of Books**

If one assumes that for challengers the book is a symbolic object of authority, it must be noted that this authority is complicated by the fact that books may contain limitless content and ideas, as a consequence of this, books are simultaneously a stabilizing and a destabilizing force in society. A common theme in challengers’ discourse centers on whether or not the presence of a controversial idea in a book gives legitimacy to the idea as such. Book history scholarship demonstrates that the book operates not only as a legitimizing agent but also as a symbolic object that can be used to demonstrate one’s particular cultural sensibility. For example, during the early modern period, simply having a copy of the *Encyclopédie* on one’s library shelf demonstrated a particular sensibility and showed that the owner shared the progressive opinions of the *philosophes* who wrote the articles in encyclopedia (Darnton, 1979). Another historical example that demonstrates the importance of the book’s symbolic authority is the reverence the 19<sup>th</sup> century New England families described by William Gilmore held for

their single-volume Bibles. Even if the household had no other books, there was always a Bible which served as a family archive and a manual for living (Gilmore, 1989). This concept of the book as signifier of one's sensibilities is linked to challengers' concern over having objectionable material in public institutions such as libraries and schools.

In her monograph on a censorship controversy in Oklahoma discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, Louise Robbins (2001) argues that libraries are particularly susceptible to challenges and that this "vulnerability comes both from the importance and authority Americans accord the books...the library collects, organizes and circulates and from its position as a public institution charged with the preservation and transmission of culture" (p. 160). For challengers, having a book in a library collection—and especially, if the book is approved for curriculum use—means that the institution believes in the ideas that are presented in the text. In this context, ownership of books becomes a sign of a particular worldview.

Perhaps the most well-known debate in area of the authority of the book relates to the relationship between the presentation of the text and how it was interpreted by readers. In her treatise on the impact of printing on Western society, Elizabeth Eisenstein argues that printing changed culture not simply because ideas shifted but because the printing press allowed many more people to have access to these new ideas (Eisenstein, 2005). Eisenstein contends that printing allowed for the standardization of texts (i.e., fixity) and permitted people to discuss the same work across space and time. It should be noted that there are some historians consider Eisenstein's argument to be overly deterministic. Adrian Johns, in particular, believes that the idea of fixity in early printing

to be overstated (Johns, 2000). He argues that early modern printings of books were not uniform editions of texts and therefore could not be considered to be a source of stable knowledge. Nevertheless, the idea of the fixed work underpins and enables the practice of indexing the book and allows for ideas to be maintained over temporal and spatial distances.

The juxtaposition of the book as a revered material object and the importance of the text contained therein is also emphasized by Daniel Selcer in his monograph on early modern philosophy titled *Philosophy and the Book* (2010). Of particular interest is Selcer's discussion of Baruch Spinoza and how the mechanized printed word changed people's interpretation of text especially in relation to the Bible. Selcer notes that Spinoza posits two somewhat contradictory positions. First, that scripture itself is a fixed entity but its new status as simply "a book" means that it has lost some of its sacred character. Second and concurrently, that sacred meaning is inextricable from the materiality of the text (Selcer, 2010, p. 188). The words on the page are capable of creating real effects on the reader:

...a concatenation of letters on the page is capable of generating in me devotion to God (or its opposite...) means the disposition of these letters produces effects in my mind and in my body, and that those effects are transitions in my power to produce effects (i.e., to act and to exist) This is what constitutes the meaning of the words in question: the meaning of words is nothing but the effects they produce (Selcer, 2010, p. 192).

This idea of meaning and interpretation, even in the secular realm, leading to real effects is integral to understanding the discourse of censorship. As demonstrated in the chapters on themes in this discourse, challengers often fear that reading the targeted texts will not only lead to short-term harmful effects but also puts the reader's soul in jeopardy. The

book, as a material object that both stabilizes and transmits knowledge, is of primary importance to understanding how these effects become manifest in a reader. The next section of this chapter describes historical models that inform challengers' construction of the practice reading.

### **Historical Reading Practices**

Reading, like writing, is somewhat difficult to theorize. In this study, reading is constructed as a social practice that has changed over time and encompasses different physical modalities and interpretive strategies. In order to understand why people challenge books, it is necessary to delve into their understanding of how reading works, “what it means” to read a text, and how they construct the idea of “appropriate” reading materials. In her article on textual interpretation, Elizabeth Long (1992) demonstrates the social and collective nature of the practice of reading. Even though reading is often seen as a solitary activity (a concept the author vividly illustrates through a series of images that show lone readers), Long establishes the collective nature of reading by demonstrating its reliance on both social infrastructure and social framing. By social infrastructure, Long means that reading is an activity that is learned through social relationships and relies on the social base of literary culture. Social framing constructs certain materials as being “worth reading” and is socially defined. As shown in Chapter 8, this concept of “worthy” reading becomes visible in challengers' discourse when they refer to the challenged material as “garbage” or “junk” in opposition to books that they consider to be worth reading.

The following sections of the chapter briefly describe reading practices from the Middle Ages to the present<sup>2</sup> with particular emphasis on the interpretive strategies employed when encountering written texts. Stanley Fish notes that “interpretive strategies are not put into execution after reading...they are the shape of reading and because they are the shape of reading they give texts their shape, making them rather than, as it is usually assumed, arising from them” (Fish, 1982, p. 168). The meaning of a text is never fixed and is open to polysemic (i.e., multiple meanings) across time, groups of people, or even within a single individual. Interpretive strategies are defined here as a set of implicit decisions regarding analysis that one makes both before and while one is reading. These decisions have many different influences including social constructions of written texts and, as noted previously, the perceived authority of the book.

### **The Middle Ages**

In the Middle Ages, historians argue that writing was understood to be a medium of authority which held the record of obligations of the poor and had both magic and evil powers (Chartier, 2002). This conceptualization can be connected to the performative aspects of writing described above. It was, according to historical accounts, an era of “restricted literacy” in which few people could read or write. Restricted literacy is defined as a society in which only the gentry, clerics, and other elites are able to read—everyone else lives on the margins of these literate classes (Lyons, 2010, p. 13). This meant, *ipso facto*, that problematic texts were not accessible to most of the population.

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<sup>2</sup> It must be noted that this overview has a distinctly Christian bent. However, as the majority religion in the West during the time periods described, these are the practices most studied by researchers. For a description of Jewish reading practices during the Middle Ages, see Bonfil (2003).

Although many people could not read, those who could did so primarily for religious purposes. Christianity is a religion whose doctrines are based almost exclusively on texts. The Christian canon consists of the written texts of the Hebrew Bible (or Old Testament—one section of which is called “The Writings”) and the New Testament that includes the written Gospels and letters to Christian communities from wandering apostles. For the Christian, almost everything that one needed to know for salvation was contained in these texts. Reading for them was considered to be the path to redemption. As demonstrated in the analysis chapters, the negative of this idea (that reading can be a pathway to sin) is a common theme in challengers’ discourse.

### **Levels of Interpretation**

In the Middle Ages, those who could read would often engage with both scripture and possibly other texts on a dialogical level and employ interpretive strategies that did not encourage a single fixed meaning but, as described below, a method that allowed for simultaneous polysemy of a given text. These codified interpretive strategies were intended to guide the reader away from a negative interpretive pathway of sin. According to M.B. Parkes, there were four levels of interpretation that readers used when studying texts. The first was *lectio*, in which the student had to identify the elements of the texts. *Emendatio* referred to the corrections made by the student to the manuscript text. The third, *enarratio*, described the process of interpreting the text’s subject matter. Finally, *iudicium* referred to judgment of the aesthetic qualities of the text. Discrepancies in texts, especially sacred texts, could be attributed to the multiple senses of scripture (Parkes, 2003). Scholars engaged with and produced their own personal readings or exegesis of



texts through a process that was fully systematized. Although, as time went on, students used a variety of glosses and abridgements to help them better understand difficult texts, all were encouraged to be readers and not simply reciters. For example, Jacqueline Hamesse offers an anecdote of Robert of Melen who, next to a passage on *lectors* and *recitators* writes “concerning those who apply themselves to the exercises of reading *and* citations of authorities and do not understand them” (Hamesse, 2003, p. 108).

### **Silent Reading and Private Interpretation**

According to accounts of the history of reading, physical reading practices shifted during the Middle Ages. Hamesse discusses modes of reading that existed at the time. First, people read by murmuring in low voices to themselves. People also continued to read aloud publicly—a practice that dated from antiquity (Hamesse, 2003, p. 104). Third, although it took some time for this practice to take hold, Hamesse notes that people also read silently. When reading silently—in contrast to reading aloud—one’s thoughts and therefore one’s interaction with the text is private.

This historical shift to silent reading is important for understanding the discourse of challengers. When someone reads silently, an observer has no knowledge of how the reader is interpreting the text. Paul Saenger notes that the connection between silent reading and accusations of heresy began in the 11th century. Reading aloud in community (public *lectio*) meant that others would be able to provide corrections to heretical statements. Saenger explicitly links the spread heresy to the silent, private reading of tracts:

Alone in his study, the author, whether a well-known professor or an obscure student, could compose or read heterodox ideas without being overheard. In the

classroom, the student, reading silently to himself, could listen to the orthodox opinions of his professor and visually compare them with the views of those who rejected established ecclesiastical authority...Private visual reading and composition thus encouraged individual critical thinking and contributed ultimately to the development of skepticism and intellectual heresy” (Saenger, 2003, p. 137).

When one reads silently, one could be thinking heretical thoughts and there is no method for correcting them. This point of distinction between reading silently and reading aloud is vitally important for understanding the discourse of contemporary challengers. Silent reading places interpretation primarily in the hands of the individual. As demonstrated in Chapter 8, the issue of unmediated text is a salient one for the challengers. While other mediums, such as broadcast television, can be censored by standards and practices boards, reading silently means that outsiders do not know where one is located or how one might be interpreting the text.

### **Early Modern Period (1500-1800)**

Along with changes to reading practices in the Middle Ages described above, new reading practices in the early modern period also provide models for understanding some distinctive aspects of challengers’ construction of reading in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Several shifts in reading practices described by historians in this period appear in the discourse of contemporary challengers. Some notable differences include an emphasis on unmediated texts and the fear of the effects of unmediated interpretation, along with these practices there was also increased distributions of printed materials and a continuing growth of literacy throughout the time period. Each of these changes is briefly described below.

### Unmediated Texts

As noted above, silent reading became a more widespread practice during the Middle Ages. Without the intervention of fellow “readers” who were listening to a text as it was read out loud, reading became a personal, individualized experience between the reader and the text. The text itself, however, often had its own mediatory attributes. As Brian Stock notes there were “textual communities” or “‘microsocieties’ that shared a common understanding of scripture” (Stock, 1996, p. 23). Sacred and classical works usually included annotations, glosses, and commentaries that would guide the reader towards a “correct” interpretation of the original text. According to Stock, individuals who shared a particular understanding of the text became a community even if they were dissimilar in other ways.

During the early modern period, sacred and classical works that were published in their original languages could be circulated without commentaries and annotations (Grafton, 2003). This particular model of reading did not focus on the interpretations of others; instead historians argue that individuals could form interpretations of classics unmediated by the annotations of others. While in the Middle Ages, a “typical” reader who read silently did not have the influence of others who were *hearing* the same text, during the early modern age, the “typical” reader did not always have to contend with the work of others in the text itself. As a consequence of this, interpretive strategies that one brought to the text exerted considerable influence when reading a text.

It should be noted that humanist scholars in the early modern age eventually produced their own commentaries and these were often published alongside the original

text. As Anthony Grafton writes, “the glosses of humanist teacher, usually offered first as lessons in classrooms, then rewritten for print, twined themselves like the illuminators’ vines around the texts... (Grafton, 2003, p. 204). However, the early modern age also placed considerable emphasis on the individual and his own interpretation of the texts. As described by Grafton (2003), often readers would write their own annotations to supplement the printed ones thus revealing their individual interpretation of the texts.

The early modern age was also a time of religious upheaval in Europe. Although there were many doctrinal variations in what eventually became Protestant Christianity, one—*sola scriptura* or salvation through knowledge of the Bible alone—is particularly important for understanding the contemporary discourse of challengers. Inherent in this idea is the belief that each person can read and understand for him or herself the truth of the good news of Jesus Christ (Mullin, 2008). Along with the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers (a belief that there is no mediator between the believer and God), the doctrine of *sola scriptura* indicates a belief that each person can bring about his or her own salvation through reading.

### **Unmediated Interpretation**

When one considers the doctrine of *sola scriptura*, it is not surprising then, that Protestant reformers viewed the practice of reading with some trepidation. This doctrine as well as the practice of reading unmediated texts silently led to two contradictory notions regarding reading the Bible. First, since the reformers assumed that God wants to save his people, the Bible was considered to be a simple text for anyone to understand. However, reformers simultaneously feared that this might not be the case and were

concerned that individual interpretations might lead to heresy—the negative interpretation described above (Gilmont, 2003). This fear was, in some respects, exacerbated by the events of the Peasants War (1524-1525) in which tenant farmers animated by with the anti-authoritarian doctrines of the Revolution rose up against feudal lords. Martin Luther, in particular, was highly influenced by the war and published commentaries on the scriptures in order to guide his followers toward “correct” interpretation.

As noted earlier, fear of unmediated interpretation is critical for understanding the discourse of contemporary challengers. As Martin Lyons notes

“neither Protestant writers nor the Catholic hierarchy could predict readers’ responses. Lutherans, Calvinists and Inquisitors alike confronted the independence of individual readers who could not easily be influenced or guided in the desired direction...The interpretation of scripture could not be controlled...” (Lyons, 2010, p. 55).

In the early modern age, reformers encouraged their followers to read on their own but with a reference text to guide them. These readers were not “trusted” to arrive at this correct interpretation on their own. Although the segments of society who are not trusted to have adequate interpretive skills have changed over time, this study demonstrates that the fear of unmediated interpretation is paramount to understanding why people challenge materials in public institutions.

### **Increased Distribution and Literacy**

Along with an increase in unmediated texts and the fear of how individuals would interpret such texts, the early modern period also saw the advent of the printing press, greater distribution of texts, as well as increased literacy. As noted earlier, Jardine (1998)

argues that the book altered the nature of knowledge in Western society. How this happened and the nuances of this change remains highly contested among scholars. One of Jardine's explanations for this change, that books were less expensive than manuscripts, seems the most salient for understanding of the discourse of censorship. Since books were less expensive they were (eventually) more widely disseminated in society. This meant that more people might have access to knowledge that was not previously readily available to them. And yet by implication, people were in danger of becoming poor interpreters of texts.

According to conventional accounts, not only were there more texts available for reading in the early modern period, there were also more people to read them. The spread of literacy during this time period is well documented (Finkelstein, 2005; Lyons, 2010). For the purposes of this study, it is important to note that this increase in the literate populace meant that more people would be susceptible to the dangers of the unmediated text. One might surmise that as more people were able to engage in the practice of reading, anxieties that they would do so "incorrectly" would also be intensified. This fear of unmediated interpretation relates to the concept of "undisciplined imagination described in more detail below and helps inform some of unease found in challengers' discourse on reading.

### **Modern Period (1800 – Present)**

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some sources note a "print explosion" in the modern world (Lyons, 2012). Technological changes eventually gave rise to the mass production of books. A few notable changes in reading took place during this time period. Both

Europe and the United States experienced a reading fever, characterized by marked rises in literacy and the “secularization” of literature. Particularly important to understanding the discourse of censorship are the concepts of critical distance to the text and common sense interpretive strategies. These latter changes are described in some depth below.

### **Secularization and Extensive Reading**

According to William J. Gilmore, the secularization of reading material occurred more slowly in the United States. Even if the household had no other books, there was always a Bible present in the homes of the New England families. For 19<sup>th</sup> century American families, the family Bible served as both a family archive and a manual for living (Gilmore, 1989). However, reading fever for texts other than the Bible grew in the Antebellum period and the reading public in the United States became especially enamored of novels which “threatened not just to coexist with elite literature but to replace it” (Davidson, 2004, p. 54).

Although Rolf Engelsing’s well-known theory regarding intensive vs. extensive reading primarily refers to practices of the bourgeois in 18<sup>th</sup> century Germany, because of the slower pace of change in reading practices in the United States, his thesis regarding changes in reading practices provides a useful starting point for understanding the practice of reading in the modern age in America (Gilmore, 1989). Intensive reading, a style that characterized many readers up to this point, involved reading a few items closely while extensive reading describes reading many items with less care. Leah Price argues that Engelsing established a contrast between “reverent readers and passive consumers... [that] fuel a conservative distaste for modern mass culture and mass

markets” (Price, 2004, p. 54). This distaste for mass culture and mass reading was marked in this time of reading fever and is well-documented in Stephen Colclough’s *Consuming Texts* which uses newspaper illustrations from the industrial age to demonstrate this idea. One such illustration shows a father ignoring his daughters who are looking at suspicious books while he is distracted by advertisements (Colclough, 2007). As will be demonstrated in Chapter 6, this scene illustrates a particular fear that is common in the discourse of censorship wherein challengers are often afraid that other parents are not “living up to their jobs” by setting proper boundaries for their children. The image described above situates that this fear within a long tradition of discourse about reading practices.

### **Critical Distance and Common Sense**

Another concept of primary importance to understanding reading practices in the modern era is the idea of *critical distance* to a text which is linked to the modern idea that humans are capable of rational thought and are able to apply their own ideas to a particular text. That is, they have “the capacity for resistance and disbelief” (Lyons, 2010, p.117) and do not simply accept whatever is written in the text. This is an interpretive strategy that defines many interpretive communities throughout the West today and it is the interpretive strategy that many librarians, administrators, and other staff of public libraries and schools have in common. When students are assigned a particular book in school, one surmises that the staff members who assign it believe that the students will be able to have critical distance from the text. In public and school libraries, librarians and other staff members hold parents responsible for ensuring that



their children are reading materials at the appropriate level. That is, that the children are sufficiently mature to have critical distance from text in the book.

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, a particular conception of the idea of “rational thought” took hold in the United States in which rational thought is limited to common sense thoughts. Although it does not necessarily have resonance for all modern Americans, I am arguing here that this philosophical framework informs the discourse of challengers in this study. Their discourse concerning interpretive strategies of text is grounded in a particular understanding of how one views text. For them, “rational thought” is coupled with a view of “common sense” that elevates a monosemic rather than a polysemic interpretation of text. The American idea of common sense, which is based in a Scottish philosophical tradition, is an attitude:

...grounded in experience in the sense of staying in touch with the world...and it is grounded by experience, in that it is the fruit of innumerable encounters with the world’s basic features and innumerable judgments both of fact and logic. The common sense attitude, once highly developed, enables the clarification, collection, and synthesis of common sense truths into a body of knowledge accessible to a broader community (Segrest, 2010, p. 23).

Although Scottish Common Sense philosophy never became very popular on the European continent, it exerted a strong influence over the American imagination. In his monograph examining the American common sense tradition and its major advocates including John Witherspoon and William James, Scott Philip Segrest (2010) notes that the tradition reigned in American philosophy until the post-Civil War era. Common sense permeates many founding documents of the United States. As Segrest persuasively argues, when the founding fathers wrote that “we hold these truths to be self-evident,”

they were referring to a self-evident truth that is grounded in the Scottish common sense tradition wherein truths must be experienced (Segrest, 2010, p. 6).

In his monograph on the philosophical foundations and development of theology in the United States, Mark Noll (2002) argues that common sense philosophy provided a necessary epistemological framework for the Revolution era. Previous eras including the Reformation, Puritanism of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and the First Great Awakening of the 18<sup>th</sup> century “stressed human disability as much as human capability, noetic deficiency as much as epistemic capacity, and historical realism as much as social optimism” (Noll, 2002, p. 95). Common sense, on the other hand, emphasizes the self-sufficiency of the individual and his or her ability to observe and understand the world around them. Noll’s work traces the spread of common sense philosophy from Scotland through the work of Scottish immigrants including John Witherspoon to institutions of higher learning in the U.S. especially the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University). Of particular importance for these philosophers is an epistemology based on scientific rationality. This orientation toward the scientific, especially in the realm of the interpretation of texts, is explained in more detail by George Marsden (1991) in his writings on fundamentalism and evangelicalism in the United States.

According to Marsden, rational ideas based in a common sense understanding of the world are of great importance in fundamentalist and evangelical culture. This is particularly prevalent in the idea of scientific Christianity wherein the Bible is seen as a book of scientific facts that can be understood by any reader and simply need to be rationally classified. A common sense orientation toward reading the Bible means that

mystical, metaphorical and symbolic perceptions of reality have largely disappeared. Instead most Americans share what sociologist Michael Cavanaugh designates an “empiricist folk epistemology.” Things are thought best described exactly the way they appear, accurately with no hidden meanings (Marsden, 1991, p. 157).

That is, when one reads the Bible—and possibly other texts—the meaning of the text is plain. In marked contrast to the fourfold sense of the scripture from the Middle Ages described above, polysemy is impossible. One example of this reading practice can be found in so-called Young Earth Creationists who do not allow for any allegorical interpretation of the 1 Genesis creation story. For them, a day *means* a 24-hour period. This viewpoint is clearly demonstrated on the website for the Young Earth Creationist group Answers in Genesis which states that “the Bible clearly teaches that God created in six literal, 24-hour days a few thousand years ago” ([answersingenesis.org](http://answersingenesis.org)).

This foundation in common sense philosophy means that the idea of critical distance has a slightly different implication in this context. It does not necessarily refer to the idea that a rational interpretation of text is based in a given individual but that the text itself is only open to a particular interpretation—one that is self-evident to any rational reader. This study demonstrates that, for many challengers, the idea of reading a text with critical distance as an interpretive strategy is suffused with the concept of reading with common sense.

The concept of reading with common sense is exceedingly important for understanding the discourse of censorship and the literalism with which challengers approach texts. Challengers often state that anyone who reads a particular text can see why they are requesting that it be removed or relocated. The problems with the text are

self-evident and a rational person need only read to understand this. For them, polysemy is impossible and there is only one likely interpretation for a given text. However, the manner in which this interpretation will impact the reader may vary wildly depending on the mental abilities of the individual. For challengers, *it is the effects of this common sense reading that takes precedence*. Rational people (usually defined by challengers as adults) have the capacity and skill to maintain critical distance from the effects of common sense reading while other members of society—especially children—are unable to maintain this distance. This is particularly clear when challengers discuss how the imagination operates, another idea that can be understood through past practices.

### **Undisciplined Imagination and Mimesis**

In his chapter on texts and images in the Renaissance, Peter Stallybrass (2011) observes that illustrations in scripture were crucial to interpreting the text. He focuses on the story of Genesis 2-3 where Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden and notes that images of the text that portray them as naked while that text states that they were clothed. However, for Stallybrass, “the visual images have effectively rewritten the biblical text. These visual exegeses are more fascinating and important precisely because they produce meanings for which there is no textual support” (Stallybrass, 2011, p. 87). The connection between text and image is of primary importance to challengers. However, as many of the books that are the targets of challengers do not contain illustration, they are more often concerned with mental images that are conjured by the text on the page. That is, challengers conceptualize imagining as a mimetic experience where, through reading a text, the reader experiences the actions in the text. Since

reading conjures images in one's mind, reading about a particular event is akin to living through it.

Cathy Davidson (2004), in her monograph on the increase in reading novels in antebellum United States, describes the phenomenon of polysemic interpretation as “undisciplined imagination” wherein the reader is unable to maintain distance between the events in a text and his or her own response. Davidson links fear of the undisciplined imagination to the influence of Common Sense philosophy described above. Teachers at the Ivy League colleges in the 18<sup>th</sup> century passed on to their students “an implicit suspicion of the undisciplined imagination, a conviction that literature must serve clear social needs, and a pervasive assumption that social need and social order were one and the same. Through these students—many of whom served as ministers—these ideas were readily disseminated throughout the populace” (Davidson, 2004, p. 114). I am arguing here that this suspicion of the imagination continues to inform the discourse of challengers. They fear, as the critics in the time period that Davidson studies, that there is no space between the events in the text and the reader's response to the text. “The very act of reading fiction asserted the primacy of the reader and the legitimacy of that reader's perceptions and responses” (Davidson, 2004, p. 118). Like the critics in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, challengers are concerned with the effect of reading objectionable material on the social order.

To summarize, in the modern era an orientation toward written texts developed wherein the reader maintained a critical distance toward texts. In the United States, this idea of critical distance is linked to the concept of common sense. Some people—such as

in historical examples women in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries or children in our time—are believed to be constitutionally unable to maintain critical distance toward a text. It is important to note that these reading practices are never isolated from one another and it is possible to read some texts with critical distance and other texts using more modular interpretive strategies. This harkens back to some of the interpretive strategies of the Reformation when leaders wanted their followers to read scripture on their own but were also frightened of what the consequences of this practice might be. Common sense interpretive strategy and fear of the undisciplined imagination is an important aspect of the worldview of challengers.

In order to situate this study, the following chapter presents previous research on intellectual freedom and censorship which is conceived as a practical philosophy. The legal, philosophical, historical and modern case studies of censorship in this area of research within library and information science point to a field that is focused primarily on policy formation and practical actions that aid librarians and administrators in subverting the claims of challengers. The chapter also discusses previous work on challengers and reading within LIS and in other fields of research.

## **Chapter 4: Previous Research on Intellectual Freedom and Reading in Library and Information Science**

This study is situated within the larger research area on intellectual freedom within the field of library and information science (LIS). Although the term “intellectual freedom” does not explicitly appear in challengers’ discourse, the discourse of censorship is intimately related to this concept defined here as is defined as the right to access the whole of the information universe without fear of reprisal from the powers that be. As will be demonstrated below, the research in this area often focuses on how libraries and librarianship should respond to threats to intellectual freedom both inside and outside of the field. As noted in Chapter 2, librarians hold significant symbolic power within their institutions in the field of cultural production. The scholarship on intellectual freedom and censorship, because it is produced by specialists for specialists, adds to this power by providing sophisticated justifications for support of intellectual freedom within the information professions.

This chapter begins with a short introduction to the concept of intellectual freedom as it is understood by librarians. It then presents an overview of the research in intellectual freedom and censorship in the field library and information science. Next, the chapter discusses previous research on challengers both within LIS and in other areas. An historical overview of research on reading practices in LIS is discussed in the final section of the chapter.

### **Intellectual Freedom**

Although it is rarely foregrounded, the meaning of the terms “intellectual freedom” and “censorship” are often rooted in implicit beliefs about the effects of

knowledge and reading. What knowledge one thinks should be accessible is intimately tied to one's assumptions of how that knowledge will affect the seeker. People's epistemological positions (that is, the justifications and verifications that they give for having a particular belief) regarding the concept of intellectual freedom are often based on how they believe new knowledge affects people's lives and society as a whole. To use the types of knowledge described in Chapter 1, one might believe there is some knowledge that would have a detrimental effect on individuals and society and therefore ought to be considered "forbidden" or "illegitimate." One's epistemological position operates as both structuring and structured structures in one's life and form part of an individual's habitus. Therefore definitions of intellectual freedom are socially constructed ideas based in a particular worldview.

In contemporary librarianship, the principle upholding intellectual freedom and opposing censorship are codified in the profession. Five out of six articles of the Library Bill of Rights (LBR), a guideline for library policy developed by the American Library Association (ALA), relate to intellectual freedom and censorship (Appendix B). For example, Article II states that "libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval" (American Library Association, 1996). Article II of the most recent ALA Code of Ethics states: "We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources" (American Library Association, 2008) (Appendix C). The ALA is also the creator of the "Freedom to Read" statement which argues that this freedom is crucial to democratic



governance (Appendix D). It includes seven propositions that cover various controversial aspects of reading. For example, Proposition 4 states that “there is no place in our society for efforts to *coerce the taste of others* [emphasis added], to confine adults to the reading matter deemed suitable for adolescents, or to inhibit the efforts of writers to achieve artistic expression” (American Library Association, 2004). This means that, according to the ALA, information professionals should support intellectual freedom for all individuals even when it comes to seemingly benign issues of taste in genre or perceived age appropriateness.

The indoctrination (used here non-pejoratively) of support for intellectual freedom is also a major part of library school education throughout the United States. Introductory library science texts and books on library ethics such as Robert Hauptman’s *Ethics and Librarianship* (2002) note that “students in librarianship are acculturated to defend intellectual freedom and abjure censorship. The general consensus seems to be that they accept this responsibility and that they continue to do so in the field” (Hauptman, 2002, p. 22). This consensus has become the generally accepted code of ethics for the library profession.

Codification and institutionalization means that support for intellectual freedom is normalized in librarianship and has become part of the profession’s symbolic power within the field of cultural production. However, it should be noted that librarians did not always hold this view and that their support for intellectual freedom developed in tandem with an agnostic view toward the effects of reading and institutionalized responses toward challenges to materials in library collections. The following section presents a

brief historical overview of the development of systemic and institutionalized support for intellectual freedom within librarianship. This history demonstrates how librarians consolidated their symbolic capital within their institutions particularly through the symbolic power of their professional association, the American Library Association. This institutionalized support for intellectual freedom is one of the foundations that librarians and other staff and administrators use in challenge cases to mitigate the voices of outsiders, namely, challengers. Another base of support for such justifications, research on intellectual freedom and censorship in LIS, is described later in the chapter.

### **Intellectual Freedom and the History of Librarianship**

In 1876, when the ALA was first established, librarians were generally members of the elite and were often opposed to collecting or reading popular fiction. In her monograph on the history of librarianship and intellectual freedom from 1876-1939, Evelyn Geller (1984) notes that:

It is significant that librarians who did challenge authority asserted their autonomy in the name of censorship. They used that value to demonstrate their professionalism on intellectual and ethical grounds—their superior judgment, or expertise, on harmful literature, and their greater commitment to the public good” (Geller, 1984, p. 39).

Librarians used their new professional status to encourage their patrons to read “good books.” In other words, librarians themselves censored books they considered to be inappropriate by simply refusing to purchase them for their collections. As shown in the section on reading studies, this practice of censorship was informed by a belief that reading books had direct effects on the reader and that these effects had a one-to-one

correlation. Reading “good books” led to “good behavior” while reading “bad books” had the opposite effect.

Although such attitudes toward reading “good books” continued within the library profession during the Progressive Era, librarians shifted their tactics in regard to their patrons. They were highly influenced by the social justice theories and movements of the Progressive Era and the library became a place for “socializing the reader” where the staff members were concerned with washing, sexual morality, and homelessness (Garrison, 2003, p. 41). Books of all kinds were added to library collections in order to “lure” people into the library, often in the hope that they would eventually turn towards classic literature and non-fiction. Although they maintained the elitist notion that patrons should be steered toward reading “good books,” it was during this period that librarians began to more fully support the concept of intellectual freedom for all. As Dee Garrison (2003) notes, the censorship of the previous era slowly gave way to a more democratic position regarding reading—that people could choose their reading materials for themselves. This change reflects the growing acceptance of the agnostic view of reading effects, described in more detail later in this chapter, which holds that it is impossible to know what effect reading a particular text will have on the reader.

During the Great Depression, institutional and professional support for intellectual freedom grew. Although there is some debate regarding which public library system initially developed an intellectual freedom statement (Latham, 2009), by 1939 the ALA had adopted its own policy statement based on one originally developed by the Des Moines Public Library in 1938. The 1939 Library Bill of Rights is suffused with ideas

appealing to the importance of free access to information in order to maintain democracy. As “an institution to educate for democratic living,” libraries should endeavor to collect “all sides” of controversial topics on the basis of their value and interest to the library’s patrons (Geller, 1984, p. 175). These ideas concerning democracy and collection development continue to form the foundational building blocks for the ALA’s current documents on intellectual freedom. The concept of collecting “all sides,” in particular demonstrates the integration of the agnostic view of reading effects with librarianship’s support of intellectual freedom. There is no longer a prevailing concern within the profession that reading “bad books” will necessarily lead to “bad behavior.”

Following the adoption of the 1939 LBR, the ALA also established the awkwardly named Committee on Intellectual Freedom to Safeguard the Rights of Library Users to Freedom of Inquiry. However, the organization initially did not provide sufficient structural or monetary support for the new policy. There were also librarians who were not ready to support intellectual freedom as part of their professional ethics in the late 30s and early 40s (Robbins, 1996). Over time, however, more librarians began to support intellectual freedom even as the rise of anti-Communism in the United States tested their support. In 1948, the ALA adopted a new version of the Library Bill of Rights just as librarians across the country grappled with the collection of propaganda materials and loyalty oaths. Librarians often adopted policies that supported intellectual freedom but also capitulated to community norms and standards. As demonstrated in the well-known the Fiske Report (1959) titled “Book selection and censorship”, when confronted with “enemies” both imminent and distant, many librarians chose to self-

ensor rather than support the ideals of neutrality and intellectual freedom. As described below in the section on research on libraries and librarians in this chapter, concern that librarians will not uphold their stated principles of support for intellectual freedom is the driving force behind many studies within LIS.

Support for intellectual freedom became more institutionalized and solidified in the 1960s when Judith Krug established and became director of the ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF). This new office "put teeth" behind librarians' philosophical stances toward censorship and intellectual freedom. Three mandates guide the OIF's mission: to collect and communicate data regarding the state of intellectual freedom in the United States, to provide legal analysis of First Amendment law, and to educate librarians and other interested parties regarding intellectual freedom. Of particular importance for this study is the *Intellectual Freedom Manual* which has been updated eight times since its initial publication in 1974. The *Manual* provides an overview of intellectual freedom in libraries, interpretations of the Library Bill of Rights, Freedom to Read Policies as well as essays on ethics and legal frameworks relating to intellectual freedom. The book operates as an institutional boundary object that encourages librarians to create policies that codify support for intellectual freedom within the profession. These policies solidify the symbolic power of librarians within their institutions. Accordingly, in order to challenge the inclusion of a particular item in library collections, patrons are required to proceed through a series of bureaucratic hoops that collectively become a form of symbolic violence mitigating the voices of challengers. Many of these policies are based on prescriptions given in the *Manual*

which was recently updated in 2010. The next section of this chapter investigates another foundation for librarianship's symbolic power in challenge cases, research in the area of intellectual freedom and censorship in the field of library and information science.

### **Symbolic Power and Intellectual Freedom**

The *Manual of Intellectual Freedom* provides an excellent starting point for evaluating research on intellectual freedom and censorship in library and information science. As Eliza Dresang (2006) notes in her article on intellectual freedom in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, “publications about intellectual freedom or censorship in relation to libraries are frequently philosophical (including ethics and values); legal (laws and court cases); descriptive of policy, as opposed to analytical or theoretical or are isolated accounts of individual or institutional incidents” (p. 171). This scholarship, taken as a whole, leads to what one might call “practical philosophy” which focuses on policy prescription and description and discusses practical actions that librarians should take when materials are challenged. That is, the research increases the symbolic capital of librarians and other information professionals by systematizing support for intellectual freedom. This leads to information professionals mitigating the voices of “outsiders” when it comes to challenge cases, an act that Bourdieu calls symbolic violence.

### **Information Ethics**

Philosophical scholarship (including ethical studies) on intellectual freedom generally posits that a particular philosophical stance provides the best foundation for supporting intellectual freedom in librarianship. For example, Martin Frické, Kay Mathiesen, and Don Fallis (2000) argue that librarians' support for intellectual freedom

should rest on social contract theory. For the authors, access to information should be based on societal, not individual good and therefore some ideas should be censored. They state that “there is some information that should be kept out of libraries ... because merely disseminating it, or facilitating access to it, would violate rights or have bad consequences” (Frické, Mathiesen, & Fallis, 2000, p. 476). According to the authors, support for intellectual freedom does not include providing access to dangerous or hurtful information.

Tony Doyle (2001), on the other hand, argues that librarians should oppose censorship on the basis of the utilitarian philosophy of John Stuart Mill since “we cannot know beforehand precisely which set of ideas or images if published would do more harm than good” (p. 69). These philosophical articles often do not offer practical applications of the theories that are discussed but they do add to the symbolic power of librarianship for supporting intellectual freedom. Librarians and other information professionals are empowered to ground their actions against challengers on well-known philosophical foundations. The analytic nature of these arguments is in direct contrast to the more “emotional” justifications made by the challengers. Information professionals are also able to draw on social structures and frameworks that have roots in more “elite” institutional foundations such as the law and philosophy instead of simply employing “common sense” arguments.

### **Legal Framework: Policy and Procedure**

Legal scholarship in intellectual freedom tends to be written by attorneys who evaluate intellectual policies, including the Freedom to Read Statement and the Library

Bill of Rights (LBR), in terms of legal precedent and philosophy. One example of this scholarship is G.B. Baldwin's (1996) conservative critique of the LBR. Baldwin evaluates each section of the LBR in light of relevant case law. He argues that freedom of access is not possible and that the library must make moral and economic judgments when developing collections. For Baldwin the LBR offers uncertain commitment to intellectual freedom and embodies the interests of librarians, not patrons. This is a more blunt assertion of the argument I am making throughout this study—that librarians use their consolidated power to inflict symbolic violence on challengers.

Yale M. Braunstein's (1990) article discusses conflicts between copyright law (that is, the ownership of information) and intellectual freedom and calls for different copyright laws for different mediums. Of particular interest is his discussion of the word free: "we use the same word to mean 'unhindered' and without charge' while many other languages use two different words for these separate concepts. This problem of dual definition of the term "freedom" appears in Braunstein's discussion of government user fees restricting access to federal data sources (Braunstein 1990, p. 130). The tension between intellectual property and intellectual freedom comes from two sources. First, it comes from the need for state control and second, from the economics of distribution.

Barbara Jones, (1999), on the other hand, focuses on the institution of the library and states that the library should be understood as a limited public forum and not a traditional forum for debate. As with the philosophical scholarship, legal arguments for or against various intellectual freedom policies in that realm are often quite esoteric. Setting aside the Baldwin article described above, they generally allow librarians to argue that



their policies are rooted in structural legal frameworks that are accepted as the law of the land in the United States. In other words, like the philosophical arguments given above, this research can offer rationalized, analytical foundation for implementing certain procedures in the library while evading the arguments of challengers.

There is also a great deal of information published on how these policies, based in philosophical and legal foundations, should be implemented in libraries. For example, along with the *Intellectual Freedom Manual*, the American Library Association also publishes a series titled *Intellectual Freedom Front Lines* (Jones & American Library Association. Office for Intellectual Freedom, 2009; Pinnell-Stephens & American Library Association. Office for Intellectual Freedom, 2012; Scales & American Library Association. Office for Intellectual Freedom, 2009) which discuss how to defend intellectual freedom in academic, public, and school libraries. The books offer general introductions to the concept of intellectual freedom in the various settings, case studies, and suggested procedures for implementing policies.

### **Historical Case Studies**

Within the realm of academic research in LIS, historians have published book-length works of individual intellectual freedom cases. For example, Louise S. Robbins's (2001) history of a case of book censorship in Oklahoma during the 1950's focuses on Ruth Brown, a librarian in Bartlesville. Brown was accused of putting communist propaganda in the local library but the pamphlets had actually been planted. The people of Bartlesville were actually upset that Brown worked for racial equality in the town and used the material to turn her into a scapegoat. Robbins notes that the ALA focused on the

censorship and not the racial equality aspect of the case. Another historical study, Shirley A. Wiegand and Wayne A. Wiegand's *Books on Trial* (2007), investigates another case of a "communist books scare" in 1940s Oklahoma.

Although more limited in scope, these historical case studies place contemporary librarians within a long tradition of other professionals who stand for intellectual freedom even in difficult circumstances. They encourage librarians to not "give in" to challengers' demands to remove or relocate collection materials.

### **Contemporary Case Studies**

Perhaps the most common type of research on intellectual freedom and censorship is written by practitioners and are primarily case studies and reflective essays. A recently published book published by ALA, *True Stories of Censorship Battles in America's Libraries*, focuses on librarians' accounts of challenge cases (Nye & Barco, 2012). Many of these case studies appear periodically in trade literature including *American Libraries*, *Library Journal*, and the *Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom* (the bimonthly publication of the ALA's Office of Intellectual Freedom). For example Linda Cornette's (1998) article "A Censor: How Do You Know One When You See One," gives a psychological profile of challengers. Donald Davis's (1999) article gives Family Friendly Libraries, a conservative library watchdog group that attempts to influence public library collection development policies and library boards.

Other articles that fall into this category include interviews with and essays by authors whose books have been targets of challengers. For example, Susan Patron (2009) describes her experiences when her book, *The Higher Power of Lucky*, was challenged.

These case studies articles, which do not emphasize theory and analysis, usually encourage librarians to maintain a hard line against removing or relocating books in library collections.

### **Research on Libraries and Librarians**

Intellectual freedom research also includes scholarly, empirical studies that tend to focus on the librarians' attitudes toward censorship and whether or not librarians have ideologically diverse collections. Marjorie Lowenthal's (née Fiske) 1959 report on self-censorship by librarians is a classic example of this type of research. Lowenthal, a sociologist, interviewed librarians in California and found that they tended to select books that would not lead to controversy. In 1972, Charles Busha (1972) surveyed librarians in the Midwest and found a correlation between authoritarianism and censorship behavior in librarians. Like Fiske, he also found that librarians were wary of controversy. Howard White (1981) used data from the Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography in order to demonstrate that most people do not agree with librarianship's official position on censorship.

Alex Spence (2000) conducted a collection survey of public libraries in order to see whether or not they collected controversial children's books. In 2008, *School Library Journal* surveyed 655 school librarians and found that 70 percent avoid buying titles that are likely to be the target of challengers (Whelan, 2009). Although not an empirical study, Rebecca Hill (2010) also explored the issue of self-censorship in school libraries arguing that librarians should not use labels or restricted shelves to preemptively head off challenges to materials in their collections.

Research investigating librarians' support for intellectual freedom operates as a cautionary tale to the profession. Although the profession purports to support intellectual freedom, there are some who do not live up to their stated ethical codes of conduct. These articles demonstrate that librarians have a somewhat fragile hold on the symbolic power of their institutions. It is possible that this lack of consistency across the profession allows for challenge cases that result in the removal or relocation of materials.

### **A Practical Philosophy for Librarianship**

These categories of research—legal, philosophical, historical and contemporary case studies as well as empirical research on libraries and librarians— generate a *practical philosophy for librarianship*. Through their discourse on the legal and philosophical aspects of intellectual freedom as well as their development of policies that organize their institutions, librarians are able to effectively exclude those who might disagree with the materials in their collections. Challengers are given space to voice their opinions via requests through recommendations and meetings with staff but at every point throughout the process, the institutional structure of the profession encourages librarians to not capitulate to any requests to remove or relocate books. That is, the practical philosophy undergirding support for intellectual freedom leads to the consolidation of librarians' social capital and power in the library.

I would argue that this accumulation of practical philosophical works to pressure librarians to be less responsive to and thus engage in symbolic violence against those who disagree with them regarding materials in their collections. However, it should be noted that, as the empirical research studies demonstrate, this consolidation of symbolic power

is not comprehensive. Librarians are, in fact, part of a weak institution and this weakness might account for the preemptive actions to lessen the threat of challenges. Libraries are also overseen by non-professional boards who do not adhere to information professionals' practical philosophy regarding intellectual freedom. In spite of this, the profession as a whole is dedicated to upholding support for intellectual freedom as a core value whether or not it is actually part of librarians' actual practice. As will be demonstrated in the analysis chapters, no matter what librarians do, challengers perceive that they and other staff and administrators in public schools and libraries, work to ensure that their requests for reconsideration are ultimately denied.

### **Previous Work Concerning Challengers in Library and Information Studies**

The research described in the previous section tends to focus on librarians and their institutional responses to challengers. In general, there are very few studies of challengers as such in library and information science. In 1986, Norman Poppel, a professor of psychology, and Edwin Ashley, a library director, published an article in *Library Journal* titled "Toward Understanding the censor." They argued that challengers are motivated by feelings of self-worth as citizens as well as being a great concern with the moral foundations that they imbue in their children (Poppel & Ashley, 1986).

Another work on challengers is James LaRue's book *The New Inquisition: Understanding and Managing Intellectual Freedom Challenges* (2007). LaRue focuses on the reasoning behind the challenges and notes that people who challenge materials are not simply trying to remove or relocate items but are actually trying to "redefine the mission of the public library" (LaRue, 2007, p. 66). LaRue takes both challengers and

their concerns seriously throughout the book and encourages other librarians to do the same.

One recent empirical study is Kelly P. Kingrey's (2005) dissertation on how conservative Christian groups view intellectual freedom and censorship. Kingrey investigated how certain organizations—who are often antagonists to librarians in intellectual freedom issues—understand the concepts of intellectual freedom and censorship. She focused on four conservative Christian groups' reactions to the passage of the Child Internet Protection Act (CIPA) in 2000. A watershed moment for intellectual freedom, the conservative Christian organizations that Kingrey studied helped to draft the CIPA legislation in Congress and also submitted legal briefs to the U.S. Supreme Court regarding the enforcement of the law. Kingrey used two questions to guide her research. The first investigated how national conservative Christian organizations understand the terms “censorship” and “intellectual freedom.” The second focused on how the groups understand the rights and responsibilities that are connected to intellectual freedom. Kingrey researched how an “outsider” group understands a concept that has been primarily defined by librarians and civil libertarians in the public sphere.

The author's data consisted of 39 documents published between January 2003 and January 2004. All of the documents were direct publications from the advocacy groups. Most were printed on the World Wide Web but she also included print and legal documents. There were four different styles of documents: legal briefs, news feature articles, editorials, and appeals to membership (Kingrey, 2005). Preference was given for documents that substantively discussed intellectual freedom.

Kingrey discovered four key themes within the groups' documents regarding intellectual freedom: first, they employ a "narrow definition of censorship". Second, the organizations "view human nature as corrupt or corrupting". Next, they exhibit a distinct preference for "majority rules over individual rights". Finally, they "distrust outsiders or opponents to their philosophies on intellectual freedom" (Kingrey, 2005, p. 80).

Kingrey's work constitutes a major step in helping library and information professionals better understand why people challenge books.

Another recent dissertation by Loretta Gaffney (2012) also investigates challengers. Titled "Intellectual Freedom and the Politics of Reading," Gaffney argues that libraries became the target of conservative social groups because of competing understandings between the groups' and librarians' conceptualization of access, reading, and how libraries are situated in communities. By employing a theoretical framework based in reader-response theory, Gaffney finds that challenge cases are essentially disputes over the nature and purpose of the public library in society.

Outside of these cases, discussions of challengers are generally limited to what can be called the trade literature of librarianship. The case studies and responsive essays described above often contain a few paragraphs that quote individual challengers, continue with a short summary of one or more challenge cases, and then give a short explanation of the author's understanding of the challengers' statements. These writings primarily contribute to a practical philosophy of legalistic responses by library practitioners to challengers described above.

### **Research on Challengers in Other Areas**

Outside of library and information science, there is some research on challengers in the reading materials in the fields of history and sociology. However, these studies are usually conducted in the context of broader social and theoretical issues. One example of a work that focuses solely on books is historian Paul S. Boyer's *Purity in Print* (2002), which looks at book censorship in the United States as an issue of cultural and social change. Beginning with the vice societies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Boyer investigates how elites responded to changes in city life. Members of the societies often wanted to impose their own morals on their new immigrant neighbors in growing urban areas. The book includes some focus on pivotal individuals in this history including Anthony Comstock and prominent members of the Boston and New York Vice Societies.

Nicola Beisel's monograph on Anthony Comstock (1997) uses social movement theory to explore the reasons why people censor. According to Beisel, a sociologist, people censor as a strategy to pass on their privilege to the next generation. They want to make sure that their children will be members of their own class and therefore worry about the undue influence of inappropriate media on their children. Beisel notes that Anthony Comstock's own writings tended to focus on three themes: the control of the middle class, fear of the lower classes, and the effects of obscenity on society.

These works provide insight into the concept of intellectual freedom outside of library and information science and offer a wider view of censorship as a social issue outside of the world of librarianship. In particular, these books use theories that are less common in LIS research. For example, Beisel's use of social movement theory examines



censorship practices as one aspect of moral movements that elite classes use to preserve their preserve their prestige in modern society. Viewing the phenomenon of censorship through this lens enables researchers to see intellectual freedom and censorship as broader issues that operate outside of the narrow lens of practical philosophy discussed above.

In contrast to the much of the research described in this chapter, the current study aims to extend research on challengers within the field of library and information science using a socio-theoretical framework and qualitative methodology to developing greater understanding of challengers' actions. The study, by focusing on challengers' interpretive strategies of text, also extends research on reading practices within the field of LIS. An overview of this area of research is given below.

### **Previous Research on Reading**

Like intellectual freedom, reading research based in a causal and qualitative framework was originally considered to be a basic area of inquiry for library science. However, as will be demonstrated below, this area of research petered out in LIS in the 1930s and 40s and would not resurface until the 1980s and 90s.<sup>3</sup> The history of reading research begins with the establishment of the Graduate Library School (GSL) of The University of Chicago in 1926. The GSL faculty believed that reading effects should be a major field of inquiry for library science and, under the guidance of Douglas Waples conducted several empirical studies in the surrounding Chicago area. These studies,

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<sup>3</sup> Research on the interpretation of texts continued, of course, in the field of English. However, focus on the reader as a reader only became widespread in English in the late 1970s.

following the program of the sociology department at the university, often took a deterministic view of practice of reading.

Waples's research, in particular, took a traditional view that reading has effects on the reader. In "On Developing a Taste in Reading," Waples (1942) used the terms "good reading and "taste" throughout the article. Another researcher, William Stanley Hoole (1938), argued that using recreational reading courses could provide "closer contacts with books which lead to broader cultural improvement" (p. 2). A.H. Starke (1931), more explicitly noted that there is a marked "influence of reading on character" (p. 180). Note that these studies are from the time when support for intellectual freedom was just beginning to take hold in professional librarianship. It is possible that the adoption of the Library Bill of Rights had a chilling effect on continued research in this area. As Wayne Wiegand writes, the LBR

"had a convenient residual effect; it promised to deflect occasional pressure from cultural authorities across the country to justify the social benefits of popular reading, and because intellectual freedom advocacy was so much more compelling in the world of professions, librarians had little reason to read newer research on reading that dealt with people's actual reading practices and behaviors, or with the multiple ways in which library patrons appropriated their reading materials" (Wiegand, 1999, p. 11).

If librarians supported the agnostic view of reading effects described below, it would not make sense for researchers to attempt to prove that reading has good or bad effects on the reader.

The view of reading effects wherein it is impossible to know what the effects of new knowledge will have on the reader, begins to appear in library research around 1950. Note, however, that this shift was not due to findings from empirical studies of reading.

Instead there is more of a theoretical and philosophical shift in understanding how texts affect the reader. For example, Melvin Oathout, for example, states that “it is not the business of the [hospital library] staff to impose on the patient population a stiff abstract moral code than they would find in outside existence or to protect them from some amorphous ‘evil’” (Oathout, 1954, p. 50). In a study of the use and users of recorded knowledge, Phillip Ennis (1964) notes that “there is no consensus as to desired effects of general reading and no way of assessing whatever effects do occur” (Ennis, 1964, p. 309). This article offers one of the first definitive statements of the agnostic view toward knowledge effects.

Jesse Shera also discussed reading in his book the *Sociological Foundations of Librarianship* (1970). He attempts to develop a foundation for librarianship that is based on the library’s relationship to society. Librarianship should be concerned with “the study of the nature of knowledge and the relationship between the structure of knowledge as it has developed in contemporary Western civilization and the librarian’s tools for facilitating intellectual access to that knowledge” (Shera, 1970, p. 84). Shera calls this study “social epistemology,” that is the study of knowledge in society. Librarians must understand how knowledge is achieved. Part of understanding this achievement includes exploration into culture and social cognition including developing an understanding of reading practices. Shera continues by describing the social construction of writing: “Books have certain intellectual characteristics...these characteristics are not stable; many of them change from period to period and even from reader to reader. The meaning of a book for one individual may be quite different from its meaning to another

individual” (Shera, 1970, p. 91). He does not state that books, nor the information contained in them, are neutral but it is because these meanings differ that librarian should be agnostic on the issue of reading effects. However, librarians can still endeavor to understand where these meanings come from.

In another work on librarianship, *An Introduction to Library Science* (1976), Shera most clearly develops his understanding of what might be called the agnostic view of reading effects. Because they do not know “‘what reading does to people’ or how it affects social behavior, the profession can be magnanimous in admitting to library shelves books that present ‘all sides of a subject’”(Shera, 1976, p. 56). This view of reading effects is now codified in professional librarianship and its influence can be found in documents such as the ALA’s Code of Ethics, Library Bill of Rights, and Freedom to Read statements.

As noted above, one of the outcomes of adopting this view of reading effects rather than the more traditional causal argument, meant that the field of LIS more or less abandoned reading research. This is one of Wiegand’s arguments in his article (1999) on “tunnel vision and blind spots” in librarianship. As demonstrated above, historical studies show that in the past, librarians believed that the public should only read books that were deemed “good.” According to Wiegand, librarians in the late 19th century did not decide which books were considered legitimate; this was left to “scientists, intellectuals, belles letters authors, and disciplinary experts” (Wiegand, 1999, p. 5). Librarians merely disseminated information from others. Eventually, librarians used systems developed by the publishing industry to discover “good books.” Ideas about reading did not change

until the 1920s when librarians accepted that “the ‘light’ reading they had disparaged for the past half-century fell somewhere between ‘good’ and ‘bad,’ and was at most ‘harmless’” (Wiegand, 1999, p. 9).

According to Wiegand, reading research at the GSL ended in 1932 under the auspices of a new dean, Louis Round Wilson. Wiegand states, in no uncertain terms that, GLS and librarianship “walked away from an opportunity” (Wiegand, 1999, p. 10).<sup>4</sup> One study published in 1938 noted that: “...reading was not ‘a passive process of absorption’, but a ‘form of intense activity,’ and researchers needed ‘to find out what happens when specific human beings with their interests and anxieties, participate in the emotional and intellectual life’ that reading ‘makes possible’” (Wiegand, 1999, p. 10-11). Wiegand also discussed the lack of reading research in his article on LIS Education from 1997. He states that LIS was more concerned with access than content and that reading studies should be reintroduced in to the library school curriculum.<sup>5</sup> It is clear from his articles, that Wiegand believes that the lack of investigation into this area was a failure for librarianship.

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<sup>4</sup> As noted above, this opportunity was eventually taken up by English departments. In the 1970s, reader-response theory became a major area of research in the field. Reader-response theory describes a strategy of sense-making. How does one interpret the words on the page? The rhetoric of reader-response theory was developed in direct opposition to the formalist theories of the New Critics. In the concluding chapter to *Reader-Response Criticism*, Tompkins notes that all reader-response theorists believe that that meaning is always found outside of the text (Tompkins, 1980). In the introduction to the *Reader in the Text*, Suleiman discusses six approaches to reader response (Suleiman, 1980). These include the rhetorical approach which focuses on the implied reader and views the text as a medium of communication. The phenomenological approach focuses on aesthetic perception and how readers appropriate the experience of reading. The hermeneutic approach investigates the nature of reading as such and calls for critics to be self-reflective. Subjective/psychological theories comprise the fourth approach which focuses on individual reader. The fifth is the sociological historical approach. Finally, there is the semiotic/structuralist approach. The approach taken in this study might be characterized as a semiotic/structuralist approach

<sup>5</sup> Many schools took his advice, including Rutgers.

In recent years, many library schools have added reading studies to their curriculum either as standalone courses or as part of courses on history of the book or reader's advisory. Research on reading has also increased of late. Recent articles include Julie Gilbert and Barbara Fister's (2011) survey of college students and their pleasure reading habits. Another article by Vivian Howard (2011) explores how reading for pleasure affects the everyday life information seeking of teens aged 12-15. Finally, an article by Leanne Bowler, Rebecca Morris, I-Ling Cheng, and Reham Al-Issa (2012) combines both reading studies in library school curriculum and research on reading by investigating the authors' experience of reading a multimodal book assigned in a library school class on technology and young people.

The current study also takes up Wiegand's call for LIS researchers to study reading. It investigates a particular little-studied group of people in LIS, challengers, whose actions have great import on the profession. The study views the discourse of censorship employed by challengers as essentially a discourse about reading. By gaining a deeper understanding of how challengers conceptualize the practice of reading, librarians and information professionals can better understand why challenge cases are brought against materials in the first place.

This chapter argued that previous work and research in library and information science constitute a practical philosophy of librarianship that codifies the construction of support for intellectual freedom. It also discussed previous research on challengers both within and outside of the field of LIS. The following chapter presents the methodology

used in the study to explore the worldviews of challengers particular as they pertain to reading practices and the construction of public libraries and schools.

## **Chapter 5: Methodology**

As demonstrated in Chapter 4, most of the research on challenges consists of historical research, philosophy, and current case studies. Instead of focusing on others' conception of challengers and challenge cases, this study centers on challengers themselves and the discourse they employ when arguing for the relocation or removal of objectionable materials. It applies social theoretical frameworks to analyze the discourse of challengers with an assumption that they are engaging in rational, systematic behavior and posits that their actions are closely tied to both their conception of public institutions and their understanding of reading practices. The study employed qualitative research methods to elucidate how challengers construct the role of public institutions and the practice of reading.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the epistemological assumptions of qualitative research. Second, the researcher discusses her own bias in a subjectivity statement. Next, the research design and procedures are reviewed in some depth. Finally, the chapter offers discusses pilot projects used to fine tune the research methodology.

### **Characteristics of Qualitative Research**

In his article on the epistemology of qualitative research, Howard S. Becker (2001) notes that the work of the ethnographer involves attempting to understand objects from the actor's point of view. Qualitative research is dedicated to discovering members' own meanings, that is, how members themselves construct and define their own social world and, by focusing on members' own understanding of social objects, researchers can



better understand how these objects operate within a particular social system and therefore, acquire understanding of the system itself. Researchers work to discover “what people think they are doing, what meanings they give to the objects, and events and people in their lives and experience” (Becker, 2001, p. 321). By using such an approach, researchers can better comprehend how a social system operates. In the current study, qualitative research is used to find out what challengers “think they are doing” and the meaning they give to public institutions and the practice of reading.

Becker both defines and gives a purpose for qualitative research in his article. First, he notes that qualitative research, which includes a broad set of interpretive stances, should describe the systems of relationship among people rather than focus on the existence of those relationships. That is, the research should strive to understand how people interact with each other instead of simply describing that a particular relationship exists. Next, Becker argues that the researcher should always strive to decipher what people are doing with as much precision as possible (Becker, 2001). This relates to Clifford Geertz’s (1973) famous metaphor regarding winks and twitches. Although they are the same movement (the eye opens and closes rapidly) they have different meanings which must be discovered by the researcher. When engaging in qualitative research, it is important for the researcher to recognize the nuances of participants’ social meanings.

Third, and following from the previous definition, Becker states that qualitative researchers must immerse themselves in data in order to guard against incorrectly guessing why people are taking certain actions. This prescription is succinctly stated—“Don’t make up what you could find out” (Becker, 2001, p. 325). Researchers must also

be aware that their role makes a difference to their participants. Finally, according to Becker, it is important for researchers to create “thick descriptions” as this helps guard against incorrect interpretation. Thick description, a concept originally developed by Geertz, is the process of interpreting culture so that one can, as noted above, distinguish winks from twitches (Geertz, 1973). Geertz describes culture as a public, acted document and it is the researcher’s job to discover the pattern in the document.

Another important aspect of qualitative research is that researchers must strive for credibility. Credibility, in this instance, is a method for evaluating the internal validity of the study. Are the data precise? Is the analysis broad? In other words, can fellow qualitative researchers understand and believe your results. Qualitative researchers operate within a particular epistemological tradition based in a commitment to context and understanding members’ meanings and it is within this tradition that their research must be judged. This study used several different types of records to ensure the credibility of the findings including documents produced in challenge cases and interviews with the challengers.

Along with a commitment to members’ own meanings and striving for credibility, qualitative research also emphasizes the reflexive position of the researcher in relation to his or her study. Researchers must be aware of their own culture, prejudices, and epistemological positions when engaging in ethnographic research. Self-reflexivity is a tool “to enhance awareness of our situatedness and, subsequently, to be more receptive to perspectives that approach the world from a different position” (Saukko, 2003, p. 62). It

does not remove bias, but allows the researcher to become more aware of his or her own biases.

### **Subjectivity Statement**

My own connection to challenged books began when I was in middle school. My mother, a high school librarian, introduced me to Banned Books Week and would bring home whatever information the American Library Association (ALA) had published to “celebrate” the week. Reading through the annual lists of challenged books was an eye-opening experience. Books that I loved like *The Chocolate War* and *Are You There God? It’s Me, Margaret* appeared on the list every year. It was always difficult for me to understand why people would want to ban such wonderful works of young adult literature.

As a former professional librarian, I am not neutral on the issue of censorship although I have adopted a neutral tone throughout this study. I strongly support the ALA’s policies on intellectual freedom and work to uphold them in my academic and professional life. In some respects, I am a direct antagonist to people who bring challenges against books. Throughout my research, I endeavored to be open to challengers’ arguments and not impose my own bias on their worldviews and it was my goal to be empathetic to challengers’ concerns throughout the research process.

### **Research Design and Procedures**

This study used three sources of discourse in order to gain a better understand the worldviews of challengers. These sources were chosen to ensure the credibility of the study. The first source consisted of analyzing documents produced in the course of

challenge cases. The second source consisted of recordings of public hearings convened by library, school, or government officials concerning the removal or relocation of library or school materials, as well as one observation of a hearing and the third source was interviews with individuals who are or have been substantially involved in challenge cases. Although all of the sources have different origins, all three include the voices of the challengers themselves.

This section of the chapter begins with an overview how suitable challenge cases for analysis were identified. Next, the section has a general overview the three sources of data used in the study. Finally, the section describes the final data set.

### **Identification of Challenges**

One aspect of the study that required care was identifying past and current book challenges in public libraries and schools. Since these institutions are supported by public funds, it is often in the interest of their administrators to keep any controversy, including book challenges, out of the public eye. As noted in Chapter 1, the ALA's Office for Intellectual (OIF) Freedom collects annual statistics on book challenges but this information is not shared by the public.<sup>6</sup> In keeping with their stated policy, my requests for demographic information regarding challenges to the OIF were denied. I was informed that "we are not able to give our raw data on our challenges because the majority of them are protected by a confidentiality agreement that prohibits us from

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<sup>6</sup> From the OIF's website: "Challenges reported to the ALA by individuals are kept confidential. In these cases, ALA will release only the title of the book being challenged, the state and the type of institution (school, public library). The name of the institution and its town will not be disclosed" <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/banned/frequentlychallenged>).

divulging any identifying information” (Personal Communication, September 24, 2009).

This meant that I had to take a different approach to finding out about challenge cases.

I employed several methods to identify challenge cases throughout this study. First, I followed the OIF’s news-only email list, IFACTION. Information regarding challenges from various news sources as well as general intellectual freedom materials are posted to the list several times a week. Second, I created several Google Alerts that were set to deliver what the service calls “Everything” including Google web, blog, and news searches. Google-defined “Best Results” were sent to my email approximately once per day. The search terms included various combinations of the following terms: library, board, public, book, challenge, complaint, hearing, banned, censorship, and comment. The final list of general Google Alerts appears in Appendix E. If I discovered an item of interest concerning a challenge case through either IFACTION or the Google Alerts, I immediately created a new “As It Happens” Google Alert for the challenge. These alerts included search terms that directly related to the particular case such as the name of the challenged book and location of the challenge. Appendix F lists the specific challenge case Google Alerts. I also mentioned the study to any librarians I happened to meet and encouraged them to contact me if they became aware of challenges in their own or another library.

All of the challenges found through these methods were entered into a data collection chart consisting of five different spreadsheets: Interviews, Hearings, Groups, More Information Needed, and Consolidated. “Interviews” contained information for challengers I had contacted for interviews and includes columns for notating whether or

not I asked them for an interview, his or her acceptance of the request, and other pertinent information. “Hearings” listed information for public challenge hearings including, place, date, and whether or not I attended. “Groups” included contact information for local, regional, and national groups that are associated with challengers. “More Information Needed” listed challenges for which there was only cursory amount of information and, most importantly, lacked the name of the challenger. Finally, the “Consolidated” spreadsheet listed each challenge along with any and all information I had about the case including whether or not I received supporting documentation, possible interviewees, and hearing dates.

### **Sources of Data**

After identifying potential challenge cases, I contacted the Office of Public Records for the governing body (generally the school board or municipality) in order to request copies of any and all documents that pertained to the challenge (Appendix G). In order to facilitate the requisition of documents, all of the requests cited the state’s Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) or Public Records Access laws.<sup>7</sup> The documents often included the name and sometimes contact information for the original complainant. I contacted the original challenger to request an interview. Finally, if there was a public hearing scheduled, I would determine whether or not it was feasible for me to attend. The three data sources are used as a means of triangulation in order to safeguard the credibility of the study. These data sources are discussed in more detail below.

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<sup>7</sup> These requests will be noted hereafter as FOIA requests after the federal Freedom of Information Act. Each of the 50 states has their own version of this act (<http://www.nfoic.org/state-freedom-of-information-laws>).

### **Documents from Challenge Cases**

Beginning with the initial request for removal or relocation (often called a Request for Reconsideration, see Appendix A), the institutionalized challenge procedure produces a large number of documents. These include such items as written responses from library and school administrators and staff, written response from challengers, as well as written responses from legal counsel. Library or public school board members also write responses to challenges that become part of the public record.

Responses to the written requests for documents varied. Out of 13 requests, I received responses from 13 governing bodies. Two of the bodies replied that they were concerned about the privacy of the challengers and sent only cursory information. Three governing bodies sent full documentation including copies of the binders used by the boards in public hearings. Documents were sent both electronically and in hard copy. Two of the responses included DVDs of the public hearings. Six governing bodies posted all pertinent information, including recordings of public hearings and minutes, to the Internet. Hard copy documents were scanned and all documents were analyzed by means of qualitative research software.

In order to be included in the final set of challenge cases used in the study, documents needed to include challengers' own voices. This meant that most meeting minutes were excluded as they generally only included paraphrases of arguments. There were several different types of documents included in this data source including requests for reconsideration (the original complaint forms that initiate the challenge case), letters, and emails (Appendix H). In order to keep data to a manageable size, letters to the editor

and op-eds in local newspapers, even if they included challengers' own words, were excluded. Documents were used to answer both primary research objectives and all three secondary objectives (See Table 5.1). All documents were scanned and then analyzed using Atlas.ti qualitative research software.

### **Recordings and Observation of Public Hearings**

When they are not resolved at an earlier stage in the challenge process, requests to remove or relocate materials in public institutions sometimes result in public hearings. There are two primary types of hearings. The first consists of proceedings that are entirely devoted to discussion regarding the request and are often the final public step in a lengthy dispute process. The hearings are held before the decision makers (usually the school or library board) and members of the public are invited to give comments for a set length of time, generally 3 to 10 minutes. The second type of hearing is generally held in the course of some other meeting such as, for example, the regular monthly meeting of the school or library board. Transcripts of recordings and one set of fieldnotes of public hearings were used to answer both the primary and secondary research objectives concerning the discourse censorship (See Table 5.1). These were also analyzed using Atlas.ti qualitative research software.

Agendas for these meetings often have time set aside for "Public Comments" and, when a request for removal or relocation is discussed, members of the public may voice their concerns during this time. Commenters usually have a set amount of time to speak (usually three minutes). Both types of hearings are generally held in public facilities that are open to all members of the public including non-constituents or people who are not



part of the library or school board's district. Although participants in the public hearings testified both for and against the removal or relocation of library materials, this study focused on the testimonies of those who support the request for removal or relocation.

I used two procedures for collecting data from public hearings. The first consisted of using audio or video recordings that were available either on the websites of the administrative bodies of public institutions or were sent to me through the Freedom of Information Act document requests described above. I also attended two public hearings (one of which is included in the final data set) during which I recorded the proceedings and took fieldnotes.<sup>8</sup> These are used to add texture to the analysis in the following chapters by noting the setting and atmosphere of the proceedings. All of the audio recordings were fully transcribed and analyzed using Atlas.ti qualitative research software. Fully transcribed meeting minutes received through the FOIA request described above are also used as sources of data for hearings.

### **Interviews**

The second source of discourse consisted of interviews with individuals who were substantially involved in the removal or reclassification of materials in libraries. The final data set consisted of interviews with the individual who made the initial request for reconsideration. As noted above, information from public records including newspapers

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<sup>8</sup> According to Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw, fieldnotes are products of and reflect conventions for transforming witnessed events, persons, and places into words on paper" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 9). Writing fieldnotes involves a type of description in which the act of writing is part of the interpretation process and constitute the first step for "textualizing" the data for the researcher. In keeping with the ethnographic principles of thick description, fieldnotes from the public hearings are used to show the behavior of the participants and not tell it.

and documents received through FOIA requests was used to contact interviewees. This method of data collection was used to answer all of the research objectives with special focus on understanding challengers' construction of the practice of reading and to outline the contours of the community of challengers.

The process for contacting potential interviewees evolved over time. I began by contacting challengers via email (Appendix I) and cold calls in the fall of 2010, but received no response. I also made one attempt to use snowball sample using an interviewee from the pilot study described below as a catalyst. This method also received no response. As a result of these response rates, in the summer of 2011, I decided to contact challengers via type-written, posted letter. I was also concerned that the legalistic language in the initial request increased challengers' hesitation to contact me. The typewritten letter was carefully crafted to lessen the legalistic tone in the initial request email (Appendix J). If a challenger contacted me, either via phone or email, I immediately sent them a follow up letter via email or snail mail (Appendix K) and consent forms (Appendix L and M). Out of the 36 initial request letters, ten challengers contacted me. Of these ten possible interviewees, three agreed to be interviewed.<sup>9</sup>

The interviews took place over the phone and were audio-recorded and transcribed. The questions were designed to invite interviewees to talk at length and reflect on their beliefs and experiences regarding the library in society, reading, and

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<sup>9</sup> It is possible that the legalistic tone in the consent forms as is required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), concerned many of the possible interviewees. The tone of the forms, in some respects, made the study seem suspicious. One potential interviewee voiced concerns regarding the need to be anonymous. If my study was above board, why could I not use the potential interviewee's name?

challenges to materials. The interview protocol (Appendix N), which followed a semi-structured format, was divided into three question clusters that related to the research objectives. Questions were tailored to the individual interviewee. The first cluster included questions regarding how the interviewee understood the practice of reading (RO3). The second cluster focused on the library (or school depending on the interviewee) as an institution (RO2). The final cluster of question discussed the actual challenge in which the interviewee was involved (RO1-3)..

The following table identifies the relationships among the research objectives given in Chapter 1 and the data sources:

Table 5.1 Research Objectives and Data Sources

<b>Research Objective</b>	<b>Primary Data Sources</b>	<b>Secondary Data Sources</b>
RO 1. Explore the worldviews of challengers	Observations of public hearings, interviews with challengers, documents produced by challengers	N/A
RO2. Challengers' construction of the role of public institutions in society	Observations of public hearings, interviews with challengers,	Documents produced by challengers
RO2.Challengers' understanding of the policies and procedures used in public institutions	Documents produced by librarians and library administrators	Interviews with librarians and library administrators, observations of public hearings
RO3. Challengers' construction of the practice of reading	Interviews with challengers, Documents produced by challengers	Observations of public hearings

### **The Challenge Cases**

Out of 24 possible cases, the final data set for this study consisted of 13 challenge cases (Appendix O). The cases took place over a five-year period from 2007-2011, inclusive. Two of the case—in Helena, Montana and New Bedford, New Hampshire—

were solely curriculum challenges. Eight cases were both curriculum and school library cases while three were public library challenges. In order to be included in the study, a challenge case must have had the voice of a challenger in at least one of the data sources. Many of the original 24 cases were excluded for this reason. For example, the documents that received through FOIA requests sometimes included only policy statements from the governing bodies. None of the challenge cases in the study included all three of the sources of data.

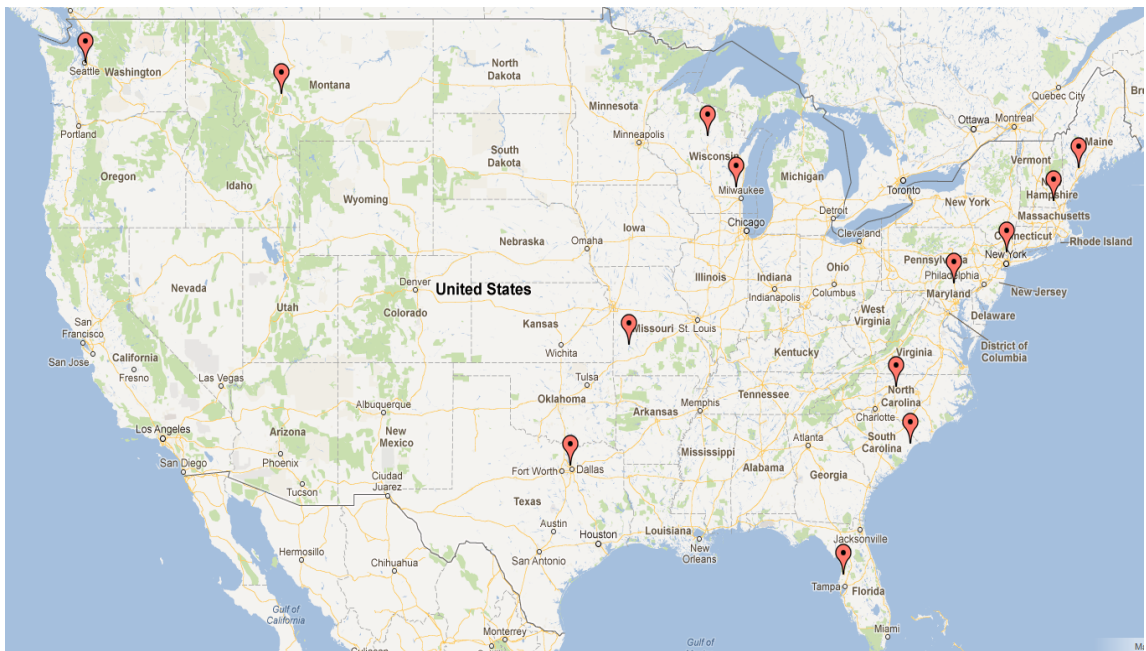
When originally designing the study, I intended to focus solely on challenges to materials in public and school libraries. However, as the research progressed, many challenges to materials in school curricula became part of the data set. As discussed in Chapter 2 and demonstrated in the analysis chapters, the essential link between the schools and libraries is that they are both institutions within the public sphere and this association makes them targets of challengers. Challengers rarely discriminate between these two institutions and are often more concerned over the presentation of objectionable ideas in public institutions than with differences among public libraries, school libraries, and school classrooms, therefore, the inclusion of both types of cases is justified.

It must be noted that, as opposed to public and school library cases, there is an element of coercion in curricula cases. These are challenges to materials that students are required to read. In the end, this element enhanced the data analysis as challengers often expressed arguments to justify why students should not be required to read a particular book. That is, the element of coercion amplified the arguments regarding reading practices. It should also be noted that curriculum challenges often included requests to

remove materials from both the school library and the classroom curriculum. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 7, differentiation between the two is only rarely made by challengers.

The case as well as data sources from each case are described in more detail below and are listed in alphabetical order by location. Figure 5.1 is a map of the cases which shows that they took place in most regions of the United States with the exception of the Southwest. The majority of the cases were on the east coast. Challenge cases are generally referenced by place throughout the analysis as one of the primary features of the cases is that they involve the community and how it is viewed in the wider society. Throughout both the summaries below and the data analysis chapters that follow, challengers are also referenced by their location (e.g., the Central York challenger).

Figure 5.1 Map of Cases



### **Carrollton, Texas (2011)**

The challenge case in Carrollton, Texas was unique in that it involved child caretaker instead of a parent. The challenger asked the Carrollton Public Library to remove *My Mom's Having a Baby* by Dori Hillestad Butler from the children's collection. I interviewed the challenger in January of 2012. Along with a transcription of the interview, data from this case consisted of one request for reconsideration.

### **Central York, Pennsylvania (2010)**

A parent challenged the inclusion of the book *Stolen Children* by Peg Kehret in the local elementary school library. Although I did receive a response to my request for documents from the Central York School District, it did not include any usable data. The challenger in the case, sat for an interview in December of 2011 and a transcript of the interview is included in the data set.

### **Conway, South Carolina (2011)**

*Push* by Sapphire was the target of a challenge in Conway, South Carolina in 2011. According to records from the Horry County School Board, the book was inadvertently purchased for inclusion in classroom library shelves. That is, the book was intended for recreational student reading that could be obtained directly from the classroom and were not purchased for either the curriculum or the school library collection. A parent challenged the book when his child brought it home from school to read. Data from the case consisted of hearing transcripts.

### **Clarkstown, New York (2011)**

Many school systems have lists of supplemental material for students to read and a parent in Clarkstown, New York challenged *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chybosky for its inclusion on this list. Such material is in a grey area between curriculum and library challenges. The books are not required but they are considered to be recommended reading material and are therefore available in the school library. Two requests for reconsideration constitute the data for this case.

### **Greensboro, North Carolina (2010)**

The Guilford County (NC) Board of Education received a complaint regarding *Hoops* by Walter Dean Myers in December of 2010. The challenger requested that the book be removed from one of the local middle school's collections. Data from this case consisted of a request for reconsideration from the challenger.

### **Helena, Montana (2010)**

A parent in Helena, Montana challenged the inclusion of the *Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie in the local high school curriculum. A public hearing on the case was held on December 13, 2010. I interviewed the challenger two years later in December of 2012. The data for this case included a request for reconsideration, letters, transcripts of the public hearing and the interview.

### **Lewiston, Maine (2007)**

The challenge case in Lewiston, Maine is somewhat notorious in library circles due to the fact that the case eventually entered the legal system. In August of 2007, a patron checked out the book *It's Perfectly Normal* by Robie H. Harris, a children's sexual

education book, out of the local public library. Instead of returning it, she sent a letter with a check for the cost of the book to the library. The library refused to accept the check and the patron was charged with civil theft. She pleaded not guilty and stood trial in front of a judge who ordered her to return the book. Eventually, the charges were dropped even though the book was not returned to the library (<http://www.sunjournal.com/node/659441>). Data from this case included letters and emails.

### **Merrill, Wisconsin (2011)**

The book *Montana 1948* by Larry Watson was the target of a curriculum challenge by 39 individuals in June of 2011. Although it is likely due to the similarity of the challengers' arguments, there is no direct evidence that the individuals worked as a group as each of their challenges was presented to the school board individually. A hearing for the book was held on September 29, 2011. Data from the case consisted of all of the requests for recommendations, five letters, and transcripts of the hearing.

### **New Bedford, New Hampshire (2011)**

New Bedford, New Hampshire has had a few challenge cases over the past two years. The first concerned the book *Nickel and Dimed* by Barbara Ehrenreich. The data in this study focused on the second case regarding *Water for Elephants* by Sara Gruen which a parent requested be removed from the local high school curriculum. The researcher attended the public hearing for the book on February 28, 2011. Data for the case consisted of transcripts and fieldnotes from the hearing.



### **Seattle, Washington (2010)**

The challenge case in Seattle, Washington received a fair amount of coverage in the media due to the perceived classic status of the book in question, *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley. The book was targeted for its inclusion in the local high school curriculum and the school board eventually voted to remove it from the curriculum of the originating school. Data for this case included letters and emails.

### **Spring Hill, Florida (2010)**

The seventh novel in the popular Alex Rider series, *Snakehead* by Anthony Horowitz was challenged by a parent in Florida in October of 2010. The parent requested that the book be removed from all local elementary school libraries. Data from this challenge consisted of two requests for reconsideration. Both are by the same challenger and the latter is possibly due to the challengers' appeal of the initial governing body vote.

### **Stockton, Missouri (2010)**

*Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie was also the target of a challenge in Stockton, Missouri. The governing body treated the challenge as two separate challenges, one against inclusion in the curriculum and the other against inclusion in the school library. A request for reconsideration, letters, and hearing transcripts constituted data for this challenge case.

### **West Bend, Wisconsin (2009)**

The West Bend, Wisconsin case also has some notoriety in the library world. Analysis of the case was one of the pilot cases for this study and it is described in more detail below. Briefly, the case began when the West Bend Public Library received a

letter in its overnight drop box asking for the removal of links concerning LGBTQ youth to be removed from the library's website. Not long after, the library also received a letter from the same individuals requesting that several books on LGBTQ topics be removed from the young adult collection while others on "ex-gay therapy" be added to the collection. A public hearing for the case was held on June 2, 2009. Data included letters, requests for reconsideration, a petition, and hearing transcripts.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The study received Institutional Review Board approval in the pilot study stage on April 14, 2010. It was then renewed in April of 2011 and 2012. Although informed consent was not required for attending and recording public hearings, the approved application included information regarding the number and characteristics of the individuals attending the public hearings.

Of particular concern was protecting the privacy of interviewees. Criteria for inclusion included individuals who supplied either oral or written requests to governing bodies asking for materials to be removed from or relocated in the institution. The IRB application also covered individuals, such as librarians and administrators, who responded to such requests although they were not contacted for this study. As noted earlier, potential interviewees were contacted via email and posted mail.

Informed consent consisted of two separate consent forms. The first covered the interview itself and assured confidentiality of any research records (Appendix L). The second informed the participant that the interview would be audio recorded (Appendix

M).<sup>10</sup> All records, recordings, and transcripts are kept in a file cabinet to which only the researcher has access and on a password protected hard drive. There were no risks to participation in the study and the interviewees did not receive any direct benefits.

### **Interpretation**

This study focused on the arguments that challengers used to justify the removal or relocation of books in a public library or school. These arguments are considered to be constitutive of the discourse of censorship. Discourse is defined here using Bourdieu's concepts of structured structure and structuring structure. In this social constructionist conceptualization, discourse both provides context for and constructs the social world. It also provides meaning for the objects that one encounters in the social world. In this formulation, discourse can be understood as part of an individual's *habitus*. More specifically, discourse is "an interrelated set of texts and the practices of their production, dissemination, and reception that brings an object into being" (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 3). Discourse is, of course, created from language but it is not simply language that exists "outside" of a particular individual but also actionable, i.e., "what they do" with the language themselves.

Following the work of Schutz, Berger, and Luckmann, language is considered to be "constitutive of reality" (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 12). Language does not merely describe the world; it also constructs the objects that exist within it. Following from this,

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<sup>10</sup> Although the consent forms were necessary to protect the rights and privacy of interviewees, they also made it difficult to obtain interviews. I was informed by several challengers that the consent forms made my work seem suspicious: If my research was legitimate, why could their names not be used? The forms legalistic language also seemed to deter some possible interviewees.

discourse analysis is a methodology wherein the researcher explores how social reality is created through these texts. Following Bourdieu, the analysis reveals both the structuring structures of context and the structured structures of meaning. Through analysis of discourse, the researcher can begin to uncover the social structures of particular worldviews—in the case of this study, the worldviews of challengers. Discourse analysis incorporates an epistemology grounded in social constructionism.

Although there are many different types of discourse analysis, this study takes a culturalist discourse research approach as described by Reiner Keller (2005). As described in Chapter 1, this approach is grounded in two foundational theories. The first is symbolic interactionism which posits that human beings create meaning through interactions with other human beings. Meanings are social products “that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact” (Blumer, 1969, p. 5). It is through the observation of these interactions that researchers can discover culture. Meaning is created through a process of interpretation then shared with others in society and society cannot exist without these shared meanings that constitute social interaction.

The second major foundation for culturalist discourse research is Bourdieu’s theories which investigate how people use language and its interaction with symbolic power. Although these terms were described in some detail in Chapter 3, in order to comprehend their relationship to discourse analysis, it is important to understand how Bourdieu uses the term “symbolic systems” to grasp his definition of symbolic power. Symbolic systems are both structuring structures that allow for cognition and structured structures that organize meaning. Bourdieu describes two “syntheses” through which

symbols gain power (Bourdieu, 1991). The first synthesis (a naturalization process that allows for the normalization of symbolic systems) allows for social integration. For example, the use of types allows everyone in a given social system to understand what various objects are in the social world. In the second synthesis, symbolic systems become political through meaning making and cognition. The objects are no longer simply objects of material reality; they now have social meaning and symbolic significance attached to them.

In this latter synthesis, different groups of individuals struggle symbolically in order to impose their own definitions of particular symbols in the social world on others (Bourdieu, 1991). “Struggle over the specific objects of the autonomous field automatically produce euphemized forms of the economic and political struggles between classes” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 169). Most importantly symbolic power is misrecognized as common sense. The idea of common sense both in a philosophical sense and in terms of textual interpretation was discussed in Chapter 2. In order to investigate themes in the discourse of censorship that constitute part of the worldviews of challengers, this study used three different sources of data: documents, public hearing testimony, and interviews. Transcripts of the hearings and interviews as well as all documents were analyzed using qualitative research software.

Data were analyzed with codes for common themes. At the beginning of the analysis, the researcher coded the data on the sentence level. After realizing that the sentences did not provide enough context for the themes, all of the data was coded at approximately the paragraph level (3-5 sentences). Paragraphs usually received multiple

codes. Conclusions from the pilot studies described below informed the original coding scheme which was divided into the following categories: institutions, justifications, power and control, and reading practices.

Coding was an iterative process and it was found that the original classification of codes did not adequately match either the research objectives or the data (Appendix P). The codes were rearranged to more adequately match the research objectives and data analysis also continually revealed new codes. These codes were added to the scheme throughout analysis and previously coded arguments were recoded. The final coding scheme was divided into three categories that correlated with the research objectives: Worldviews, Libraries and Other Institutions, and Reading Practices/Effects/Books (Appendix Q). The discussion of the pilot studies below also includes information regarding the data analysis process.

### **Pilot Studies**

In preparation for this study, the researcher conducted three pilot studies to test the viability of the data collection methods to be used in this study. The first pilot study was an analysis of documents, the second was an observation of a public hearing, and the third was two interviews of challengers. These studies were conducted throughout the calendar year 2010.

### **Document Analysis**

The first pilot study consisted of an analysis of documents from the West Bend, Wisconsin challenge case. In June of 2009, at the American Library Association's Annual Conference, I attended a panel session on the West Bend case. In order to

prepare for the session, information regarding the challenge case was posted to the West Bend Community Memorial Library website. This included a copy of the presentation handout which contained the original complaint as well as a timeline of the case. The library also posted video of the library board's public hearing that took place on June 2, 2009 in which members of the community and members of the library spoke either in support of or against the removal of library books. The library also posted every news article and letter to the editor in both local and national news regarding the case. There are also links to podcasts on local talk radio. The data for the current study's discourse analysis comes from two sources: Letters to the editor, transcripts of voicemail messages, and opinion columns in the *West Bend Daily News*, a local newspaper and transcripts of video tape from the hearing held on June 6, 2009 before the library board. All of these documents were used for data analysis in the summer of 2010.

The challengers of West Bend articulated many themes and concepts (throughout their letters to the editor, newspaper columns, and hearing testimony). The pilot study focused on three themes in the challengers' discourse that related to their view of the library as an institution in society. The first focused on the idea that the library be "safe space" that protects children. The second theme related to reclassifying and labeling controversial materials within the library in order for the institution to maintain its status as a safe space. Finally, the third theme concerned the idea that if the library does not move and label these materials, children will be in danger of "stumbling upon" them when they are unsupervised.

As noted above the West Bend case is included in the final set of challenge cases in the study. However, the number of documents was drastically reduced as letters to the editor, op-eds, and newspaper columns were not included in the data set. Themes from the study constituted a large majority of the codes in the original coding scheme used in the final study (Appendix Q). However, these codes were part of an iterative process of analysis and changed throughout the analysis described in the following chapters.

### **Public Hearing**

The second pilot study focused on public hearings in challenge cases. In order to discern whether or not using hearings as a source for data would be viable, the researcher attended a book challenge hearing on February 28, 2011 in Bedford, New Hampshire. The book *Water for Elephants* had been challenged by a member of the community and the Bedford School Meeting included time for public comments. I travelled to New Hampshire that day and was able to both record and take notes at the meeting. The general public commented on the book for approximately 20 minutes at the meeting. I conducted this pilot study in order to test the viability of observing public hearings as a method of data collection. This hearing is included in the final set of challenge cases in the study.

However, since the time between the announcement of a hearing and the actual hearing date is quite short (generally no more than two days) I was only able to travel to one other hearing in New Jersey. This hearing is not included in the final data set due to time constraints regarding the case's integration into data analysis. Therefore, although I was unable to attend other hearings, I located many recordings of hearings on



the web and received several recordings through the Freedom of Information Act Requests described above. These recordings enabled me to transcribe full testimonies from challengers for use as data. Even though some of the immediacy is lost in the recordings, my attendance at the hearing in New Hampshire in particular allowed me to contextualize the heightened emotional tone that is present in many of the hearing recordings.

## **Interviews**

The third pilot study consisted of two interviews that were not included in the final study. The first was in the spring of 2010 when I interviewed a well-known figure in various challenge cases around the country. David K first became involved in challenges in 2005 after a high-profile case in Oak Lawn, IL.<sup>11</sup> He maintains both a website and a blog that discusses challenges around the country and encourages community members to become involved. An attorney, David K offers legal advice to challengers and others who have encountered difficulties with the administration of local public and school libraries.

I conducted a semi-structured interview with David K. in a café in New Jersey in May 2010. The interview, consisting of open-ended questions, was taped and then transcribed into Atlas.ti. The questions focused on four themes: 1. Controversial materials in the libraries 2. Definitions of terms including intellectual freedom and pornography 3. Reading effects 4. The status of the library in society. As a former

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<sup>11</sup> Note that the two interviewees in the pilot study are referenced using pseudonyms instead of place names.

librarian and scholar of library science, I represented the “other side”, David K was very excited to express his views to me and the conversation included a wide range of topics. The transcript of the interview was coded using Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software and provided some of the codes used in the original scheme.

Many themes and concepts were articulated by David K in the course of the interview. However, there were four that were quite prominent. First, he was very concerned about authority and who has the right to “control” local institutions. Second, he saw ALA as an illegitimate, hypocritical, and deceptive institution. The next theme concerned the “inappropriateness” of certain materials in libraries. Finally, although more implicit in his arguments, David K had strong beliefs regarding the effects of reading and viewing explicit material.

I attempted to use David K as a catalyst for a snowball sample for the study. The first request consisted of an email to David K to a list of his own contacts. This resulted in one email to me from a challenger who decided not to grant an interview. The second request from David K went directly from him to another challenger on my behalf. The challenger informed David K that he was not willing to speak with me. The failure of this method of sampling led me to use type-written, posted letters written in a more colloquial tone sent directly to challengers. This tactic, which is described above, was much more effective than using a snowball sample.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> One challenger noted that he decided to contact me since I had taken so much time to write him such a nice letter. I suspect that in the era of emails and texting, receiving a personal letter in the mail is such a rare occurrence that it encourages people to contact the sender.

I also interviewed another challenger, Cathy W, in November of 2010 as part of the pilot study. Cathy W was a volunteer for many years in the researcher's mother's high school library. She challenged the inclusion of the magazine *Rolling Stone* in the 1990s and was willing to be interviewed about the case with the researcher. Cathy noted that she was concerned with the explicit sexuality in the magazine.

Cathy raised several themes that would be discussed by challengers in the study including the request that magazines and other library material be reviewed by members of the school community and concern over sexual excitement in children when reading certain texts. The interview led to a significant change in the interview protocol. Although the questions did not change, the order did. Cathy's interview began with questions about the actual case and then moved to question about libraries in general. This sequence of questions was a bit unnatural and the interview ended up being quite short. Suspecting that it was probably easier to move from the general to the specific, I reversed the order of the questions. Subsequent interviews that were included in the study proved that this was the correct tactic and conversations with the challengers flowed more freely when they began by discussing their personal feelings about reading and libraries and then moved to the specific challenge case.

### **Limitations**

This study does not purport to be an analysis of a unified worldview of all challengers. Instead, it seeks to delineate some of the contour of the worldviews of people who challenge books as part of a cultural system. In looking at the justifications that challengers give for wanting a particular book removed, it reveals some, but not all,

of the various social structures that inform challengers' actions. Although the findings are somewhat transferable to challengers who are not part of the study, the researcher is not arguing that the findings in the next three chapters constitute the worldviews of all people who challenge books but it does address some of the common conceptualizations of social space used by challengers.

The researcher hoped to observe as many hearings and interview many people, time constraints did not allow for a large number of participants. Public hearings for challenge cases occur irregularly and were difficult to anticipate. This limitation was mitigated by the availability of recordings of many of the public hearings. The researcher also hoped to interview more challenge but, as noted above, the response rate for interview requests was quite low. This might be due to a variety of factors including the perceived professional antagonism of the researcher and the tone of the required consent forms.

Other limitations are integral the nature of qualitative research. For example, data analysis in this study will reflect the perspectives of the researcher. However, in light of these limitations the researcher has attempted to provide rigorous analysis of the challengers' discourse. Finally, although the researcher hopes to discern worldviews of people who challenge materials in libraries, the findings are not necessarily generalizable to all challengers in any censorship case.

### **Notes on the Analysis**

The following three chapters describe several themes that emerged through analysis of the three sources of discourse and are constitutive of the worldviews of

challengers. Great care is taken not to give any identifying information other than gender in the analysis. Gender is only used to avoid using “him or her” throughout the analysis in order to simplify the writing style. Interviewees have been given aliases that match their gender.

All quotations are from transcripts produced by the researcher and any errors are her own. Quotations are followed by a citation in italics indicating the location of the challenge case as well as the data type. Hearings include the gender and number of the speaker in the order of commenters who were arguing for the request for reconsideration. Documents include document type and date. Many of the quotations include necessary context and pertinent words and phrases are indicated in bold. This emphasis is the researcher’s voice alone.

## **Chapter 6: Themes in the Discourse of Censorship: Society, Parenting, and Childhood**

Challenge hearings are filled with both passion and tension where public comments sometimes degenerate into angry exchanges. The book in question serves as both a signifier of a particular problem and a catalyst for debate in a public forum and it is this debate that reveals the worldviews of the participants. For challengers in particular, the objectionable material is a signifier of systemic problems in American society as well as a catalyst to engage their community in a larger discussion regarding these problems. The fact that such material is available to children both indicates that something is wrong with society and is also a symptom of the problem with society.

The idea that American society is in decline is clear throughout challengers' discourse. The language of decay permeates their testimony, documents, and interviews. There is a definitive sense that many aspects of society have changed and not necessarily for the better. For challengers, new sexual mores and gender roles as well as the prevalence of vulgarity and violence indicate a shift in society; one that has come at the expense of both American culture and the people, especially children, who exist within it. Although challengers' arguments do look back to a better time, it would be difficult to describe them as being particularly nostalgic. The past is seen as a template for the present and not necessarily as a time to which challengers wish to return. Instead, as described below, there is apocalyptic tone of spiritual warfare to the challengers' discourse. It focuses more on the outcomes of society's decline rather than a need to return to a more wholesome age.

This chapter attempts to delineate themes in challengers' worldviews concerning the themes of the decline of society, the difficult role of parenting, and the innocence of childhood.<sup>13</sup> In some respects, it is difficult to define the lines among these three aspects of social life as the challengers' discourse provides significant intersection among them. However, every attempt is made to maintain focus on each of these in turn as themes within challengers' discourse. First, the chapter explores challengers' understanding of society with particular emphasis on the themes of moral drift, their sense of being a minority within contemporary American society, and the consequences of moral decline. Second, the chapter looks at the theme of parenthood within challengers' discourse wherein the availability of objectionable material makes parents' work (understood as a role that provides for the moral education of children) more difficult. Finally, the chapter explores the theme of innocence of childhood and how such material leads to its loss and corrupts the moral guidance that parents provide for their children.

### **Society**

In Lewiston, Maine the challenger sent the administration of the local public library many letters outlining her position on *It's Perfectly Normal*, a sexual education book for children. The following excerpt from one of the letters demonstrates the three themes discussed in this section on some of the structured structures that construct challengers' view of society. Two of the themes, that society is in decline and an overall apocalyptic view of that decline, are mentioned explicitly. The third theme, that

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<sup>13</sup> Although other aspects of challengers' worldviews appear throughout their discourse, these are the most salient to a broad understanding of the debate regarding reading challenged materials

challengers are part of an embattled minority, is implied. The idiosyncratic spacing is the writer's own:

**A nation wars against its own people** when it fails to defend the essence of masculinity and femininity. Yes it is a political maneuver for the L P L to accept and defend "I P N" to be on its shelves: L P L **is guilty of a whole lot more** than violating the City of Lewiston's Obscenity Codes, but in my defense of not guilty I will give some evidences that L P L conjoins with the SIECUS curricula and Planned Parenthood to **destroy our great nation**. The latter we know are **reaping huge financial benefits and protections**. These three we know support the highly objectionable book "I P N" (*Lewiston, ME 1/30/2008 Letter*).

Note that the challenger uses the initialisms LPL and IPN for the Lewiston Public Library and the book in question, *It's Perfectly Normal*. SIECUS is the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States. The challenger describes her defense of "not guilty" because she was charged with theft after not returning the book to the public library after a designated length of time.

After stating that the United States is battling against the American people, the writer indicates that the LPL, along with Planned Parenthood and SIECUS, is out to "destroy our great nation." These institutions are *structuring structures* that represent antagonists to the challenger. By providing information on sexuality and providing abortions, these institutions are not only "conspiring to put an end to America", they are also benefiting financially from the nation's destruction. Planned Parenthood and SIECUS are structured as "enemies" to society for the challenger—enemies that are actively working to put an end to American society as it has been known so far. The question then becomes, *what* are these entities destroying?



## Moral Drift

One indication of what institutions such as the LPL and Planned Parenthood are destroying comes from a challenger at a hearing in Stockton, Missouri. The speaker at the public hearing argued against the inclusion of the Sherman Alexie's book the *Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* in the school curriculum:

And all we have **seen over the last 50 years is a slide further and further into debauchery and rebellion against righteousness, principles, ethics and morality.** [What are] the parameters by which they chose the book, I don't see anything in here about values or morality or our ability to care for individuals. **Moral drift of the society.** I am honest person that is necessarily against this book but I am a person that is for the public having the right to elect officials who make decisions such as you made and I want to thank you for your decision that you made and I support it. And I want to say that I am 100% for the decision that you made (*Stockton, MO Hearing Male Speaker #1*).

It is clear from the speaker's statement that society's morals were more in keeping with his own fifty years ago and changes since then have only been to society's detriment.

According to the challenger, the boundaries of permissibility have radically changed over the past 50 years and the values of contemporary society are significantly different what they were in the recent past.<sup>14</sup> As the following challenger from Helena, Montana states in a letter, the 1960s are when the problems for "our youth" began:

Many people wonder **why our youth are in the trouble they are in today vs. fifty years ago.** Well, just take a look at what is being forced down the throats of our youth today. Allowing this book to be a part of our schools curriculum reflects on the values of the Helena community (*Helena, MT Letter 12/3/2010*).

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<sup>14</sup> Shifts in American culture since from the 1960s onward are well-documented and analyzed elsewhere. This study focuses on challengers' own understanding of those shifts in social mores. For more on these cultural changes see, for example, Bellah, 1996 or Hunter, 1992.

This letter writer is also referring to the *Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* and it is clear that the ready availability of this book to young people is part of the moral decline of society. The writer implies that 50 years ago, youth were not “in trouble” because they were not given such objectionable material to read in schools. For the Stockton, Missouri challenger quoted above, this shift has even affected the standards by which schools choose educational materials. According to the challenger, “morality” is not a criterion for inclusion in the curriculum. Although this challenger does not explicitly state what the morals of society were in the past, other challengers offer several examples.

In an attachment to a Request for Reconsideration form, the following challenger discusses several changes to society’s values:

The theme of this book is an extreme version of a **“coming of age”** of our current society which has been **infiltrated by different forms of media pushing illicit sex, graphic situations and an ultracasual view of morality**. Do we need to join in on the **assault of decency** (*Clarkstown, NY Request for Reconsideration #1*)?

Note the use of the term “current” here indicates that there was some time in the past when society had a different view of “coming of age.” According to this challenger, the time prior to adulthood used to be “decent.” Now, the media is identified as an “infiltrator” that pushes new morals particularly regarding sexuality onto society.

Some of these values that the media pushes are more concrete than others—it is difficult to know what the challenger means by “graphic situations” though in the statement above it is linked to illegitimate sex. “Morality” is never fully defined by this particular challenger but one can assume that to be moral means not engaging in illicit sex. The statement “ultracasual view of morality” implies a prevailing sense that the

media does not sufficiently emphasize the perceived consequences of such behavior. What these consequences might be is not specified by the challenger but one gets the sense that they are calamitous. There is a feeling that administrators who allow such material in libraries or schools are unaware of the catastrophic consequences to their decisions. This will be discussed in more detail below.

The challenger in Lewiston, Maine offers a very succinct definition of how society has declined morally. She particularly focuses on gender roles and the protection of children.

A culture is civilized in as much as **women and children are respected and defended by men**. To the degree that **children are respected** enough to be given the best possible education in preparation for their human vocation will be the degree of the strength and respect of the United States in the world. One reputable organization has produced what is known the “Map Of Shame.” This map, indicates the nations in the world that are literally sliding off the face of the earth because these nations are targeting their own people for extinction. **“I P N” is just one small but very effective pawn** being used to cause our great nation to possibly be one of those nations going the way of the dinosaur and included in this “Map Of Shame” (*Lewiston, ME Letter 1/30/2008*).

This challenger clearly states that a civilized society can only exist if men and women fulfill traditional gender roles where men are the protectors and women are the protected and failing to do so means that the United States is no longer a moral nation. Here one can see how the presence of objectionable material in a public institution signifies a greater moral decline—the institution becomes a “small but effective pawn” in the moral drift of society. That is, both the book and its presence on the shelves of the local public library are structured as both an object and an action that means that the nation is in decline. The Lewiston Public Library, in its failure fulfill its prescribed role as defender, is no longer playing a “civilizing” role in society when it allows *It’s Perfectly Normal* on

its shelves. This directly relates to the structured structure regarding the library as a place of shared community values. The role of the library in the community is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

A sense of moral drift permeates much of the challengers' discourse. There is a sense that society has changed profoundly and not for the better. As the interviewee from Helena, Montana noted, "Our culture has gotten away from a standard. And **we don't follow a standard anymore** as to how to live. How to treat one another. And that's just had a huge effect" (*Helena, MT Interview*). One of the "standards" in this and other comments refers to the standards of selection used by public libraries and school. In the past, books like the ones in question would never have been allowed on library shelves or in school curricula in the first place. Their presence as signifier of a greater change and part of an active attack on the "standards" of the past is implied in such statements. For challengers, society is more than just a collection of people in a given geographic space—society, discussed here as "the nation" or the "community" or just "we", is the backbone for life. Throughout their discourse, challengers are concerned with the values and morals that are condoned by society and that without a strong backbone, society will collapse. If poor values and morals are acceptable in the larger society, then the world as it is known today is doomed.<sup>15</sup> Although this might seem hyperbolic, the language of doom and destruction—that is, the language of spiritual warfare regarding the state of an

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<sup>15</sup> Again, note that this is not a nostalgic argument. The challengers do not necessarily want to return the past but instead worry more about what changes will come if society continues on its current trajectory.

individual's soul—is ubiquitous. Challengers often state that they are part of besieged minority that works to remind others of the standards of the past.

### **An Embattled Minority**

Throughout challengers' discourse there is a prevailing sense that they are one of the few individuals left on the side of "morality." They are willing to speak up in their community for what they believe is right even in the face of opposition from many of their neighbors.

So don't tell me that this is preparing our kids, ok. Because that's not acceptable to me. And it's not acceptable to people—a lot of people. But because we're standing up and saying "No, this is wrong" **and we may be the minority today**—that does not mean we're wrong. It just means we **have the guts to stand up for our kids and children**. And I don't want my grandchildren and I don't want your 3-year-olds to be told that this is acceptable in our society. It doesn't work that way (*Clarkstown, NY Hearing Male Speaker #3*).

The speaker quoted above states that, because of his willingness to ask that a book be removed, he is demonstrating a bravery that other community members do not possess. This is a type of structuring structure where the challenger perceives that he is different from others around him. He is willing to accept the ire of his neighbors in order to protect both his and other people's children and grandchildren. For him, it is more important to be "right" than for others to agree with him.

Another challenger in Stockton, Missouri uses the dwindling rates of religious believers as a framework for discussing his sense of being one of the few who adhere to a particular set of beliefs:

I am actually here as a Christian [...]. It's estimated in sources from campus ministries that **75% of practicing Christians fall away from the Christian faith** during their first year of college. Abortion rates among Christians and post-Christians are the same as others. Divorce rates are at parity with unbelievers.

**Professing believers walk the same, dress the same, watch the same movies, and read the same books. We're living in a post-Christian culture** partially caused by post-Modernism that says that all truth is relative and we live in a world where there is [no] absolute truth (*Stockton, MO Hearing Male Speaker #3*).

Not only is he a minority in his community, this speaker feels that he is a minority even among his fellow Christians. There are no delineating characteristics or behavior markers between Christians and "Post-Christians." His statement implies that the book in question should not be read by Christians but since everyone reads "the same books" such material is considered to be acceptable by all, including those who call themselves Christians.

The challenger in Lewiston, Maine also makes an explicit claim that her stance on the challenged book makes her part of a dwindling minority.

The greatest **war against human civilization is immorality**. History will look back on the past 30-50 years as a dark time in human civilization. I felt a great sense of sadness when I received your e-mail. I keep hoping **there might be a remnant with a dutiful sense of responsibility towards the youth** (*Lewiston, ME Letter 8/20/2007*).

In this statement she explicitly links the perceived moral decline of the nation as discussed above with the idea that she is on the losing side of the battle. Of particular interest is her use of the term "remnant." "Remnant" or the faithful few who are left after the apocalypse is a common theme throughout the apocalyptic and spiritual warfare literature (Frykholm, 2004). It is clear that, for this challenger, there are only a few left who are willing to battle against immorality.

## The Language of Spiritual Warfare

Finally, one of the major themes concerning society in challengers' discourse is the dire consequences that will come of moral drift does not end. As noted earlier, this is often stated in apocalyptic language with a distinctively militaristic tone.<sup>16</sup> In previous statements in this chapter, challengers spoke of society falling into "rebellion" and "assaults" on decency. Another discusses a "war" on human civilization. One speaker at the Stockton, Missouri public hearing plainly notes that

**Civilization has indeed failed.** They flourish depending on how moral that civilization is. A civilization is a group of people who are civil along with **cultural refinement, along with infrastructure, and civilizations fail in direct proportion to corruption.** Then there's God. Some people like to give him [?] a name that we can't repeat in the pledge of allegiance. A name that we're going to chase out of the public square. A person—and he is a person, not just a spirit. We're created in his image. And some would have us not even allow us to give him thanks in a public school (*Stockton, MO Hearing Male Speaker #5*).

The speaker's definition of civilization is clear: A civilization is a moral, culturally refined society with infrastructure whose people eschew corruption. Of particular interest is the explicit link the challenger makes between morality and civilization as well as the implicit understanding that the presence of a particular book symbolizes the failure of civilization. The challenged book's availability in the Stockton School District demonstrates a lack of "cultural refinement" and the failure of the district, through its purchase of the challenged book, to adhere to the parameters of the civilized world. The

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<sup>16</sup> Although it is often assumed that challengers are religious conservatives, this study included challengers who targeted books for non-religious reasons. However, the language of spiritual warfare was a distinctive characteristic in challengers' discourse. This language, although often based in a religious worldviews, is not necessarily related to theology. That is, the language was often used to describe changes in the secular realm. For more on apocalypticism in American culture see Frykholm, 2004 and Bivins, 2008.

theme of public institutions as symbols of the community is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

In another case, the Lewiston, Maine challenger quoted above states in a letter to the Lewiston Public Library administration that “the greatest war against human civilization is immorality” (*Lewiston, ME Letter 8/20/2007*). It is clear from this language that challenges are not based simply on differences of opinion but are a struggle over what the moral structures of society will be in the future.

The themes of moral drift, minority belief, and the apocalyptic destruction of civilization are strongly yoked with ideas concerning sexual morality and gender roles for many of the challengers’ understanding of social and moral order. The structuring and structured structures that construct many challengers’ worldviews in these areas tilts toward what one might call a traditional morality wherein the proper outlet for sexuality is within a heterosexual married, family unit.<sup>17</sup> The following letter writer from Clarkstown, New York associates all three of the themes concerning society:

My wife and I have a Judaio-Christian [sic] perspective which stands directly opposed to such **worldliness**. If one is to conclude that the basic building block of society is the family unit - and that traditionally Is [sic] understood as one man, one woman, and their offspring, then to propose any curriculum in the school system contrary to that, is to establish the **society of the chaotic**. There is a beautiful design and balance in the family unit as understood by my description. **Within the construct of family design are limits and guidelines for behavior.** One is not free in a moral society to act immorally without consequences. The designers of our constitution realized this. Without an established set of moral codes and guidelines, once again, chaos is the end result and the destruction of such a society (*Clarkstown, NY Letter, Date redacted*).

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<sup>17</sup> For an analysis of traditional gender roles and current discourse surrounding them see Coontz, 1998 and 2000.



The letter writer and his wife are “directly opposed” to the “worldliness” of the larger society. “Chaos” and “destruction” will prevail if the school system does not support a traditionally organized society. Of particular importance for him and other challengers is the role of the family and the support it receives from public institutions within the public sphere: the family and particularly parents play an important role in setting boundaries for their children in order to save them from the “society of the chaotic” and “worldliness.”

### **Parenting**

For many challengers, parenting is more than just a simple role—it is structured as job that one has willingly assumed and, like other jobs, it requires time, skill, and specialized knowledge.<sup>18</sup> Throughout their discourse, challengers focus on several important aspects of the role of parenting. First, parents must set boundaries and maintain a certain amount of control over their children’s lives. Second, coupled with the idea that even though it is a parent’s job to set limits for their children, many parents do not and are, essentially, falling down on the job. Finally, there is sense that parenting is difficult and that public institutions must help parents with the difficult task of raising children. To use Bourdieu’s terms, “parents” are part of a structuring structure for challengers that makes up the basic family unit. The meaning of parenting (i.e., its structured structure) for challengers is much more complicated and often described with

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<sup>18</sup> The discourse of parenting as “work” is ubiquitous outside of the challengers discussed here and deserves its own study.

terms from the realm of economics and is imbued with an undercurrent of anxiety concerning the work of others who fulfill the role.

### **Boundary Setting**

Parents have many different roles to play in their children's lives. For many challengers, one of the most important is that of boundary setter. Parents must set limits for their children's behavior and impose punishments when they go outside of these limits. As will be discussed in the next section, children are often constructed in challengers' discourse as innocent vessels who, through education and life experiences, are filled with knowledge from various sources. One of the most important sources for knowledge, especially moral knowledge, are the boundaries that are set by their parents regarding moral behavior. For many challengers, setting these limits is both a parent's right and constitutes his or her proper role in the family structure. The following speaker in New Bedford, New Hampshire describes this role:

For people who want this book, they can ask for it, the book is available. Go buy it. Get it online. I didn't let my kids when they were five watch R-rated movies for the same reasons. You need to **draw a line as to what is appropriate and what's not**. If other parents want to provide other information to their kids. Fine. It's up to them. But I don't think we need to have it in the public schools (*New Bedford, NH Male Speaker #5*).

The idea of "drawing lines" for children in regard to the media that they consume is a common theme throughout challengers' discourse. Some types of media are considered inappropriate and it is the duty and responsibility of parents to make sure that their children are not exposed to problematic movies, books, or television. Note that the speaker in New Bedford points to institutionalized film ratings as an aid for setting boundaries for children. The film ratings are both a structuring and structured structure:

when a film is given an R-rating it is perceived as a certain type of film—one that is not appropriate for the challengers’ children. To the challenger the book in question is analogous to an R-rated film (though one without the structuring device of ratings) and therefore should not be made available to students. That is, the book is structured as being inappropriate for children. It is interesting that the challenge concerns a book in the high school curriculum and he uses the age of five in his analogy. However, this seems to be a rhetorical device within the discourse of censorship to indicate just how inappropriate the challenged book is for student. That is, the book is so objectionable it is comparable to showing an R-rated movie to a five-year-old child.

Many challengers tend to see boundaries as part of a framework for inculcating values and morals in children. It is through setting limits that parents demonstrate moral right and wrong for their children. For the challenger below, the boundaries are themselves values. (Prior to this challenger’s testimony, several students had also expressed their positions concerning the challenge case at the hearing in Clarkstown, New York):

So first of all, I am impressed by the students here. I think it’s a good thing but everybody also needs to remember that **what you teach your children at home**, whether it’s books or whether it’s TV, everybody has to be aware that **that’s your foundation. If you’re strict at home with your children, the educators should support that.** And I know that there’s problems. I know that six and seventh graders back in 1992 were talking about sex and parents their parents apparatuses in the classroom. Now. If you want to talk about keeping in line with good morals and values that’s fine everybody deserves the opportunity to read or not read. And so everybody should be respectful of everyone else (*Clarkstown, NY Hearing Female Speaker #5*).

The challenger is clear that it is the role of parents to set boundaries for their children in the home. Interestingly, media is understood to be an important aspect of being “taught”

proper morals and values. It exists as part of an educational framework and forms a foundation for the moral development of children. Although there might be problems throughout the school system, the institution should still support the efforts of “strict” parents.

Boundary setting is constructed by many challengers as a common sense skill for parents—being a parent means setting limits for one’s children. Parenting is structured as a role that sets restrictions. Although, as will be discussed below, parenting can be difficult, establishing boundaries is one of the most basic actions any parent can perform. As one challenger Clarkstown, NY states, “Now, look, read the book and then see if this is appropriate for your son or daughter. **You don’t have to have the tools to teach your son or daughter this correctly—go out on the streets and get it**” (*Clarkstown, NY Male Speaker #6*). The skills that one needs for parenting are available “on the street” and it is one’s duty as a parent to develop these skills. According to the challenger applying this knowledge, it will be obvious that the book in question is not appropriate.

One of the interviewees stated that going through the challenge helped her clarify what was appropriate for her children to read.

The book’s still there and I have three more children that will be in that building. They know...we’ve now had lots of talks about what’s appropriate to pick out and what’s not. This **gives a chance to set some boundaries as far as what they’re allowed to read** because I hadn’t even thought that there would be a book that like that in the library. To be a selection as a possibility. Now I think a little differently (*Central York, PA Interview*).

Even with limits in place, the challenger is still concerned that her children will encounter objectionable material. Note that she is somewhat surprised that the book was available to children in the first place and is concerned that, even with the limits she has placed on

her children's media consumption, they will still come into contact with media of which she disapproves. The experience of the challenge taught her that her values do not necessarily align with the schools and this has made her somewhat wary of the institution as a whole.

The theme of boundary setting introduces the subject of control into challengers' discourse. Although public schools and libraries should help parents set boundaries, for challengers, it is parents who have ultimate authority over the moral development of their children.

**My responsibility as a parent supersedes that of a teacher or any national interest group.** I am most the qualified person to tell the board what is appropriate for my child. No board, community group will **ultimately answer for the content of my child's education or the content of their integrity.** That is my responsibility. It is the responsibility of this board, in my opinion, to represent the will and values of this community that elected them to this position of public trust (Stockton, MO Male Speaker #6).

Parents not only decide what is appropriate for their children, their decision making is a reflection of themselves to the wider society. If their children do not have "integrity" then they have failed as parents. "Parent" is constructed by parents as not simply a role but as having great social meaning and one's achievements as a parent will be evaluated by others in society. In some respects, this idea that parents have ultimate control leads directly to the next theme regarding the failure of other parents to do their jobs correctly. If parents are the ultimate arbiters of moral development for their children, what does it mean when they fail to do so?

### “Other Parents”

“Other parents,” writ large, are of great concern to many challengers and a common theme throughout their discourse is that other parents are “falling down on the job.” As one of the speakers at the public hearing in Merrill, Wisconsin states, “Some parents—I don’t want to say that they don’t care but **they don’t have the time or resources to read every book** that the school puts forth to our kids” (*Merrill, WI Female Speaker #7*). This speaker implies that it is part of parents’ job to read all of the books assigned to their children but some parents simply do not have the resources to do so.

Another challenger states:

It sounds pretty conservative, I know, but I think it has a lot to do the lack of **parental involvement in what their kids are reading**. The themes. A lot of children around here are allowed to play video games or allowed games of a violent nature. We certainly don’t allow those in our house. Not something we encourage or permit them to do while other children their age are allowed to play graphic video games and read whatever literature they want. I don’t know if it’s **lack of parental involvement or they just think it’s not damaging or I’m not sure why that it is** (*Central York, PA Interview*).

The interviewee’s statement implies that she is concerned with the moral development of both her own and other people’s children. Other parents do not seem to understand the damage they are inflicting on their children when they allow them to read violent material.

The theme of differing standards of parenting is quite common in challenger’s discourse. “Other parents” are simply teaching their children incivility in the eyes of challengers. Another interviewee stated:

“We thought...we’re very involved in our children’s lives and what they see, what they watch, what they hear, what they read, and we thought that that’s just a testimony to our loving involvement in our children’s lives. **And I know it’s not**

**that way with a lot of children in our schools today. The rudeness. The crassness. The vulgarity.** That difference, I believe, is a testimony to how we're involved in our children's lives" (*Helena, MT Interview*).

She is clearly aware of how her parenting differs from others whom she perceives to be less involved in their children's lives than she and her husband are. Other children are more rude, crass, and vulgar than her own and this is a direct outcome of their parent's neglect. A letter writer from Merrill, Wisconsin is blunt in her characterization of parents who "fall down on the job." They are simply unaware of the harm they are causing their children:

I realize **that some parents do not care what their kids see or read.** I also submit that they are **either ignorant of the facts, effect and repercussions of such books or are, in my case, afraid to say anything to the education professionals.** They also **do not have the time to read all of the books their kids read at school** to make an educated decision about what they would like their kid to experience or not experience. I realize that you cannot cater to every parent's wishes, but as a whole would it not be wiser to stay away from such forms of literature (*Merrill, WI Letter 6/10/2011*)?

It is the school's responsibility not to "give in" to these parents. For this challenger, since the other parents do not know the materials their children are reading, schools should eschew adding controversial books in the curriculum. Because other parents are not living up to their role as boundary setters, school and library administrators must help those parents who do not have the time or inclination to impose boundaries and limits on their children.

### **Institutional Support for Parenting**

The idea that parents are busy is a common theme throughout challengers' discourse. As one speaker at the Clarkstown, New York hearing noted "We as parents work. We don't have time to read every single material that our kids are view"

(Clarkstown, NY Hearing Female Speaker #8). Instead, parents rely on elected representatives to ensure that their own interests are included in library and school policies. The speaker continues: “We vote on you as our representatives and we want you to represent us and to give us the opportunity to depend...depend upon you to use good judgment on what you are putting in the curriculum. That’s all...it is up to you to understand and represent us as parents.” Parents, especially those who lack resources, are indebted to administrators and elected officials to make good decisions regarding curriculum and collection materials. The schools and libraries are *structured* in this discourse as a support system for parents.

Another challenger is concerned that if parents do not receive this support from administrators there will be a rift between parents and their children.

...but I think about kids who [ ] before it and happen to have conservative parents who said “We don’t want you to read that book.” Then what would that develop between the parent and the child. That causes some kind of **division between the parent and child because that child might feel like they’re an outsider and you in high school they’re all challenging what they’ve been raised in**. Moral values. Religious values. That’s what they’re all going through. So **they don’t need a book presented by the school to add to that** (Clarkstown, NY Hearing Female Speaker #5).

Once again there is fear that the institution’s values do not match the parents. When this happens, children will feel like outsiders in the school environment. Presumably other children would know that they were not allowed to read a particular book and this would make these children “different” from the others in school. When such a situation occurs, it can cause tension at home.

When libraries and schools have objectionable material, they make parents’ jobs more difficult. According to challengers, administrators of these two institutions have



two roles. First, they must keep parents informed of what is going on in their institutions. Second, they must ensure that such controversial materials are not available for students. These ideas will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, but it is important to note that this is how challengers conceptualize the relationship between public institutions and parenting. The following speaker at a hearing in Clarkstown, New York states these ideas explicitly:

So, your job is to **educate our children and to inform the parents properly so they can make the right decisions** as to whether or not what their child is learning squares with their moral values. That was not done. And this is not the first instance. **Your job is not to make our job as parents harder.** Your job is to help us so that we can develop our children into model young men and women who go out into the world. We are all very busy in this society and I just want to say to all the parents here: take the time and know what your children are learning (*Clarkstown, NY Hearing Male Speaker #4*).

While the role of the parent is to set boundaries, it is the role of the school system to help parents enforce these limits. However, the speaker still emphasizes that other parents should be informed of what is happening in their children's lives.

One of the most interesting aspects of the idea that parents must set boundaries—and public institutions must aid them in doing so—is the implicit understanding of children that comes out of this discourse. Children are structured as vessels who are either “filled with ideas” as they grow or individuals who have certain innate traits that are “activated” through exposure to media. As one challenger states:

We don't want to question the teachers' authority or the educational values that they bring forward. But we do want to be heard. We do want cooperation. We do want to know that you understand that we do understand what our kids are up to. Rules need to be drawn and **we need to put in all the good stuff while we can before we let the rest of the world fill them up.** Part of it's about society and culture and the culture that we build in our school systems in the day to day

contact between kids and the adults that they're in contact with (*Merrill, WI Hearing Female Speaker #7*).

Children are seen as vessels that are slowly filled with knowledge and it is up to parents to ensure that any knowledge they receive enhances their moral development.

### **Children and Innocence**

Their view of childhood innocence is perhaps one of the most intriguing aspects of many challengers' worldviews. Children are seen as beings in need of protection from the outside world, especially when it comes to protecting their "innocence." Innocence is characterized here as a state of unawareness and children are innocent because they are unaware of the world around them unless it introduced to them.<sup>19</sup> There are two prominent constructions of childhood innocence within challengers' discourse. The first views the child as a *tabula rasa* and sees sexuality, violence, vulgarity and other behaviors as *learned* behaviors. The second construction views childhood as time when these behaviors are *latent*. Sexuality, violence, and vulgarity are already part of a child's natural being but they are only triggered through some outside mechanism. In either construction, the action of the challenger is the same: since they lack the requisite interpretive strategies for the material, children must be protected from learning about such behaviors as long as possible.

The innocence of children, regardless of how it is constructed, is taken as a given for many challengers. It is something that never needs to be explained or discussed, only protected. Throughout challengers' discourse children are seen as individuals who would

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<sup>19</sup> For an historical analysis of childhood, innocence and its relationship to media consumption see Beisel, 1997.

not have knowledge of sexuality, violence, obscenity, or vulgarity if it is not presented in media. As one challenger states “This book is not suitable for children in Elementary school and if I have to start petitions I will then all the parents will see that Westside Elementary committee does not care about the innocence of our children” (*Spring Hill, FL Request for Reconsideration, 11/10/10*). For challengers, there is a direct relationship between not supporting the challengers’ position and being unwilling to protect children. To disagree with the challengers’ assessment of a particular book means that one is unconcerned with children’s innocence. As will be shown in the following chapter, this characterization is attributed to the staff members of libraries and schools that choose to make “harmful” material available to children.

Children’s need for protection is a primary justification throughout requests for reconsideration of collection or curriculum materials. The following letter writer from Stockton, Missouri discusses how this is one of the primary duties of the local school board: “We are certainly blessed to have a School Board that will stand in protection of our children and young people and not be bent by vocal critics” (*Stockton, MO Letter 5/13/2010*). This need for protection is evident in another letter writer’s arguments regarding challenged material in Helena, Montana where she compares the book to manure:

Our children do not need to **roll in bad things to understand their nature**. But there is an interesting phenomenon about manure. If one works near it for enough time, it begins to lose its smell, and one is less concerned with getting away. **How can it be wise to go out of our way to expose children and teenagers to what is in essence--manure?** It defies common sense (*Helena, MT Letter, n.d.*).

For this challenger, part of the maturation process is learning how to understand one's own nature and being able to recognize the difference between good and bad behaviors. The challenger holds the *tabula rasa* view of childhood: If children are exposed to the objectionable material, they will no longer recognize why it is problematic and it will instead become part of their overall character. As children are filled with knowledge, they slowly become a particular type of person with agency and personality and it is vital that administrators of public institutions do their part to ensure that they are on the correct path. Also note the challenger's use of the term manure. Following the work of Douglas, one can see that the challenger characterizes the book as a "dirty object" something that must be removed from access to children lest they do not recognize the object for what it actually is.

The following commenter at a public hearing clearly explains that it is also the duty of parents protect children from problematic material. Prior to this comment, she described Jiminy Cricket from Walt Disney's *Pinocchio* as an exemplar of positive values in media:

Esteemed board members, I've witnessed the values of power and control supersede the values of purity and integrity and goodness during the debate over *Montana 1948*. And **the power and control of issues do not rest with the parents.** We are here to **defend our children from obscenity and corruption.** For me it is a shame to find safety and virtue in Walt Disney but not in the representatives of my community. Thank you (*Merrill, WI Hearing Female Speaker #7*).

As in other themes discussed in this chapter, the language used is martial. This challenger notes that parents must "defend" children from outside forces which are filled with definite dangers to children since it is filled with "obscenity and corruption."

Another writer also uses the martial language of spiritual warfare to describe the dangers of society:

The **world assaults** our children every day with profane and obscene use through countless outlets. Why do some feel the need to **perpetuate that assault** in the guise of preparing our children for the real world? Why do we recognize that the material is vulgar yet feel the need to expose our children to it (*Stockton, MO Hearing Male Speaker #6*)?

For this challenger, profanity and obscenity are so prevalent throughout society that parents must stand with the school board in vigilance. If they do not, children will be harmed risking both health and life and failing to become responsible adults. Another challenger writes:

LPL has outrageously adopted policies that **put youth at the risk to be sick for life or their possible death** by allowing books on their shelves that encourage reckless sexual behaviors. The library has chosen this Playboy kind of book for children's entertainment. Youth are their targeted segment of Lewiston's population who have not attained the ability to process without trauma these pornographic illustrations and writings. "I P N" violates **youth's period of latency, robs them of their childhood, and greatly infringes upon necessary preparation for responsible adulthood** (*Lewiston, ME Letter 1/30/2008*).

The challenger in Lewiston makes an explicit link between the challenged material and risks to children's health. Note that this challenger uses the second construction of childhood innocence wherein youth is a "period of latency." If children encounter objectionable material then they will be aware of their own potential to be, for example, "sexually reckless." Presumably for this challenger children's sexuality is unrealized until they are either told about it by outsiders or it is awakened through reading.

For the Lewiston, Maine challenger, the book contains knowledge that will have extremely dire effects from which they will not be able to recover. The idea that reading can have profound effects on the development of children is explored more in Chapter 8.

For now, it is clear that challengers argue that adults must protect children from the perceived harm that will come from reading the challenged materials. As the following writer states, it is up to administrators to ensure that children are protected: “We approve the school board’s action for the book *Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. Thank you for making this stand and for your part in **protecting our children’s mind** [sic]” (*Stockton, MO Letter 5/10/2010*). The issue of protecting children is ubiquitous in the discourse of challengers. For many of them, this is why they challenged a particular book in the first place—to safeguard the minds of the innocence.

One of the interviewees was explicit in her assessment of what inappropriate material does to children:

There can be a story written about, a mystery that doesn’t involve violence. So for me it’s just a little **about taking away that childhood innocence** when you...you know expose them to that kind of violent imagery you **can never get that out of your head**. So I just thought it was not appropriate for children as young as 8 years old, for that to be in that library (*Central York, PA Interview*).

Children who consume the objectionable material will no longer be innocent. This is the tabula rasa view of childhood: children’s minds did not contain the knowledge before it was introduced and once there it cannot be removed. As first introduced in Chapter 3, children have an undisciplined imagination are therefore unable to have critical distance from a text. This concept is discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

Another challenger also presents the idea that once certain ideas are introduced to children, they cannot be erased:

Finally the tragedy that scores of **minors are having their minds warped and corrupted** by images and themes they’ll remember for the rest of their lives. Images and themes that scintillate and seduce. Images and themes they are

**entirely unqualified and unprepared to handle or process.** (*Clarkstown, NY Request for Reconsideration*).

The objectionable material leads to the corruption of innocence. Since the children are innocent, either as a tabula rasa or in a latent period, they simply do not have the mental capacity to handle the information given in the challenged book. For challengers, the effects of such material cannot be underestimated. In fact, the loss of innocence in childhood can be linked to the overall moral decline in society.

Lewiston Public Library shows no remorse **nor makes inquiries to the cost of sexual liberation of youth as is revealed by experts.**

Youth who grasp the essence of their human nature will never be a detriment to society. Youth have the capacity to achieve true meaning of their human sexuality, and of being other-centered for the building up and protection of society. **Impeded their natural growth and development and we destroy local culture and beyond.**

I cannot possibly bring into this report every credible piece of evidence that leads to what does not keep our youth safe, but I've made a diligent effort gather the facts needed to get the book "It's Perfectly Normal" off the shelves of public funded libraries and out of schools (*Lewiston, ME Letter 1/30/2008*).

This quote clearly demonstrates the consequences of not removing the challenged material from the library shelves. Children who are exposed to the material will not grow up to be productive members of society. Not only will the local community be destroyed but also the larger society. The cost of "sexual liberation" for the challenger is simply too high.

Hearing teachers and admins defend this book is alarming especially after hearing how children had to disclose how their innocence had been stolen from them in real life. If the nature of public education is to scandalize and sexualize our children, then my children will have no part in the public school system. **Our children are victimized enough outside of school:** from the promotion of underage sex to the idolization of anorexic pop stars to the marketing of destructive hormonal pills. **Our beautiful children have been come instruments**

**for profit and for social engineering and experimentation. I dare say that includes our school district** (*Merrill, WI Hearing Female Speaker #7*).

Through exposure to the challenged material, children become victims of a larger system that attempts to exploit them. Because they are innocents that are filled with knowledge through the education process, children are in need of protection from institutions such as public schools. It is clear from the statement above that this particular challenger has lost faith in the ability of the public school system to protect the innocence of children in her community.

### **Thematic Summary**

As noted at the beginning of the chapter, challenges to materials in public institutions are filled with passion. The individuals on both sides of the issue feel strongly about the challenged material and are often willing to engage in a type of public advocacy that is novel to them. The testimony and written statements given throughout challenge cases often swing wildly from a discussion of the challenged material to a defense of life and liberty. Even though the challengers in this study are from all over the United States and, in many cases, challenging different books, there are several themes that are common throughout their justifications for removing a book from a school's curriculum or a public library's shelves. These justifications reveal some of the structures that make up the worldviews of these challengers particularly via themes that are common throughout their testimony, requests for reconsideration, and responses to interview questions. As noted above, the themes discussed in this chapter do not constitute complete worldviews but do disclose some of the structures for cognition and meaning that challengers use when arguing for the removal or relocation of a particular



book. As discussed in Chapter 3, the discourse that challengers use is understood as a type of poetic wherein individuals work within an institutionalized structure when developing arguments for a particular point of view. Poetics is defined here as the creative practices of individuals that take place within a structured space—it is how one uses the repertoires available for justifying one’s actions. In Bourdieu’s terms, the poetic takes place within an individual’s habitus—between and among structuring structures and structured structures.

### **Society – A Fragile Backbone**

Challengers view society as a backbone of life that should provide “good” morals and values to its members. For them, the society of thirty to fifty years ago provided “good morals” for its citizens. Since then American society has shifted profoundly and, in some respects, the fragility of moral consensus has been revealed. This is the essence of the argument regarding moral drift discussed above. The 1960s, in particular, was a time of upheaval throughout American society and the nation is just beginning to see the outcomes of that shift. This is a well-known argument throughout political discourse in the United States concerning those of conservative mindset on the red right-hand of the political spectrum and those of a more liberal mindset on the blue left. In this study, even though the challengers are political actors, it is more fruitful to explore their arguments using socio-theoretical frameworks regarding the changes of society outside of the

political realm using a social-theoretical framework based in symbolic structures in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of their justifications.<sup>20</sup>

The challengers' justifications are based on more than a simple political framework. Instead they see shifts in the actual structures that shape their worldviews. Moral drift is not simply a political moral drift but a change to the structures of civilization as it has been known. Sexual mores, gender roles, the ubiquity of violence and obscenity all point to a shift in structure of culture and society. For the challengers, it is the structuring structures of society that have shifted. What is recognized as "society" has been altered over the past 50 years. The meaning of these shifts, that is their structured structures, is profound as it indicates for the challengers a change in the very fabric of civilization.

This analysis may seem exaggerated, but it is clear from the challengers' discourse that they view these moral shifts in what can only be understood as apocalyptic terms regarding the moral conceptualization of society. There is an ongoing assault on what they view as moral and they are the embattled remnant standing up for those morals. This viewpoint helps to explain some of the language used throughout challengers' testimony. As stated above, the objectionable material both signifies and is a symptom of society's moral decline.

### **Parenting – A Difficult Boundary Setting Role**

Challengers typify parenting as one of the most important roles in society that requires special skills and resources that some parents are unable to provide to their

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<sup>20</sup> In political discourse, these debates are known as the culture wars. See Hunter, 1992.

children. Their discourse concerning the role of parenting is somewhat fraught. Parenting is “natural” in that it should be obvious how one should conduct oneself as a parent particularly when it comes to setting boundaries for one’s children. However, the challengers also sometimes argue parenting is also a skill that can be learned if one is willing to be attentive. In either case, challengers argue that it is imperative for parents to fulfill their role as boundary setters for their children.

Parenting for challengers is also fraught because they tend to view parents as having control over their children’s lives. If one of the primary roles of a parent is to maintain boundaries, it is clearly problematic for challengers that there are parents who do not agree with them on what those boundaries ought to be. These parents are essentially “falling down on the job.” When faced with such disagreement, the challengers turn to institutions for help.

When it comes to public institutions in the lives of parents, challengers argue public libraries and schools should help parents provide boundaries for their children. This means that they should always err on the side of caution. The presence of objectionable material on library shelves or school curriculum means that they not fulfilling this role. The construction of these institutions in challengers’ discourse will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

### **Childhood –Vessels of Knowledge**

The innocence of children is a major theme in challengers’ discourse. Innocence is constructed as a lack of knowing about ideas or issues that are perceived to be negative. Unless they are introduced to it by outsiders through media or the educational

curriculum, children do not know about sexuality, obscenity, or violence. Most of the challengers do not view these as part of the human condition—they are solely learned behaviors.

Children's innocence must be protected by both parents and institutions. The challenged material signifies the presence of knowledge that is forbidden for children and if they are not exposed to the material, their innocence will be maintained. This is what it means to set boundaries for children as a parent. By setting limits a parent is, in fact, protecting their children's innocence.

What is most significant here is that children are not understood as individuals who possess the ability to have critical distance from texts. Since, according to challengers, children lack the interpretive strategies to properly understand the challenged material, it will necessarily lead to dire consequences if they are exposed to it. Part of what it means to be a child is to lack adequate skills of comprehension when faced with problematic material. Everything to which children are exposed becomes part of their character. When encountering such a signifier, challengers draw on the structuring and structured structures within their own worldviews to justify their arguments for relocation or removal objectionable material.

The following chapter examines a more narrow aspect of the structuring and structured structures of society: public institutions. In particular, it investigates challengers' construction of public libraries and schools and the policies and procedures used in challenge cases.

## **Chapter 7: Themes in the Discourse of Censorship: Public Institutions and Procedures**

In light of ubiquity of books—they are available in bookstores and on the internet—it is difficult to understand challengers' efforts to remove a particular book from the shelves of a local public or school library or the curriculum of a local school system. What is the impetus behind such actions? This study argues that challengers' actions are primarily related to the practice of reading; however, the site of the challenge is also an important factor when attempting to understand challengers' efforts. While the previous chapter focused on challengers' structures of society, parenting, and childhood, this chapter investigates their construction of two institutions in society: the public library and the public school as well as challengers' understanding of the practices employed by staff in these institutions.

As noted in the previous chapter, this study examines book challenges through a social-theoretical lens that focuses on the actions of challengers as a symbolic practice. Through Pierre's Bourdieu's theory of practice, this chapter investigates how challengers' discourse reveals a worldview wherein public institutions are constructed as more than simply repositories—they are public symbols of the community itself. These institutions are spaces of both safety and orderly knowledge. In fact, these two traits are often mutually dependent for challengers: if disorderly, unsanctioned knowledge is present in the school curriculum or public library collections, then the institution cannot be a safe, orderly place it used to be. As noted in Chapter 2, following Mary Douglas's theory of purity, the challenged books are ambiguous or anomalous knowledge and are indicative disorder. Therefore, the objectionable materials must be removed or relocated

in order to restore the institutions to order and safety. Challenges are, in some respects, an effort to reorder an institution of an object that has fundamentally changed its character.

This chapter first focuses on challengers' discourse concerning public libraries and, to a lesser extent, public schools as places of safety and sanctioned knowledge for children. It then discusses the policies and procedures that library and school administrators have put in place concerning requests for reconsideration of collection and curriculum materials. It must be emphasized that this chapter, like the previous one, investigates challengers' own understanding of public libraries, schools, and the procedures used in these institutions. That is, its primary focus is on challengers' structured structures of public institutions and procedures. Particularly in the discussion concerning the policies and procedures, these constructions may or may not align with how librarians, teachers, and administrators understand their roles. Challengers' discourse reveals their own understandings of these institutions and institutional practices.

### **Controversy in Public Institutions**

Libraries fulfill many institutional roles for challengers and throughout their discourse challengers discuss "libraries" as a general institution that lends to patrons. The school and library buildings are intended to be places where children are free to move around without fear of encountering objectionable materials. Challengers also structure libraries as places where the First Amendment of the United States Constitution is embodied in local communities—that is, they are a physical embodiment of free speech. The availability of a book in a local library means that the book is available to all. For example, in a curriculum challenge, the existence of public libraries in the

community is sometimes used as justifications for removing a particular book from the curriculum.

In Clarkstown, New York challengers were attempting to remove the book from both the English curriculum and school libraries. The following challenger argues that because the book is available in public libraries, he and his fellow challengers are not engaging in censorship:

And all have **one thing available to us, it's called libraries so to ask for a book not to be promoted in our school doesn't mean that we're censoring it**, it just means that we would like for it not to be the curriculum for our child. Not to say that all of our children might not go to the library and take it out. But that's their choice and that's the choice between the parent and the child and something that they can discuss (*Clarkstown, NY Hearing Female Speaker #6*).

In this instance the public library becomes a kind of “cover” for the challenge. If the book is available in the library, then removing it from the curriculum is not banning the book. For this challenger, libraries are seen as a venue for collecting all knowledge while the school curriculum should be reserved for ideas that she deems legitimate. In this instance, public libraries, and not schools are the only spaces in which censorship can take place.

Schools, *per se*, were rarely discussed in challengers' discourse. However, it is implicit in many of their arguments that schools should also be places of safety for children. Only one challenger described how the school library is part of the overall educational mission of the school and therefore has a different purpose from the public library while other challengers do not make any distinction between a school and public library.

Looking at it from a school's perspective I know **that the school library is vastly different than a regular public library**. They both have different rules, policies, regulations, and morals. A school library serves only students. **One main rule of a school library and a school board is to protect students**. If the content were put into a movie we teachers could not show that content in our classrooms. If it was on a website, it would be blocked by our server (*Stockton, MO Hearing Male Speaker #8*).

For this challenger, the idea of protection for students is offered as a justification for removing a book from the school library. Precisely because it is not a public library, administrators will not be acting unconstitutionally if the book is removed. As part of the school, the school library is structured as a space that should instead ensure students' safety.

According to challengers, libraries also have a duty to protect children and aide parents in their roles as boundary setters. Within these institutions, children should be free to move around without encountering objectionable material. One of the interviewees noted this idea of safety when discussing taking the children she cared for to the local public library: "We would go to the library and get books or videos or things. Whatnot. I would go to the children's area which is set aside and **feel like the kids could get whatever book from that section**" (*Carrollton, TX Interview*). For this challenger, the library is constructed as a safe place where the children could check out whatever they wanted from the children's section. The collections themselves, and not just the perceived physical safety of the building, made the library a safe place for the challenger.

### **Embodiments of the First Amendment**

The relationship between the First Amendment and the library is a frequent theme in challengers' discourse. For example, the following speaker, a member of the Merrill,



Wisconsin school board, notes that removing the book from the school library would be unconstitutional. Immediately prior to this statement, the speaker explained his vote to remove the book from the school curriculum.

**No on the library part**, I feel...obviously on the First Amendment that we...our founding fathers were light years ahead of their time when they developed these amendments for us. I feel that one thing I would like to see changed would be if there is an individual parent that does not want their child to read a certain book with the system that we have in place. Let them know that they could call the district or the school to have that book on list and then they can't check them out. **At that time the district is still [supporting] the First Amendment and we are not in any way denying any rights.** You still have the authority as the parent (*Merrill, WI Hearing Male Speaker #6*).

Although it is not stated explicitly, the speaker seems to be arguing that removing the book from the school library would be infringing on student's First Amendment rights. However this is coupled with the idea that parents' authority trumps a student's wish to read the book. The board member argues that the district would still be upholding the First Amendment if a parent calls and requests that their child not be able to check out a particular book.<sup>21</sup> The theme of parents as boundary-setters vis-à-vis their children's consumption of media was discussed in more detail in the previous chapter.

The idea that removing books from the curriculum is not unconstitutional is also clearly stated by the following writer. Although primarily an argument concerning the ability of non-Native American teachers to conduct a discussion of the book *Brave New World*, the writer also argues that the book should remain in the school library:

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<sup>21</sup> This action is against the ALA Code of Conduct. The Intellectual Freedom Manual states that school libraries should follow all school policies but information regarding students' reading should be protected (American Library Association, 2010).

I was told that the argument against removing the text was based on first amendment rights. This is an invalid argument because our request is to remove the text from the required reading list assigned and taught by primarily non-Native SPS teachers. **I believe this book should remain in the library and as a summer reading option.** The primary issue which is pertinent to this meeting today, is that this book is **required reading** and that the SPS teaching staff lacks the insight, knowledge base and accurate information to successfully balance classroom discussions. In addition, there is no mandated or required lesson plan to adequately, respectfully address the racist content of this text (*Seattle, WA Letter 8/23/2010*).

The letter writer's concern is focused on the presence of the book in the curriculum. She or he takes an interesting position wherein the writer is concerned that adequate discussion of the book will not be possible in the classroom but the book should still be available "in the library and as a summer reading option." That is, the curriculum is structured as a space of orderly knowledge while the school library is a place of more freedom. Since children are required to read materials in the curriculum, these materials must fit within particular categories of knowledge and cannot be anomalous or ambiguous. For this challenger, the library and summer reading lists are spaces where ambiguous knowledge can be made available for students. As will be shown below, this position is somewhat different from those taken by other challengers who argue that the library must contain orderly knowledge.

### **Ambiguous/Anomalous Knowledge and Selection**

Concern regarding ambiguous or anomalous knowledge is often specifically related to the materials that comprise the children's or young adult sections of the public library and the entire collection of school libraries. In keeping with their understanding of the First Amendment discussed above, challengers argue that the library may collect whatever it wishes in adult sections but the children's area in a public library or the

collections of a school library cannot have such latitude. These collections should contain only materials that challengers consider “safe.” One interviewee stated this theme explicitly: “I think there should be a wide variety of books in the library. And I think there are authors and there are people who enjoy reading that kind of literature—then good for them. **But I don’t think it should be available to children**” (*Central York, PA Interview*). Following Douglas, the presence of these books has brought disorder to the library—its categories of knowledge are no longer clear. For the challenger, the children’s area is meant to be set apart from the rest of the library and having objectionable materials on the shelves in this section means that the library has become “impure” in some respects. Only acceptable ideas and themes (as defined by the challengers) can be contained in materials included in the sections of the libraries designated for minors and school libraries.

The following challenger focuses on the screening procedure as a method of placing knowledge within appropriate categories:

There’s so many...Dr. Seuss, Jan Brett, *Goodnight Mood*, all sorts of great, great literature out there for children and their imaginations and in a safe environment. I just felt like...**I couldn’t believe it that the book is in the library. It didn’t go through any screening to see if the book is acceptable or not.** They feel like—if it’s published it’s acceptable” (*Carrollton, TX Interview*).

The concept of screening materials is a prevalent sub-theme throughout challengers’ discourse. It is this process that leads to orderly collections in public institutions. Challengers structure the staff of libraries and schools in some respects as their proxies in the selection process. As proxies for the challengers, librarians and administrators should be aware of the concerns of the general community when evaluating materials for

curricula and collections. Since the books have all been evaluated by professionals, then—according to challengers—they cannot contain objectionable material. Any books that contain inappropriate material would not have been selected in the first place since the professionals entrusted to these positions would not go against the community's wishes and “waste” tax money on such materials.

As will be discussed in more detail below, many challengers are unaware of how books arrive on library shelves or are added to school curricula. For some challengers, the fact that objectionable material has been found in these settings means that the books did not go through an adequate screening process.

I thought that [the books] were all, went **through some kind of screening** and I never thought anything about it. As far as the rest of the library, that's fine when you're a certain age, whoever you want to look at and do, make choices. That's different. But in the children's section, **I just felt like there wasn't anything**...you could request to have the book removed. Which I did and...but they denied it (*Carrollton, TX Interview*).

The screening process is structured by challengers as a method of separating knowledge into appropriate categories of legitimate and illegitimate knowledge. If the process is carried out with care, illegitimate knowledge will not be allowed into public institutions. As demonstrated in the quote above, the interviewee from Carrollton, Texas could not understand how the book she challenged was in the library in the first place. For the challenger, the screening process failed to categorize knowledge correctly.

Another interviewee acknowledged that the materials had been through a screening process but felt that they were inadequate due to wider trends in publishing and collection development throughout the country. When asked why she thought libraries collected materials she felt were inappropriate, she pointed to a trend toward darker

literature in young adult fiction, a subject that had been discussed in the mainstream press in 2011.<sup>22</sup> After submitting her challenge, the interviewee discussed her case with a school librarian acquaintance:

I called her on the phone and we talked about this and she said that she noticed lately that there is a **trend toward a more dark literature** [...] not that *Harry Potter* or that kind of thing is bad or anything, but just a trend toward darker literature and they win awards. She said she never understood it and **there's plenty of literature out that doesn't have to involve any kind of violence or anything like that but there just seems to be this shift lately in what kids were reading** (*Central York, PA Interview*).

This shift in children's literature has been discussed in many venues including an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*. For this challenger, the screening process failed because it has been overly influenced by wider trends in society some of which relate to the decline in civilization discussed in the previous chapter. Texts that the challenger considers inappropriate are not classified in the same way by those making decisions. It is important to note that it is possible that this trend contributes to the construction of public institutions as no longer being a safe place for children.

The question of how objectionable material is selected for libraries and schools and the failure of the selection process is a common theme throughout challengers' discourse. For many, there is a clear feeling that, when institutions collect such material, they no longer have children's best interest at heart.

I don't know who made the decision to buy the book at all. But you know what's embarrassing? **What's embarrassing is how did a book like this get into the school anyway.** And the book is called the *Perks of Being a Wallflower*, and furthermore, our superintendent said about a book, that this is the type of book

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<sup>22</sup> This was a topic of discussion on many blogs after the *Wall Street Journal* published an editorial on the subject in June of 2011 (Gurdon, 2011). It led to discussion across many LIS communication venues.

that could mold and shape our children for all society. And the conviction that appears to be moral. It's an absolute embarrassment. **This book is a disgrace that shouldn't even be in the school.** (*Clarkstown, NY Male Speaker #1*)

This challenger seems flummoxed by the idea that the school would have intentionally purchased a book like *Perks of a Being a Wallflower*. The opacity of selection procedures is not only a dominant theme in challengers' discourse; it also leads to an overall distrust of the systems in public institution.

### **Selection and the Ordering of Knowledge**

Although the policies and procedures described are clear to the people who work within public institutions, they are often opaque to outsiders. As noted above, their discourse contains many questions regarding how books are included in collections and curricula. Many challengers suggest that some books should only be read by minors with their parents' permission. Although permission is sometimes required for materials that administrators believe will be controversial in the classroom, such procedures are rarely part of standard school or public library policies. As one interviewee stated:

I did ask for that...when the superintendent told me that they would not change the book being made me available in the elementary school. I did ask that there **was a possibility that it could be put in a separate section** that kids ask for permission to sign it out and **he said absolutely not. They would not consider that in any way, shape, or form** (*Central York, PA Interview*).

In this case the interviewee is requesting that a library book be subject to official parental approval. Here the superintendent's reaction to the challenger's request is seen in a negative light. The use of the terms "absolutely" and "in any way, shape, or form" demonstrates the vehemence with which the challenger interprets the superintendent's objection. The challenger also stated that there was a teacher in the school who kept the

book locked in the classroom and the teacher's students could only read the book with their parents' permission. The interviewee was surprised that the school district has "the superintendent telling me one thing and the teachers are doing another thing" (*Central York, PA Interview*). This lack of standard procedure across the school system is not surprising as teachers are often given a high degree of autonomy in American classrooms.

One of the most striking aspects of challengers' discourse is the extent to which some of them are unaware of the procedures that are used add a book to the library's collection or school's curriculum. Then, once they are informed of them, the procedures seem inadequate to the task of controlling ambiguous and anomalous knowledge. As discussed previously, the presence of a particular book on the shelf means that the books have not been adequately screened. However, although the procedure may be unclear to challengers, books in public institutions do go through some sort of screening process and it is possible that administrators, teachers, and librarians are not necessarily looking for the same content as the challengers. In public libraries, in particular, it is parents' responsibility to review what their children read. Many parents are unaware of this policy. The interviewee from Carrollton, Texas stated

I didn't know that...I had to review any book before giving it to the child. I didn't feel...**I thought that was the responsibility of the library.** And I don't want to draw any more attention to the book because nobody's racing in to get the book. And I think if it goes a certain amount of time without being taken out then it probably gets removed from the shelf. But that's not to say that somebody didn't go into the library and get it and read it right there (*Carrollton, TX Interview*).

This lack of awareness regarding policies leads many challengers to lose trust in public and school libraries. For challengers, the library is structured as a place that must take responsibility for who has access to knowledge on its shelves. In this case, the Carrollton,

Texas interviewee hopes that another library procedure—weeding—will finally remove the book from the library collection.

Once challengers become aware of the procedures that teachers, librarians, and administrators use to select book, they often become the object of criticism. The Carrollton, Texas interviewee mentioned some trade journals by name:

I think that the library just looks at positive reviews. A certain amount, it says here [reading] *Booklist*, *Library Media Connection*, *Science Books & Films*, *School Library Journal* and *Horn Book*. Um... ***Booklist and Science Books & Films I guess gave it... says that it was acceptable for libraries and the library just goes it was already reviewed by a panel, I don't know, that they trust.*** But I really think that it should be...anybody who sees the book has got to think that it's not appropriate (*Carrollton, TX Interview*).

Note that the challenger is concerned that the library is only looking at positive reviews. Also note that these are not necessarily from well-known, and therefore less-trusted, publications. There is also some concern that librarians, who, as discussed above, operate as proxies for the community, are not relying on their own judgment when deciding what to buy for the local collection. If they are allowing objectionable materials on shelves then they are not fulfilling their roles as proxies when classifying knowledge.

Even after a book is removed, challengers often continue to be concerned about how selection decisions are made. In Conway, South Carolina after the book *Push* was taken out of the library, a challenger posed this question to the school board:

**Was there a single person that was in charge or was this a number of people?** As of tonight this question has not been answered. To make matters worse the school board is still blaming the vendor, something the Reading Resource denies. **Where is the mechanism that reviews questionable material for the district? Where is the oversight? Who is the oversight?** And no response from the school superintendent concerning these matters (*Conway, SC Hearing Male Speaker #1*).



For this challenger, it was imperative to find out who had failed in their duty as a proxy. The school board members did not have an answer that would satisfy him. As will be discussed below in more detail, the presence of the book became an issue of trust for the challenger.

### Permissions and Standards

As mentioned above, encouraging use of permission slips as a policy is common theme in challengers' discourse. A challenger in Merrill, Wisconsin notes that the public library requires children under the age of 18 to have parents' permission to check out a particular book. Permission slips operate as a type of boundary object in this case. It is an official document that allows for communication between the institution and the parent. Note that the use of permission slips is highly unusual in a public library setting and, as mentioned above, against the Library Code of Ethics.<sup>23</sup> However, the challenger is arguing that the fact that the book requires permission to be read in the public library is sufficient reasoning for removing the book from the high school curriculum.

[He] just said to get it out of the public library **you have to sign it out to the parents if they're under 18 to check it out** and they get it out of the high school library without problem. That seems to be a little odd. It's **in the adult section of the public library. We don't have an adult section in the high school library.** They have it in there because they said there's explicit material in it that has to do with pedophilia and suicide (*Merrill, WI Hearing Speaker #1*).

In this case the public library's own policies are used as a justification for removing a book from the school. Note that the issue of various sections of the library is prominent

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<sup>23</sup> I could find no evidence of this particular policy on the T.B. Scott Free Library (Merrill, WI) website (<http://wvls.lib.wi.us/merrillpl/>).

in the challengers' statement. Since it lacks an adult section, the school library must only contain material that is appropriate for children.

In a similar vein to the challenger above, another challenger in Merrill, Wisconsin suggests using technology to indicate whether or not children are permitted to check out a particular book. She discusses alternative policies for the book in the library and the classroom.

I do believe if we leave it in the library it should be under a situation **where the parents can log in as Mr. [ ] suggested and issue their opinion on whether or not they would like their child to take the book out.** I would not have a problem with this being in place and that this could be something that could be a choice to do a book report on. As long as another student has the right to choose their own book as well (*Merrill, WI Hearing Female Speaker #11*).

Once again, note that using technology in the manner suggested by this challenger would be against the Library Code of Ethics. Like many challengers, this speaker is concerned that the school would be acting against the will of parents if it allowed children to check out a particular book without their parents' permission. As noted in the previous chapter, the theme of parents as boundary setters when comes to the media consumption of their children is an important one in challengers' discourse.

In another curriculum challenge, parents were required to fill out a permission slip prior to their children to reading a particular book. However, many of the challengers felt that the permission slip did not adequately convey the controversial material in the book. As one challenger remarks:

The English Department has grossly misrepresented this book to parents. **Their permission slip is vague and white-washed.** We truly believe if all parents were able to see the graphic excerpts of this book, most would not allow their child to read it (*Clarkstown, NY Letter, Date redacted*).

The permission slip did not sufficiently elucidate the inappropriate material in the book. For the challenger, it is an inadequate boundary object since it did not fulfill its duty to communicate information between different information contexts and settings. Without adequate information regarding the book, the challenger argues that parents could not make an informed decision regarding whether or not their children should read the book.

Parallels among various procedures used by libraries and schools are a common theme in challengers' discourse. The school in Merrill, Wisconsin required parents to sign an internet usage form for their children and one challenger notes that she thought that same guidelines would be used for library books in the school

I find that was a **phenomenal document for us to sign so we can protect their children**. The parents sign that and the children sign that, and everybody signs it. I thought this was a wonderful document. And what I thought was that...I was under the **impression that with all of the material in our school district, this was also followed when you would pick things out. All of our material in our school district would follow this type of a guideline**. So you can imagine my shock when I did see that in a book, this book *Montana 1948*. I thought our diligence for the other material was followed. I just thought that. But when I found that book, I totally 100% lost my trust. I felt the contract for my internet usage was broken by our school district and that's not a good thing (*Merrill, WI Hearing Female Speaker #6*).

Here the permission slip for internet use is described as a "phenomenal document" that adequately fulfills its role as a boundary object. For this challenger, the challenged book is not line with the standards required by the school for internet use. Therefore she does not understand how the item could be included in the curriculum when students would not be able to view what she believes to be similar material on the internet.

Another common theme throughout challengers' discourse concerned the use of labels to alert parents to the presence of objectionable material in public and school

library collections. Labels, like movie ratings discussed in the previous chapter, are markers that allows individuals to immediately categorize a particular object. For example, if a book is labeled as “romance,” one is able to recognize the text as part of a particular genre that follows certain writing conventions. As one letter writer states:

It is perfectly **dishonorable that public libraries have no warnings of the pornographic materials on the shelves in the children’s section.** The book teaches the children how to have sex and is a predator’s dream come true...It is a **truly disordered concept of freedom** when library policies adopt children’s capability to get pornographic material (*Lewiston, ME Letter 8/20/2007*).

The use of the term “pornographic” demonstrates that this challenger disapproves of the lack of warning labels on public library books. Since the books in public libraries do not have labels, the challenger is not able to immediately recognize which books might contain objectionable material and the space is “disordered.” That is, there is no structuring structure in place for recognizing inappropriate materials in the library. The challenger argues that library administrators, by failing to label objectionable books, therefore support policies that are harmful to children<sup>24</sup>.

It is not surprising that the Motion Picture Association of America’s (MPAA) rating system is often described by challengers as a model that libraries and schools can adopt to help parents find “appropriate” materials for their children. The MPAA’s system offers parents a marker regarding the content of a particular movie and many parents use the ratings as a benchmark for determining whether or not their children may

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<sup>24</sup> Labeling materials is also against the Library Code of Ethics. Although librarians may label materials as directional aids, these must be value-neutral. The use of prejudicial labels is discouraged. These are labels intended to “restrict accessed based on a value judgment that the content, language, or themes of the material or the background or views of the creator(s) material, render it inappropriate or offensive for all or a certain groups of users” (American Library Association, 2010, p. 155).

watch a movie. The presence of the ratings system creates a sense of order and safety with regard to movies. As one challenger stated:

For people who want this book, they can ask for it, the book is available. Go buy it. Get it online. **I didn't let my kids when they were five watch R-rated movies for the same reasons.** You need to draw a line as to what is appropriate and what's not. If other parents want to provide other information to their kids. Fine. It's up to them. But think we need to have it in the public schools (*New Bedford, NH Male Speaker #5*).

More surprising is the argument by analogy comparing the labeling of books to the actions of standards and practices departments found in print and broadcast media. Standards and practices departments ensure that publications and shows adhere to the broadcaster or publishers own standards regarding obscenity, violence, and sexuality (Dessart, 1997). As the challenger in Lewiston, Maine notes, none of the print or broadcast media she contacted showed pictures from the book she is challenging:

Why is it that the newspapers and television stations I have been in contact with since August of this year **neither print nor show the illustrations and Writings of "I P N?"** One television station told me they would be sued by the Federal Communications Commission if they showed the contents of the book in question. What a contradiction that is when **youth of any age can easily remove for their perusal this book without restrictions.** What a contradiction when LPL has recently increased to ten more books of "I P N" to be on its shelf violating City of Lewiston's Obscenity Codes and still the printed and television media are restricted to view what children easily can get their hands on at L P L (*Lewiston, ME Letter 1/30/2008*).

The standards and practices of print and broadcasters also operate as a structuring structure that allows individuals to recognize and categorize materials in newspapers and on broadcast television as "safe" for consumption. If the materials are perceived to be inappropriate for these outlets which follow particular standards for content, then, challengers argue, they are also inappropriate for the library. This challenger sets up an

opposition between the library and media outlets. Why is the library willing to violate standards when the local television station is not willing to go that far? The television station's actions provide all the evidence that is needed to prove that the public library is acting irresponsibly and in a manner that violates commonly held standards. For this challenger, the public library, by collecting books such as *It's Perfectly Normal*, is even in violation of the town's own obscenity codes. The institution has taken a position that does not correlate with how the challenger structures "libraries" in her worldview.

The interviewee from Helena, Montana also mentions broadcasting and publishing standards:

For the same reasons when I spoke publically in the meeting about it the press was there but I knew they wouldn't print what I...I recited the same passages as I did to you. **They would not print that because the media has standards.** You would never hear this kind of language on TV. On CNN. Or in the newspapers. They have standards. So it is...isn't it interesting. **They allow the kids to read it. But they could not speak it out loud** (*Helena, MT Interview*).

This challenger argues that implies that the library should follow the same standards as the media. Note that these challengers do not question why the library might have these different practices in place. For them, the broadcast media and libraries are structured in the same way and they are spaces that must protect children and the broadcast media is regarded as doing a better job of protecting children by adhering to standards that do not allow objectionable material to be consumed by minors.

Classroom standards are also viewed by challengers as a model that libraries can follow. Of particular interest are arguments concerning how controversial material will be discussed in the classroom.

It's so bad that they couldn't discuss it in the classroom. **Because the classroom has standards. Teachers, staff have standards.** The way they speak...the way they conduct themselves. And so they couldn't talk about his book in the classroom. All those parts because they weren't up to standard. But it was okay for the children to read (*Helena, MT Interview*).

If the information in a particular book is too controversial to be discussed in a classroom, then, challengers argue, why should the book be included in the library? The relationship between the appropriateness of a book and its suitability for discussion will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter which focuses on the interpretive strategies that challengers use when encountering texts. Here it is important to note that challengers argue that the standards in the classroom correspond to those used in the library. Another challenger in Merrill, Wisconsin also discusses the idea that the school is not adhering to its own standards when objectionable material is allowed in the curriculum or library. "Our" refers to guidelines from the school administration.

My concern is not just this book, but **how much has been allowed into the school that goes against our own guidelines?** My ultimate question is who are all the individuals supporting this material in our school and then holding them accountable for their actions (*Merrill, WI Letter 6/15/2011*).

For this challenger, the presence of the book is a symbol of declining standards in the whole school. Although the challenger is using the challenge process to remove this particular book, he or she is most concerned that whoever is in charge be held accountable for allowing such a book into the school in order to ensure that it does not happen again.

### **Going Through the Ritual Motions**

In her book on purity and danger in the social world, Douglas (2005) describes methods to handle disordered objects: ambiguous objects can be reclassified while

anomalous objects can be removed often through rituals. As noted in Chapter 2, Douglas argues that rituals are a type of symbolic enactment that offer participants an avenue for gaining control over ambiguous and anomalous objects. Challenges, in many respects, operate as a ritual of public discourse as they are a series of prescribed actions that attempt to relocate ambiguous knowledge or remove anomalous knowledge from public institutions and restore order. The ritualized actions begin with challengers filling out the request for reconsideration form, then there are meetings with administrators and staff, and finally, if it is deemed necessary, the governing boards hold public hearings to debate the fate of the material in question.

The challenge procedures that constitute the ritual used by many public libraries and schools often seem inadequate to many challengers. Challenge cases are rituals in which the actions are prescribed by institutional actors who are often antagonistic to the desires of outsiders. In some cases, challengers view the ritual as a set of procedures intended for their voices to be “heard” but that have no real effect on what will happen to the objectionable material.<sup>25</sup> For example, the interviewee from Helena, Montana was initially satisfied that her child was allowed to read an alternative book for class but then she decided that the book was not appropriate for any children to read. As she notes:

I felt strongly that this book should be taken out of curriculum so I went and pursued that course of action. **They had me fill out paperwork and then they had a public meeting about it. And they chose a review board.** Three or five people had read the book? Maybe five. From different areas...a parent, a teacher, you know what I mean. And they reviewed it and then they had invited public comment on it. So your question? **So they invited me to go through the**

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<sup>25</sup> It is argued elsewhere in this study that this is, in fact, the intended effect of these procedures. This chapter, however, is focused on challengers’ perceptions of those procedures.



**process that they had in place for objecting to materials so we went through that process... They went through the motions** (*Helena, MT Interview*).

The statement going “through the motions” implies that she did not feel that her concern was ever going to be adequately addressed by the school. Filling out paperwork and having meetings was simply a way for the school board to process her complaint and move on. Another challenger narrated the entire process in an interview:

So there was a process of filling out paperwork and having to type each page number and the direct quote where I found the sentence, each thing and I had about 25 different pages that I felt contained material that wasn’t appropriate for the age group. **So I sent that paperwork in and I was told that it would be reviewed by a committee. Then I received paperwork back saying my request was denied again.** So then I called and asked what the next step was and the next step was to appear in front of the school board and plead my case there. So I did that, they said they would consider it and they gave me a phone call about a week later saying my request was denied and they would not consider removing the book whatsoever. **And I asked why wouldn’t they consider removing it and they said they wouldn’t discuss it with you. And end of case. End of story** (*Central York, PA Interview*).

Even though the interviewee went through the entire reconsideration procedure, she felt that her concerns were ignored by the school administration and she was, in some respects, completely removed from the discussions of the committee and the school board. Another interviewee also seemed to feel like her request was not taken seriously:

It was just a form and make my request. And then they mailed me back a paper saying, “Sorry, but we feel like the book has already their proper procedures and decided to keep the book.” **They weren’t going to do anything with it** (*Carrollton, TX Interview*).

This particular challenger does not feel like her concerns were addressed through the procedure. In these cases the process of challenging materials put in place by administrators of the public institutions is seen as inadequate to the nature of the problem as it is perceived by challengers. It must be noted that it is possible that these two

challengers were disappointed because their requests were denied and they may have felt differently if the process had worked in their favor.

Challenge cases often result in the general public becoming more aware of school and library policies. As demonstrated from the statements above, many challengers request a change in policy to reduce the availability of controversial materials to children. For example, in West Bend, Wisconsin, the challengers requested several changes to the public library's policy concerning materials in the library. The petition, which asked that the Library Board consider each of its provisions in turn and that there be a public record of each individual board member's vote, included five appeals including a request for the library to filter its website and have a "balanced" collection on controversial issues. It also asked that the library adopt the Child Internet Protection Act provision. Of considerable interest was a request that the library reclassify youth-targeted "pornographic books" and label explicit material (West Bend Citizens for Safe Libraries, n.d.). That is, the West Bend, Wisconsin challengers specifically target ambiguous knowledge in the public library which they argued needed to be labeled in order to ensure that the library remained a safe space for children in the community. As noted above, labels operate as a marker that allow for immediate recognition and classification of knowledge. For these challengers, without these labels the challengers will lose the trust of the community.

Throughout challengers' arguments, the issue of policies in schools and libraries is directly related to the issue of trust. If one book containing objectionable material is

allowed onto library shelves or into school curricula, how can users or parents trust anything that the school or library administrators do:

I know this situation has been quite shocking to a lot of people that I have talked to: first of all, **because a book with this content got brought into the school in the first place.** And secondly because four English teachers were trusted by a lot of parents (many of whom believed the teachers would do what was right for their students) and now, many of those **parents see that their trust was misplaced** (*Stockton, MO Letter 5/5/2010*).

For this challenger, there is a tension between what the school administrators actually did and what the challenger understood the role of the school to be. Administrators and teachers did not live up to their roles as protectors of children and parents should not have trusted the school in the first place.

Librarians and other administrators are viewed by challengers as people who trust outsiders, such as book reviewers, more than they trust their own guidelines. As noted above, administrators are viewed as proxies for the community and challengers expect them to use their own judgment in the selection process. According to challengers, when objectionable material is found in public institutions, administrators and staff hide behind their procedures in order to ignore challengers' concerns regarding the material. As another challenger states:

This is the book that got attention, and **we felt that our voices weren't being heard.** The next step was to do the official request. We now feel that, if this book is being given to children, **there are also probably many other items in the curriculum that are not positive learning tools.** There are many discrepancies in the district. We must sign a form for internet use, just in case kids would get their hands on something inappropriate. We have to sign a letter to allow our kids to watch a movie. And the impression is given that violence, and drugs wouldn't be tolerated. All of that is great, **but then we find that a book like this is being handed out. Much of the trust we had district is gone.** We were invited to a meeting during the summer and it seemed as though the teachers

and administrators were defending the book and the author (*Merrill, WI Letter 9/27/2011*).

This challenger clearly feels that the teachers and administrators of the school are on the “other side” and the challenge case, a ritual which is intended to restore trust and order in the public institution, fails. The ritual established by the administrators is unable to either adequately gain control over the objectionable material or restore order to the public institution and results in the challenger feeling that both hers and other challengers “voices weren’t being heard.” Teachers and administrators defend the book and the author, even though the book contains violence and drugs that the administrators have already determined to be inappropriate.

### **Thematic Summary**

It is somewhat paradoxical that challengers choose to expend time and energy into trying to remove or relocate books in public libraries and schools. As noted at the beginning of the chapter, the books they are challenging are often widely available. Therefore, their actions can only be understood as a symbolic practice wherein challengers are a form of public discourse over the construction of public institutions. For challengers, such institutions should contain only properly classified, legitimate knowledge. Although understanding reading practices and strategies is important when trying to understand challengers’ efforts, the site that is the target of the challenge is also significant.

### **Public Institutions**

For challengers, public libraries and schools are more than just buildings—they are public symbols of the community whose staff, in their role as proxies for the

community, choose collection materials consisting of legitimate knowledge. Like society, parenting, and childhood in the previous chapter, these institutions operate as both structuring structures and structured structures. As structuring structures, “libraries” and “schools” are perceived as an outward symbol of the community and therefore the presence of certain materials in curricula and collections *means* that the community also considers these materials to be legitimate knowledge. It is their work as a structured structure within the challengers’ symbolic universe that is of primary importance here. As discussed in Chapter 3, symbolic capital is a concealed form of economic capital that relates to concepts of prestige and authority in society. The presence of a public library in a community conveys a certain status where the economic capital of the community is transformed into a library for everyone in the community.

Public libraries and schools are also a type of symbolic capital for communities and it is this transformation from economic capital to symbolic that partially informs the actions of challengers. Because the institutions are paid for by tax money from the community, challengers argue that public libraries and schools should—in all ways—represent the values of the community. The collections and curricula contain knowledge that is sanctioned by the entire community since it is paid for by members of the community. When objectionable materials are found on the shelves or in curricula, the institution is no longer symbolically representing the community in the best light to the rest of society. Only through the removal of the offending material, can the positive symbolic capital of the institution be restored.

In some respects, challengers' discourse demonstrates that bringing a challenge case can be understood as a kind of ritual purification of a space for them which operates as a symbol for community. By having objectionable material, the safety and moral order of the school and library have, in their view, been defiled. The book might be understood, as Mary Douglas notes in *Purity and Danger*, as "matter out of place" (Douglas, 2005, p. 44). The book is a reflection of disorder within the order of the challengers' community. The challengers work to positively re-order the institutions by removing or relocating the "dirt" in order to make the institutions conform to a particular idea of a proper symbol for the community.

### **Policies, Procedures, and Symbolic Violence**

Although challengers are part of the institutions' communities, they are not part of the institutions themselves. Both public libraries and public schools operate as hierarchical, bureaucratic structures. Even though they are both typically under the aegis of elected boards, they employ credentialed professionals who oversee the day-to-day operations of the institutions. These employees are institutional experts and, consequently, have symbolic power within their institutional structures. Administrators and librarians have significant control over their collections and curricula. Their titles (Director, Principal, Youth Services Librarian) convey their status within the hierarchy of the institution.

It is through the establishment of policies and procedures that institutions consolidate their symbolic power over others in the community. As noted above, challengers often felt that they were simply shuffled through a bureaucratic conveyor belt

when they brought their concerns regarding a particular book to various institutional staff members. This is not an accident. The process of filling out forms, meeting with administrators, and placing the concern before a board is intended to mitigate the power of outsiders over the institution. Bourdieu calls this type of mitigation symbolic violence. The use of hegemonic norms and procedures in these institutions is intended to give outsiders less control over collections and curricula in public institutions. This is particularly clear in what challengers perceive as the failures of challenge cases. As noted above, challengers state that the people evaluating their claims were “going through the motions” or would “absolutely” not consider removing a book.

In libraries in particular, administrators and librarians are encouraged by the profession not to accede to challengers’ requests. The *Intellectual Freedom Manual* states the following:

Listen calmly and courteously to the complaint. Remember the person has a right to express a concern. Use of good communication skills helps many people understand the need for diversity in library collections and the use of library resources. In the event the person is not satisfied, advise the complainant of the library policy and procedures of handling library resource statements of concern. If a person does fill out a form about their concern, make sure a prompt written reply related to the concern is sent (American Library Association, 2010, p. 243)

Nowhere in the manual is it recommended that librarians consider removing or relocating the book from collections. The request for reconsideration policies and procedures are intended to give community members a voice but not a vote over collections. This is a

form of symbolic violence because it is a struggle over power in institutions where one group—in this case librarians—exercise their symbolic power over another group.

Throughout both Chapters 6 and 7, the study has focused on broader aspects of challengers' discourse including challengers' construction of society and public institutions within the public sphere. The following chapter investigates a narrower facet of challengers' discourse: their conceptualization of the book and the interpretive strategies of text.



## Chapter 8: Themes in the Discourse of Censorship: Reading Practices and Print Culture

Throughout the previous chapters concerning themes in challengers' worldviews, emphasis has been placed on broad concepts regarding the structure of society and institutions. This chapter explores how challengers understand a more intimate practice—reading. In its most basic sense, the practice of reading is seen by the challengers as a powerful activity that can alter the course of one's life.

The language used to describe reading is religious as well as martial, consistent with the themes discussed in previous chapters. Although it is probable that there is a wide overlap between conservative Evangelical Christians and challengers, this study focuses on non-religious aspects of challengers discourse. However, it is interesting to note that there is a prevalence of what might be called “biblical language” throughout some of the challengers' arguments on reading. Statements will begin in common colloquial English and then suddenly shift to a more archaic tone.

There are some who would say, but this is real life.” Whether or not this book is a true representative of some lives is beside the point. As I've said, the good that could have been accomplished with this book is in my opinion offset by material that is harmful. I hesitate to offend anyone's sensibilities, but I can't think of another example that is more apt. Because I grew up on a ranch, **I learned early to identify a cow pie. I could identify one without rolling in it. I saw from whence it came and judged it not good.** Our children do not need to roll in bad things to understand their nature (*Helena, MT Letter, n.d.*).

The phrase “from whence it came and judged it not good” hearkens to the language of the King James Bible, which is often the preferred translation of scripture within American Evangelicalism (Ammerman, 1987). As demonstrated in this chapter, the language of spiritual warfare permeates challengers' arguments concerning the effects of reading.

The chapter begins with an exploration of how challengers construct the book as a material object. It then discusses the theme of interpretive strategies in reading practices that are common in challengers' discourse. Third, following directly from the interpretive strategies, it investigates the theme of the various effects of reading on the character and behavior of children. Finally, the chapter explores how challengers employ causal or domino effect arguments to justify the removal or relocation of books.

### **Living to Read**

Why do challengers attempt to remove or relocate books as opposed to other mediums? Is there something about the book as a medium that informs their efforts? It is a difficult question to answer as challengers rarely discuss books as such and yet the construction of the book as a material object of great importance is implicit in both their actions and their discourse. As will be demonstrated below, it is not mere happenstance that challengers target books. The idea of the book clearly plays a significant part in their overall worldview. Although there are other formats and types of media that contain texts, for challengers, the texts contained in the form of books have a special significance. These texts are capable of changing lives and therefore should contain timeless truths.

In order to conceptualize how challengers construct their idea of the book, the interviews with challengers included questions about books that were important to them. The Central York, Pennsylvania interviewee discussed a book that she read in her childhood that led her to become an environmentalist:

You know, I **started living to read** when I was really young and I remember reading a book in 5<sup>th</sup> grade called *The Field*. It really opened my eyes to a whole world that I didn't know existed about cruelty and things like that. So I became very conscious of being more protective of animals and endangered species and

the environment. That's kind of been a lifelong thing that's been part of me. Part of my interest back then and enjoy it today. Sounds very simple and simplistic but it is something I remember very well.

**At this time I had never really heard of anything like that, I never knew that kind of thing existed and went on in the world.** So I became a member of Greenpeace after that and sort of followed up with PETA after that. In high school I did not pursue the dissection of the pig and that kind of thing. **It gave me a little something to look at—there's more to the world than what's going on in our little town** (*Central York, PA Interview*)

Although the theme regarding the importance of reading is common in contemporary society, the language used throughout this response is strikingly deliberate. The interviewee states that she started “living to read” and that her exposure to environmentalism at a young age became a part of her overall character. In some respects she became a different person because of her exposure to this book. This statement defines a core theme in challengers’ discourse—books can change lives in both positive and negative direction and reading can literally change one’s life. It is not that other media cannot have this same life changing effect, but that the sentiment that books, in particular, can have a profound and formative effect on readers helps to contextualize the actions of challengers. As another interviewee stated “I’m a Christian so the Bible, of course, **changed my life**” (*Helena, MT Interview*). This study argues that because challengers are confident that books can change lives, it is very important texts contained within shape one’s moral character in a positive direction.

One challenger offers a clear account of the place of books within the marketplace of ideas. For her, concepts and ideas, if they are good, will be presented over and over again through various media. That is, in the marketplace of ideas good concepts will

become more popular and others will fall to the wayside. What matters most to the challenger is how the ideas are presented within this marketplace:

It's true this particular book has valid points to make, but it's not as **if the baby is being thrown out with the bath water. Ideas are not babies; they are fluid.** If an idea is good and important, **it will surface again in better surroundings.** I'm certain **other books make similar worthy observations without pushing our children in for yet another dip into the gutter.** Time is short. With a wondrous array of great books and great ideas available, why should one moment be wasted on a book that may do more harm than good? (*Helena, MT Letter, n.d.*)

For challengers, it is not that the idea concept in the challenged book is necessarily a harmful one, but the way in which it is presented to children. For this challenger, there are other books that discuss the same ideas in a more respectable fashion and good ideas will appear in books that do not have objectionable content. These are “better surroundings” that the challenger discusses above. In the marketplace of ideas, there are many ways to present various concepts and it is best to do this in the most positive manner possible.

Part of the reason why books, in particular, are the target of censors is that once one has access to a book, it cannot be censored unless the book is taken away from the reader. Although it is possible to censor books through redaction, this is not discussed by challengers in this study. There have been some cases of textbooks being marked through as a result of challenges but none of the challengers in this study suggested this tactic. It is possible that the marking through printed texts has strong negative implications for the challengers and is tied to their reverence for the book as a material object.

Since challengers do not advocate the redaction of texts, the relationship between the reader and the text is unmediated by other interpreters. As discussed in Chapter 2, reading silently is a private act. There is no way of knowing what one is reading (that is, one's position in the text) or imparting suggestions for interpretation of the texts. One challenger notes

Of all the tremendous literary works that could be presented for the edification of our children, why would something so destructive to the hearts and minds of young people be selected? The media trough [sic] the television “bleeps” foul language. Evidently there is still some moral standard by which modern day society follows. **When a book of this sort is presented, there is no way to limit or sensor [sic] the content** (*Clarkstown, NY Letter, Date Redacted*).

Books, unlike broadcast media, are not censored for language. Whatever is in the text is seen by the reader regardless of whether or not they possess adequate interpretive strategies to interpret it. As the letter writer states “there is no way to censor the content” once it is in the reader's hands

Books are constructed as powerful vehicles for knowledge and operate as legitimizers of texts, characterizations that are often described negatively in challengers' discourse and that also operate as legitimizers of texts. For challengers, these characteristics mean that the ideas contained within books must be morally sound. Challengers find it surprising that authors would take the time to write material that they consider inappropriate and, following this first offense of writing the work, it is even more outrageous that a publisher would legitimize the writing by publishing the manuscript. Both authors and publishing companies are blamed for allowing such ideas to reach such a revered medium. The following challenger questions the motivations of

the author on the one of the themes of the book regarding the misuse of power by one of the characters:

On the form it is asked what we believed the theme of this book is. We heard of the misuse of power along with others, however, those supporting this book don't seem to want to ask how a 12-year-old lusting after his aunt, getting sexually stirred at the thought of a young girl being sexually abused by her uncle, among others, fit into this novel. **These things are very disturbing and I would question the author's mindset and what he was thinking by putting these things in the book,** as they have nothing to do with the misuse of power (*Merrill, WI Letter 6/15/2011*).

This challenger argues that authors, through the act of writing and publishing, have power and by writing an inappropriate book, the author has abused their privilege to influence the minds of young people. This perception that authors have great influence over the minds of their readers is based in a particular understanding of the practice of reading. The following section explores how challengers construct the process of reading—that is, the interpretive strategies that one uses to make meaning out of text.

### **Interpreting Text and the Edification of the Soul**

One of the challengers above stated that the books should be for “the edification of our children” (Clarkstown, NY Letter, Date redacted). This is a common theme in contemporary American Evangelical Christian culture. To edify is to improve moral character and the concept of only exposing oneself to media that “edifies” is common topic of discussion in sermons and blogs.<sup>26</sup> For challengers, interpreting text is directly related to the system of edification. As stated in Chapter 2, an interpretive strategy is defined within this study as a set of decisions, based in one's worldview, regarding

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<sup>26</sup> Although it is not scholarly, the best description of the term “edify” can be found on the blog “Stuff Christian Culture Likes” at (<http://www.stuffchristianculturelikes.com/2011/05/blog-post.html>).

analysis that one makes both before and during the act of reading. The interpretive strategies that challengers discuss in their discourse focuses on a mimetic, literal interpretation of texts.

### **Imaginative Visualization and Mimesis**

For challengers, an issue of great importance concerns the imagination in its most literal sense. Challengers' discourse includes many references to the act of constructing mental images of what happens in the text while one is reading. One challenger uses a list of class discussion questions as comparison to his understanding of the practice of reading:

“1. Remind your child that when making a picture or mental image, readers put themselves in the story or text by making a mind movie.” When you really enjoy what you are reading **creating this picture** is probably the most important step. **But do we really want our kids, even if they are age 15 or 16, picturing themselves in *Montana 1948*? Or do we want them making it into a mind movie?** We sure don't. We hope you will agree and remove this book (*Merrill, WI Letter 9/27/2011*).

The process of reading as a mimetic activity is very clearly articulated by this challenger. When someone reads, they create images or “mind movies” and, for this challenger, the pictures created by the challenged book are unacceptable. This harkens back to the protection of children theme discussed in Chapter 6 that there are some ideas and concepts available in the marketplace of ideas that children simply do not need to know. As another challenger states, such images can “warp” children for the rest of their lives:

Finally, the tragedy is that scores of minors are **having their minds warped and corrupted by images and themes they'll remember for the rest of their lives**. Images and themes that scintillate and seduce. Images and themes they are **entirely unqualified and unprepared to handle or process** (*Clarkstown, NY Letter, Date redacted*).

Note that for this challenger children lack proper interpretive skills for understanding the objectionable material and are simply unable to cope with the images presented in the challenged book. If they do encounter them, they will be scarred forever. Challengers' conceptualizations of the lingering effects of such images will be discussed in more detail below.

Children are corrupted through texts because images remain in their minds and cannot be erased. One challenger compares texts to Pandora's Box:

Anyone going in there can just take that book out. And then they're going to ...those doors are open. **It's like a Pandora's box or whatever. You can't go back once you've had that information in your head.** That's it. That will lead to further curiosity about things. And I don't know what that means. **Does that mean acting it out? Doing it with another...to see...or whatever.** I have no idea, but I don't think those things are appropriate for children that young (*Carrollton, NY Interview*).

Not only do texts expose children to images that will become a permanent part of their being, this challenger argues that the images also lead them down a path toward an unspecified danger. This is the negative, mimetic interpretation of text that leads to sin first described in Chapter 3 wherein the effect of reading a particular text is a pathway to moral corruption. Although the challenger quoted above cannot quite verbalize what might happen if a child were to read the challenged text, there is an overwhelming sense that the effects will be negative and lead to the dissolution of the natural order.

Another challenger describes the process of reading more obliquely; however, he also demonstrates a particular understanding of the imagination:

Because teenage suicide is an issue. Those kids need an answer. The theme promoted in this book, of course we can't talk about it. We can give it to our kids. **They can envision it. They can live through it.** But we can't talk about it because we're adults. Unbelievable. (*Merrill, WI Hearing Male Speaker #1*).



This is a very powerful testimony regarding the power of the imagination. The challenger states that there is a direct correlation between imagining and experience. Envisioning an event through text is understood to not simply be an experience of the mind but an event that one “lives through.” Reading is instead viewed as a mimetic process wherein the act of imagining the events of the text is the same of living it. For this challenger, when children read about teenage suicide it is not merely a description of an action by a character in a novel—they experience suicide themselves. These ideas are based in a particular interpretive strategy rooted in “common sense” interpretation of the text in which words “mean what they say.”

### **Common Sense Interpretation**

As noted in the Chapter 2, there is a strong strain of what might be called “common sense” interpretation of texts throughout challengers’ discourse. Challengers do not allow for varying interpretations of text especially where children are concerned. Children, who are considered to have undisciplined imaginations and lack critical distance from texts, are subject to give highly literal interpretations of text. Texts are a medium wherein “what you see is what you get”—the words on the page both mean what they say and say what they mean. Texts are monosemic (i.e., possess a stable referent) media and can only be interpreted in one way. This construction of texts as literal and monosemic is found throughout challengers’ discourse.

The interviewee in Helena, MT described common sense interpretation more colloquially as “garbage in, garbage out.” Although the following quote is lengthy, it elucidates a particular understanding of how texts can be interpreted.

Right. The school should not require it. Kids can read...in my family we strongly discourage reading stuff like that. **We truly believe “garbage in, garbage out.”** Other kids. Other homes. Other families. You know, want to say what they can do or whatever.[...]

Well...my family has a different definition of what garbage is. And that became clear going through this process. I felt like a freak. And what I think is garbage is not considered garbage to most people out there. **We are just very concerned about what we let our kids watch. What we let them read.** What we let them see and hear. We believe that the cussing, the sexual innuendo, the gutter language, and the visual on TV. You know all that you see on TV. **The sexual the inappropriate, the potty humor, we consider that garbage. And when we take that in, through our eyes, through our hearts, our ears. And then that’s what comes out.** In the way we behave and the way we speak and the way we treat other people. That’s what we mean by garbage in garbage out (*Helena, MT Interview*).

For the challenger, certain texts are “garbage” because they contain, for example, objectionable language or sexual situations.<sup>27</sup> If children are exposed to these texts, they will then have a penchant for such obscenity and sexuality. The challenger makes little room for texts that might use vulgarity or obscenity as part of a cautionary tale or as a marker of realism. Books and other media that do not build strong moral character in a very literal and mimetic sense are to be avoided at all costs.

Another challenger also states that the material that children read should not be too “dark:”

The young adult branch of literature, like anything else, has **its good and its bad sides**. We do not need to cater to a teens need to be **entertained by viewing or reading salacious, or gritty, material to gain their attention**. I understand the idea of reaching out to them where they are and to real situations that go on in

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<sup>27</sup> In his article on the reception and interpretation of the *Left Behind* novels by evangelicals, Paul Gutjahr (2002) discusses the long-held ambivalence with which American Protestants viewed the popular novel. American Christians gradually accepted Christian fiction, but it is clear that this acceptance was not all-encompassing. Their views on other types of fiction are still somewhat negative. Gutjahr writes that “as late as 1993, one irate Protestant author...titled a pleading article that appeared in the major protestant periodical Christianity Today ‘Stop Rejecting Fiction!’” (p. 210). It is possible that the phrase “garbage in, garbage out” is related to this ambivalence toward fiction.

their lives, **but not at the expense of letting our schools, or them, wallow in it.** They need a contrast to that situation. Something that challenges their thinking and to influence them **to deal with life situations in a more positive way** (*Merrill, WI Letter 6/10/2011*).

For this challenger, reading material should be challenging but positive. Since teens are, by nature “salacious” (a conceptualization of childhood discussed in Chapter 6), adults must be sure that the texts that teens read are realistic but not to the point that they do not provide some sort of positive instruction for life.

Texts, for challengers, are *a priori* instructional—they should teach people the right way to live. This educational aspect must be present on the text’s surface and is, in fact, the primary purpose for literature.

...I have spent my whole life working with children. And I can tell you that the things that what we expose our children to does not make it right and does not necessarily prepare them for life and to make good decisions. **If I want my kid to know more about drugs do I then get heroin or cocaine and say “Try it son”? Or try it on my daughters? But when it comes to literature, [it’s] okay? We have this thing where we want to educate...** (*Clarkstown, NY Hearing Male Speaker #3*).

For this challenger, books that discuss heroin and cocaine are implicitly teaching the reader how to take drugs. This is similar to the issue of imagination discussed above; literature must not contain certain themes or images because reading about an experience is the same as having it. There is a lack of critical distance between the reader and the text and reading becomes an imitative endeavor.

The theme of common sense reading strategies are most fully elucidated when challengers discuss objectionable sections of the challenged book. Texts are understood literally and there is no concept of multiple layers of meaning or polysemy. The following passage from a challenger’s letter discusses some of the events in Sherman

Alexie's coming of age novel, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. The writer is discussing the 14-year-old protagonist of novel and quotes from the book:

(He is proud to masturbate; he is good at it and he is ambidextrous) and "if God didn't want us to masturbate he wouldn't have given us thumbs"- and later "you should read and draw because really good books and cartoons give you a boner". Then still later he talks of getting an erection because he teacher was so good looking. He later tells his friend he is a "fag tree." **I thought we were trying to teach our children not to use those "bullying terms"?** (*Helena, MT Letter, n.d.*)

Since the book uses the term "fag" then the school is teaching students that it is permissible to use the term "fag." Note that the challenger does not state that the book might discuss how it feels to be called such a derogatory name—the focus is on the use of the term itself. The concept of learning proper morals through text is found throughout challengers' arguments.

Challengers' discourse links common sense interpretation to the educational purpose of literature. For them, reading about something means that it is being "promoted:"

It seems strange and fickle to on the one hand, observe the school district adopt safe-sex teaching practices for high school age children, and **yet have no qualms about presenting material such as this book**. When STO's, unwanted pregnancies, and even suicide is on the rise, how could the promotion of the Images [sic] portrayed on the pages of this book, be good for our children? Just because "it's out there" - the internet etc. - **does that mean it should be promoted by those who are entrusted to be wise guides in the maturation process of our children?** (*Clarkstown, NY Letter, n.d.*)

For the challenger, all educational materials across the school curriculum are of a piece. The materials used in the English classroom and the sex education classroom should be interpreted by students using the same strategies: Note the conflation of text and images

in the challenger's statement. Reading about an action in prose is the same as having it presented as "mind movies."

There is also a conflation of non-fiction (which one presumes would be used in a sex education class) and fiction. This lack separation between fiction and non-fiction is common throughout challengers' discourse and relates to the idea of common sense interpretive strategies. In the following quote, "Alexie" refers to the author of the book, Sherman Alexie.

Wow, OK. Number 1: Highly inappropriate material for a high school English Literature class. especially the immature and crass way with which he speaks. Number 2: Again. **Disrespect of women. Alexie endorses objectifying women.** Using them to satisfy his own sexual desires. Number 3: **Blanket false statements. "Everybody does it?" That's a lie.** I know of many parents that are teaching their children differently. They are teaching them a more excellent way. Not everybody does it. But can you imagine young, impressionable teenagers **believing these inaccurate observations?** Also, "If God hadn't wanted us to masturbate. then God wouldn't have given us thumbs." **Another big fat lie** (*Helena, MT Letter, n.d.*)

The use of the term "lie" in this statement is instructive. For this challenger, it seems that fictional texts must be factually "true." It is important to remember that the quotes given in the statement above are from a work of fiction and, presumably, the author is not arguing that the narrator's voice is "true" but this is how they are interpreted by the challenger. This is an example of common sense interpretation where the author "means" what he writes.

For other challengers, there is less of a conflation between fiction and non-fiction and more of a focus on the concept of "timeless truths." The capitalization is the writer's own:

That the author writes well and makes some valid points **is sadly offset by various inappropriate discussions** including the teen's ideas about masturbation which are as follows: "EVERYBODY does it. And EVERYBODY likes it. And if God hadn't wanted us to masturbate, then God wouldn't have given us thumbs. So thank God for my thumbs." As I said, this book discusses things that are morally erosive. **Why should any child or teenager be required to wallow in the immoral reality of this fictional boy's life?** (*Helena, MT Letter, n.d.*)

The juxtaposition of "immoral reality" and "fictional boy" is striking in this statement.

One might surmise that, for this challenger, fiction must present a moral reality and an appropriate blueprint for action. This particular book, according to the challenger, does neither.

This line of reasoning regarding truth is discussed by other challengers. The nature of truth in texts means that books that are being written must contain a moral lesson. The following challenger begins by discussing the negative influences of inappropriate texts and the idea of ordered knowledge first introduced in Chapter 7:

When children "must read" fiction or other books containing degrading material at school, they **can assume that such content is approved by both the school and society**. This also has the possibility of setting the stage for influencing our children in a negative way by giving them permission to **not only read, but, to act out immoral** (non-acceptable) situations. **"Bad behavior" (non-acceptable) does have consequences and influences others.** This is overlooked in Montana 1948 when **evil deeds**, including murder, rape, etc., **escape punishment** (*Merrill, WI Letter 6/13/2011*).

Once again there is a prevailing theme that including a particular book in the curriculum means that everything in the book is endorsed by the community. For this challenger, one of the primary problems with the challenged books is that they do not present adequate consequences for objectionable behavior.

Since children lack critical distance from the text and interpretive skill, they will interpret the text as meaning that such behavior is permitted. Another challenger writes:

Most students would gravitate toward this book. Is it our role to use this book? We understand what is happening in their lives. **Some of the children who are still forming have not fully formed their position.** They are looking to adults for good examples. **We don't want them calling out and using this language.** We have to protect students (Clarkstown, NY Letter, Date redacted).

Here the concept of having a “fully formed position” might be understood as a type of critical distance and children do not possess the interpretive strategies to understand what they are reading. They are still maturing and therefore must read books that will give them a good moral foundation. Another challenger refers to scientific studies to describe the concept of critical distance:

Studies on brain research show that the human brain, particularly the frontal lobe (where judgment is made), **is not fully developed until 22 to 25 years of age.** Why are we subjecting our children to immoral situations and illegal acts **when they are not ready to process it?**” (Clarkstown, NY Letter, Date redacted)

Children are simply unable to process the material found in the challenged book. For this challenger, until they are ready to do so they should not be subjected to the themes in the text.

Also of interest is the idea that reading the texts can lead to a particular behavior.

Another challenger states this idea plainly:

Has anyone ever challenged you to be a defender of women and children? I hope this is not a pleading that you've heard for the first time. **The truth is the contents of the book in question leads to a lot of misery, pain, lack of freedom, and often death.** Consequences of the behaviors taught in the book, and there are many, obviously not even taken into consideration. How responsible is that!!? (Lewiston, ME Letter 8/20/2007)

The concept of reading effects is found throughout challengers' discourse and is strongly linked to common sense interpretation and children's lack of critical distance. Since texts “say what they mean” and children do not have the skills to interpret them using a

different method, reading inappropriate texts will inevitably lead to inappropriate, imitative behavior.

### **The Consequences of Reading**

Challengers construct reading as a practice that has effects.<sup>28</sup> Texts are not read passively but, as mentioned above, they can alter a person's life and reading can have both long- and short- term effects. This section of the chapter discusses language used in both of these instances. Generally, when challengers describe the long-term effects of reading, the language is stark and more concerned with permanent psychological and spiritual damage. Short-term effects, on the other hand, are discussed using what might call "triggering" language. Once again, there is little nuance in the discourse concerning reading effects—reading inappropriate material will inexorably lead to both inappropriate behavior and poor moral character.

One of the interesting aspects of the Merrill, Wisconsin Request for Reconsideration form is that it specifically asks the requestor to describe what effects the book will have on someone who reads it. Challengers provided a variety of responses to the question "What do you feel might be the result of reading, viewing or listening to this material?" and none of the challengers wrote that there would not be negative effects if children were exposed to the book in question. Below are a few of the replies that some of the challengers gave:

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<sup>28</sup> I am not arguing here that only challengers believe that reading has effects. However, it is significant that challengers believe that the effects of reading are inevitable and that there is a correlation between what one reads and how one behaves. This is in contrast to the view in modern librarianship which is agnostic to the effects of reading material. According to this viewpoint, since it is impossible to know the effects of reading a particular text, one can be open to keeping all points of view within a collection (Shera, 1976).



It **stimulates the imagination** toward sexual behavior as well as violence being a suggested way to release this feeling – Rape – (*Merrill, WI Request for Reconsideration 6/7/2011*).

While a 12 year old boy realistically may not be able to articulate his feelings **some young person reading this could be sexually aroused**. It adds to all the X-rated things thrown at young people – Not Good (*Merrill, WI Request for Reconsideration 5/31/2011*)

It gives their minds immorality to think of. **It paints filth in their imagination**. It pulls their morals down (*Merrill, WI Request for Reconsideration 6/15/2011*)

It lends itself to **putting unnecessary sexual thoughts in young peoples' minds**. It also lends itself to let kids know if they make mistakes/kill yourself (*Merrill, WI Request for Reconsideration 6/13/2011*)

The **explicit details in this book create visual images** that a child under 18 does not need to be and should not be exposed to (*Merrill, WI Request for Reconsideration 6/11/2011*)

All of the themes discussed in this chapter are articulated by the challengers in the statements above. The imagination will be used for sexual exploration and possible violence. Children will develop poor moral character and they will not be exposed to proper consequences for objectionable behavior. Children simply do not possess the critical distance or interpretive skill to process what they will read in the book. Of particular interest is that these effects are taken for granted throughout challengers' discourse. Exposure to the challenged book will inevitably lead to the negative effects in the long-term such as the destruction of the soul and, in the short-term, embarrassment and acting out.

### **Corrosion of the Soul**

When challengers discuss the long term effects of reading objectionable material, they often state that they are not only trying to save children's minds but also their souls:

I believe that this book does damage to people especially young, developing maturing children in what that cannot be measured. **Reading filth corrodes our souls.** I felt dirty reading this book. I'm fully aware that such language is spoken in our kids' culture, But must we, as educators, role models, and monitors, perpetuate it in our schools" (*Helena, MT Request for Reconsideration 10/28/2010*).

This is connected to the "garbage in, garbage out" argument discussed above. Even though obscenity is common in contemporary culture, reading a text with such language damages the soul. The martial language discussed in Chapter 6 is also a common aspect of discussing long-term effects of reading:

**The battle we are engaged in is a battle of our age, to save the minds and souls of the generation.** We all need to be very careful of the words and thoughts that are being conveyed to young minds...Teachers must be very careful to use resources that they use in the classroom to reinforce the attitudes and behaviors that you want to see prevail in the rest of areas of the school environment. Using books that might be [?] and unacceptable under school policies **sends a convoluted message to the students' minds.** There is no middle ground before God. Either you are for me or you are against me. For if you are not putting good thoughts into these students minds, you are acting with Satan (*Stockton, MO Hearing Male Speaker #4*).

For this challenger, the act of removing an objectionable book is part of a "war" for children's souls. It is clear that reading the material will do permanent and lasting harm to their characters and therefore the book must be removed. This is similar to the issue of spiritual warfare discussed in Chapter 7.

The challenger in Central York, Pennsylvania also argued that reading the challenged book could cause permanent psychological damage. In the interview, she was particularly concerned with the effects of reading dark literature.

I think it's damaging for children to **read literature, damages them psychologically...**that literature, not dark as in Harry Potter dark. But dark as in holding a gun to the head and describing holding a knife to a two-year-old's throat. **That's just too graphic too much. Crossing a line.** If they weren't

doing a story about a kidnapping they wouldn't have...you know they get kidnapped and trapped in a closet. But it never crosses that line where somebody is holding a knife to her throat. To me the line has been crossed and I felt like I had to stand up and say my piece about it (*Central York, PA Interview*).

Although she does not specify what kind of psychological damage dark literature will do to a child, she is clearly worried about the long-term effects of reading such literature.

There is a point where the text becomes too intense for a child to read.

### **Acting Out, Triggering, and Micro-Aggressions**

The impact of reading on children's souls is not the only reading effect that concerns challengers. There is also a pervasive fear that children will act out the scenes that they read in a book.

We hope you will agree and remove this book. I also strongly urge you to take a close look at what are children are being fed at school and make sure it is something that we **want them to recreate in their minds or potentially act out** (*Merrill, WI Letter 9/27/2011*).

It is not only fear of the imagination as described above that concerns challengers but also fear of what children will do when they are aware of particular behaviors. The ideas given to them through books must be sound so that children will not act upon what they read.

One short-term effect that is discussed throughout challengers' discourse is the possibility that reading the challenged material will cause sexual excitement.

I just looked up the Merriam Webster definition—the depiction of erotic behavior (as in pictures or writing) intended to cause sexual excitement. I wanted to confirm for myself that depicting in writing would fit the definition, but it also says **it must be intended to cause sexual excitement**. I would like to believe that this is not true, but the more that comes out about what our children are being exposed to in school, I really don't feel I can assume anything anymore. Whether or not this fits the legal description of

pornography, it is not appropriate for children. Why would we want to expose our children to this? (*Merrill, WI Letter 6/10/2011*)

This challenger is concerned that children will use the challenged book as erotica. There is an abrupt shift in the statement from defining erotica to labeling the book in question as pornography. The issue of literature as pornography will be discussed in more detail below.

The feeling of embarrassment or needing to hide is used by some challengers as proxy for inappropriate material. If one is embarrassed while reading particular text then it contains objectionable material and should be removed or relocated.

I noticed the older girl in the backseat of the car. And like she knew she was looking at something that she wasn't supposed to. **She was hunched over a bit and I thought she's probably making something out of nothing** because it's a public library book from the children's section. [I thought,] "There can't be anything she shouldn't see." And then I asked her if I could look at the book. She didn't want to at first and then she did. And I could not believe the things reading and seeing.

Graphic. **Just too much information. Just way too much information.** You know. And anyone I showed the book to then...I couldn't give it back to her. And I had to let her parents know what she had just seen. And um, she thought it was disgusting and I asked her question about where it was located. And right there by the little children's books. She was curious about babies I guess, but this book just went way beyond, the necessary. You know...you can be truthful without being graphic at that age (*Carrollton, NY Interview*).

The challenger knew that something was wrong with the book because the child in her care was hiding her reading. The child's actions meant that the book was inappropriate.

It is implicit in this statement that appropriate reading materials do not have to be hidden—they can and should be read out in the open. As noted in Chapter 3, silent reading, as opposed to public reading, has often been associated with suspicion as well as private and unmediated interpretation. The challenger above gives some indication as to

why this might be so. If the caregiver had been reading the book aloud, presumably she would have stopped when she reached the objectionable material. The child's embarrassment and the interviewee's subsequent dismay could only take place if the child was reading to him or herself.

Another short-term effect that challengers discuss is the concept of "stirring" or triggering. That is, the challenged books are so explicit that they will cause children who have experienced violence to re-live the events:

The hardest task as a CPW was working with children who had been sexually abused and after that experience, I wonder how anyone can defend a book that places sexual abuse in the context of ambiguity. **Sexual abuse is an unspeakable violation and must always be portrayed as such.** On page 121 of *Montana 1948*, the main character David becomes sexually stirred at the thought of a high school girl being sexually abused by his uncle.

This scene alone created a myriad of questions for me: How would reading about how David was aroused by a possible sexual assault teach boys to respect girls? Would girls gain self-esteem by reading about how young women are abused and the malefactor is never brought to justice? **How do I hope children cope with their memories of abuse, when they are reminded of them in their English class?** How can I approve of this book and then look at my family member [crying] knowing that she had been sexually touched by her teacher, sending her on a depressive spiral or my friend who was molested by his pastor, or another family member, by her grandfather, or another friend molested by a trusted adult. What if my child or your child was sexually abused? What would we think of this book in our classroom? (*Merrill, WI Hearing Female Speaker #7*)

Although other common themes in challengers' discourse, including the lack of moral clarity are brought up in this statement, what is most prominent is the fear that children who have suffered through abuse might not be able to process the events described in the text. The book will instead elicit terrible memories for them. This triggering effect will be compounded by the fact that the character who abuses the girls in the book is not, according to the challenger, adequately punished.

Some of the reading effects that challengers discuss are of a more generalized nature but still relate to fear that the challenged book will produce negative feelings within the readers. The following challenger describes her daughter's reported emotional state when she read the objectionable material:

My daughter was courageous enough to discuss how having to read this material makes her feel. [Redacted] **reported feeling inferior, embarrassment [sic] and misunderstood, she also felt invalidated and stereotyped.** In addition there was no effort in her classroom to dispel these stereotypes and negative view of [American Indian/Alaska Native] people. One lecture even promoted an inaccurate view of why "we have reservations"... (*Seattle, WA Letter 3/14/2010*).

As with the challenger from Merrill, Wisconsin directly above, there is concern that reading the text has immediate negative effects on the reader. The challenger is concerned that, because of her heritage, her daughter does not have the same experience as others in her class when reading the book. The classroom becomes a space of hostility because the text makes the daughter feel inferior and embarrassed. This challenger argues that reading is not a neutral activity but one that can alter one's state of mind.

The challenger in the Seattle case uses the term micro-aggression, a term from social psychology which refers to everyday behaviors that affect the well-being of minorities, to describe the effects of reading the challenged book.

I did have a courageous conversation with Ms. [ ] on Friday afternoon and I appreciate her apology and her genuine interest in addressing this issue. As you know Seattle Public Schools has a tremendous achievement gap with AI/AN youth. This gap continues to widen for a number of reasons and **I feel as though this issue I am raising today is a contributing factor. Accumulated micro-aggressions has a detrimental impact on the emotional well being of AI/AN which undeniable affects academic achievement for many of our Native youth** (*Seattle, WA Letter 3/14/2010*).

Although the term micro-aggression has somewhat different connotation from triggering, it also describes an effect on the reader. For this letter writer, the challenged book negatively contributes to the overall psychological health of American Indian and Alaska native community. Micro-aggressions including, presumably, the availability of the book in question, lead to a lack of academic achievement with in the community.

### **Pornography and the “Slippery-Slope”**

The concept of inevitability is related to what one might call pornography arguments. There is a well-known discourse within contemporary American society that consuming pornography is a kind of domino effect or “slippery-slope” toward violence against women.<sup>29</sup> While they are less focused on pornography’s presumed harm against women, challengers do argue that consumption of inappropriate material is the beginning of a “slippery slope” toward the destruction of one’s moral character. This causal argument was most prevalent in the Merrill, Wisconsin challenge case.<sup>30</sup> It should be noted here that throughout these arguments, the challenged material is considered to be pornographic.

According to the CDC information, a [causal] link between pornography and sexual offences has been proven through numerous studies and testimonies. **Pornography has proven to have a harmful and corrupting influence...**and I want to have you hear this: there is no guarantee that pornography will not be imitated by sexual offenders. I want to say that in Wisconsin legislative documents...crimes against children are in—and children is defined as anyone under 18 years of age—Chapter 948.11. That it speaks to exposing a child to

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<sup>29</sup> This argument was first put forward by Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin in *Pornography and civil rights: A new day for women’s equality* (1988) and it is a major theme in second-wave feminist thought. That it is used by challengers in their own discourse demonstrates how this concept has permeated contemporary American society.

<sup>30</sup> Note that I have no evidence that the challengers in this case particular worked together and I cannot account for the similarity in their discourse.

harmful material or harmful descriptions and variations....it's the law against pornography.

I want to ask you, are you sure that you want to take the risk in our school district and our classroom and keeping the book in our curriculum based on what I just read? **Will you put a student or a child at risk of being raped?** Based on this, who's going to monitor the classroom for the students who have been molested, use pornography, or would be influenced by the literary images of this book of a sexually explicit nature. **How do you know that it will not be imitated by somebody that you may never see in the teacher's classroom and would act out on what they read in this book?** How are teachers going to find out ahead of time who those students are? (*Merrill, WI Female Speaker #3*)

This speaker begins with information on pornography from a well-respected institution, the Center for Disease Control, in order to strengthen her argument against the book. By leaving the book in the school, administrators are risking that students will be sent down a path to sexual violence. Because the book is considered to be pornography, it is, in fact, illegal for the school system to retain it. Note that the challenger also describes the triggering effects of the reading material discussed above.

A challenger in Stockton, Missouri also characterizes objectionable material as pornography. He links this to act of imaginative visualization described above:

I recently attended a protestant youth retreat. We talked about the problems with internet crime. The number one factor that increases the vulnerability of our children to sexual predators was their exposure to vulgar and profane language. We talk about protection tonight. That our teachers are there to protect us. Thank you for protecting our children. **When they visualize these acts is that not pornography? Is it not just as pornographic as if they had seen it in person? Or in action in a photograph?** I appreciate your leadership. Leadership is action. Leadership is not imposition. The time is always right to do what you did (*Stockton, MO Hearing Male Speaker #9*).

For the challenger, the work in question is pornographic because it leads the reader to visualize sexual acts. The speaker also states that because children are exposed to obscenity they will be more vulnerable to sexual offenders. This is an interesting change



to the common “slippery slope” argument which usually relates the change in behavior to the consumer alone. Here, consumption makes the reader more vulnerable to the misdeeds of others.

The challenger in Merrill, Wisconsin quoted above offers a precise definition of pornography in order to differentiate it from literature.

**When is it okay to give a child or youth pornography?** And what is the right thing to do when you find pornography in the hands of a child. The definition of literature is “works having excellent form or expression or dealing with ideas of permanent and lasting interest.” **Pornography is “the depiction as in writing of erotic behavior defined to cause sexual excitement.”** Profane is “the impure, treat with irreverence, or debase with unworthy use.” Quarantine is “restraint on movements, on persons, or of goods that are intended to prevent the spread of pests or disease.” Disease is “an alteration of a living body such as a human body that impairs the function” (*Merrill, WI Hearing Female Speaker #3*).

Not only is the challenged book characterized as pornography, it is a disease that must not be accessible to children. This argument hearkens back to the idea of removing anomalous knowledge discussed in Chapter 7: The book is like a disease that must be literally quarantined.

Another challenger in Merrill, Wisconsin also offers definitions of literature and pornography to bolster his or her arguments on the Request for Reconsideration form :<sup>31</sup>

Literature: all writings considered as having permanent value  
 Pornography: writings pictures etc., intended primarily to arouse sexual desire. **I find nothing of permanent value in *Montana 1948*...**[illegible] sexually explicit writing (*Merrill, WI Request for Reconsideration 6/7/2011*).

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<sup>31</sup> It is possible that this is the speaker at the hearing in the statement above.

Once again, the book is labeled as pornography and, because it cannot be characterized as literature, it should be removed from the school. There is no ambiguity for this challenger regarding how the challenged book should be classified.

The following speaker at the Merrill, Wisconsin hearing is quoted at length as her testimony at the hearing demonstrates many different aspects of the pornography in a causal argument.

As a grandmother I am very concerned about what's going on and as a person who works with decency groups in the surrounding area and throughout the city it's my observation throughout the years **that pornography fuels the thirst of addiction in people who are exposed often to sexually explicit materials.** Statistics show that pornography is the seventh largest industry in the U.S. that 11-year olds are the average age of exposure to the internet. That 12-year-olds -17 year olds are the largest consumers, and only 25% of youth who receive solicitations on the internet have told their parents. So why do we want to add fuel to the fire.

Many of these people-children-are exposed in their grammar school years and we **find that soft pornography which surrounds us in our society as well as hard pornography stimulates early sexual arousal before many are prepared mentally and emotionally to deal with it. And we find that soft pornography does exactly what cigarettes do to marijuana. It often leads to harder materials.**

Reading *Montana 1948* is one example of how young people can be easily aroused as can anyone. Statistics will see that they are already exposed so this is just another piece of coal on the fire. **To suggest that pornography with[out] pictures could not have an effect on you, including a harmful, is to deny the whole notion of education and to suggest that people are not affected by what they read and see.** In that case, Karl Marx's book, *Das Kapital*, the Bible, and the Qur'an or any advertising have no effect either. My suggestion is to remove *Montana 1948* from the curriculum not because it's the wrong thing to do but because it's the right thing to do (*Merrill, WI Female Speaker #2*).

The speaker begins with statistics that show that children are exposed to pornography on a regular basis and leaving the book in the school system will only increase their consumption. Consuming pornography leads directly to "indecentcy." Although the speaker allows that there is a difference between what she characterizes as soft and hard

pornography (one contains pictures and the other does not), there is no difference in the effects of these two types. She makes an explicit analogy linking pornography and cigarettes as “gateway drugs.” Finally, she notes that there one should “deny the whole notion of education” if one does not believe that reading has effects. For her, it makes no sense to have students read anything if educators do not think it will affect them in some way.

### **Thematic Summary**

What happens when someone reads? For challengers, the answer to this question is of primary importance. If reading a particular text will lead you astray, then it is best not to only not read it but also to remove or relocate the text so that those who do not have the mental facility to process the information contained within will not have access to it. As demonstrated in this chapter, challengers employ a myriad of arguments related to reading throughout their discourse. First, they view the material object of the book as a powerful medium in and of itself. Second, challengers discuss a variety of interpretive strategies that one uses when encountering a texts. Third, they are very concerned that reading has both long- and short-term effects. Finally, challengers view reading inappropriate material as an inevitable “slippery slope” to poor moral character and behavior.

### **Books as a Legitimizing Medium**

Throughout challengers’ discourse there is an emphasis on the authorization and legitimation within the marketplace of ideas. When an idea or concept is published it then becomes a legitimate idea or concept and it is through the act of writing and

circulation that ideas gain traction in society. Writing and publishing are powerful actions for challengers. Since the book is a legitimating medium, authors and publishers must be careful to use their power wisely.<sup>32</sup> For challengers, books can change the course of one's life and it is up to the people who create books to ensure that inappropriate materials are not circulated in the wider public.

In the discourse of censorship, the process of writing and publishing what they consider to be immoral ideas is presented negatively. As demonstrated above, challengers are often surprised that someone would bother to write or publish the materials that they are challenging. They place great emphasis on the selection process of publication. If an author sends in a work riddled with vulgarity or sexuality, then it is the duty of publishers not to publish the manuscript. This is vitally important because once something is published and in the marketplace of ideas it has the legitimacy of having been published and printed in a book an act that affords it authority and increases its power. If this selection process fails then the institution has a duty not to buy it because this legitimacy cannot be removed from the work and, for challengers, the only perceived recourse is to remove or relocate the book.

### **Common Sense and the Imagination**

Not only are books a legitimating medium, they are also, unlike film or television, an unmediated medium. There are no outside entities between the reader and the text. As

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<sup>32</sup> In some respects, this argument is not much different from the ones made regarding scholarly publishing. Academics and librarians place great trust in scholarly publishers to weed through illegitimate information. Once a work has been published, it has the imprimatur of the publisher and is considered to be legitimate piece of scholarly writing.

noted previously, books, unlike broadcast television or movies, are somewhat difficult to censor once acquired by the reader. This lack of mediation informs the interpretive strategies that are discussed throughout challengers' discourse.

Common sense interpretation of text is one of the primary interpretive strategies that informs challengers' discourse. This is the idea that the words in text mean what they say and there is little recourse for different methods of interpretation. Of particular important is the understanding reading the nature of truth in texts. Since texts are subject to common sense interpretation, when an author states something in writing, it must be true. For challengers, truth telling is a vital component of both fiction and non-fiction. Being "made-up" is not an excuse for not telling the truth in texts.

Along with common sense interpretation, the work of imagination is an important aspect of understanding how challengers construct the practice of reading. When one reads, one visualizes what is happening on the page and it is this visualization that most concerns challengers. There are certain situations and behaviors that those who possess an undisciplined imagination, i.e., children, should not encounter. Children, in particular, lack critical distance from texts and reading inappropriate materials will lead them to have unsuitable reactions to such materials.

### **Short- and Long-Term Effects of Reading**

Common sense interpretation and the imagination are also related to the idea of reading effects. Because there is little room for polysemy and reading is a powerful practice, the effects of reading are viewed as inevitable for challengers. Reading

inappropriate material when one is a child will inexorably lead to both long- and short-term outcomes.

In the short term, challengers are especially concerned with how the imagination affects children physically and emotionally. Responses to text such as sexual excitement and violence are common references throughout their discourse. It must be noted that both of these are seen as negative and inevitable and reading the inappropriate material will lead inescapably to behavior that is considered to be immoral because children, by their nature, cannot process the material. Feelings of embarrassment and hurt are used as proxies for identifying objectionable books. If a child experiences hurt or embarrassment while reading, then the text must be inappropriate.

Long-term effects of reading inappropriate material include the degradation and corrosion of the soul and/or the development poor moral character. This particular interpretative strategy is not surprising since challengers place so much faith in the power of reading. If your life can change by reading a book on environmentalism, the Bible, or *Das Kapital*, how could it not change when reading a book that tells a story about sexual violence? It is not hyperbole to state that some challengers argue that one's basic character is put in play when reading. This is why it is vital that only "good" materials are presented to children. The concept that all texts are read in the same way and therefore must induce physical and emotional effects is key to understanding the actions of challengers.

### **Causal Arguments**

The argument that the effects of reading that justify the censorship of books is a similar to one that feminist arguments against pornography and has parallels to “slippery slope” arguments used in anti-drug campaigns. Just as smoking cigarettes or marijuana is gateway to harder drugs, reading inappropriate material is a gateway to poor behavior. If children see that certain behaviors are legitimized by their inclusion in books that are then sanctioned by the public library or school, they will believe that such behaviors are correct.

As with anti-pornography arguments, reading about a particular behavior legitimizes it and leads to worse behavior in the reader later in life. In some respects, the challenged books are not simply like pornography—they are pornography. Since the texts lead the reader to visualize sexual or violent acts, the challenged books cannot be classified as literature. The inclusion of such acts in the challenged texts, means that they cannot have permanent, enduring value in the same way that literature does.

These four themes concerning reading and the book constitute a particular conceptualization of print culture for challengers. Their discourse focuses on the book as a legitimating symbolic object within the marketplace of ideas and the effects of reading in order to justify the action of removing or relocating objectionable material within public institutions. Although these arguments are not necessarily unique to challengers, the actions that that they are meant to justify are distinctive. However, it must be noted that challengers are only sometimes successful in their endeavors and the outcome of their cases often rests in the hands of librarians and other staff and administrators in

public schools and libraries who wield significant symbolic power within their institutions.



## **Chapter 9: The Worldviews of Challengers and the Discourse of Censorship**

As stated in Chapter 1, the primary purpose of this study was to better understand the worldviews of people who challenge materials in public libraries, school libraries, and curricula. Through the analysis of common themes within the discourse of censorship, the study identified the contours of these worldviews. In particular, the study identified challengers' understanding of the practice of reading as well as their construction of public libraries and schools in society. Throughout the study, a worldview was defined as an interpretive lens that provides individuals with both a framework for comprehending everyday life as well as a roadmap for action.

The study also had three secondary research objectives. First, it attempted to delineate some of the worldviews of challengers through an exploration of—following the work of Pierre Bourdieu—their structuring structures and structured structures (i.e., their cognition and meaning systems). Second the study explored challengers' construction of the role of public libraries and schools in society as well as the policies and procedures used in challenge cases. Finally, the study explored challengers' construction of the practice of reading by identifying challengers' construction of the book as a symbolic object, their interpretive strategies and reading practices as well as how these strategies shape challengers' behavior.

The study focused on 13 challenge cases in the United States that took place between 2007 and 2011. The cases concerned books in public libraries, school libraries, and school curriculum. There were three sources of discourse used in the study. The first consisted of documents, obtained via Freedom of Information Act requests to governing

bodies, produced in the course of challenge cases. Recordings of book challenge public hearings constituted the second source of data. Finally, the third source of data was interviews with challengers. Sources were only used if they included the voices or arguments of challengers which offered insights into their justifications for removing or relocating objectionable materials in public institutions.

Analysis of the challengers' discourse was based in a social constructionist meta-theoretical framework that posits language as the foundation for everyday life. The study employed both Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice and Mary Douglas' theories of purity concerning social classification and moral order to examine challengers' discourse. Following Bourdieu, social space was conceptualized as consisting of "structures": structuring structures that provide for individual cognition within social space and structured structures that assign meaning to the material objects found in these spaces. Both of these structures were revealed through discourse and comprise aspects of challengers' worldviews.

Although the challengers came from different areas of the country and their arguments addressed different materials, there were several shared themes in their discourse regarding objectionable materials in public institutions. Common themes in the discourse in censorship centered on three broad areas: social structures, institutions, and reading practices and print culture. First, with regard to social structures, challengers viewed their own actions as intervening in what they view as the moral decline of American society, constructed parenting as a boundary setting role, and worked preserving the innocence of children. Next, challengers conceptualized public institutions

as safe spaces for children and, according to their discourse, this is partially accomplished through careful selection of materials that children will encounter within those spaces. If objectionable material is found in the institution, it is no longer considered to be a safe space and therefore must be relocated or removed by means of a ritual purification. Finally, challengers' demonstrated a reverence for the books as a material, symbolic object. Interpretive strategies used in the practice of reading focused on mimetic imagination and common sense interpretation of the text. Challengers were particularly concerned with short- and long-term effects of reading in justifying their actions.

This concluding chapter presents a summary, briefly outlined above, of the major findings in this study, contributions to theory, and avenues for future research. It begins with an overview of some of the structuring and structured structures that organize challengers' worldviews. Then it discusses challengers' understanding of public institutions and the policies and procedures employed therein. Third, the chapter presents challengers' construction of reading practices and interpretive strategies. Next, the chapter summarizes facets of challengers' worldviews and the discourse of censorship from their perspective. The chapter then presents an overview of the study's contribution to theory as well as future research possibilities. The chapter ends with a short personal reflection on the study.

### **A Worldview of Destruction and Innocence**

Challengers' worldviews are quite complex but there are several common themes found throughout their discourse that relate to the overall ordering of social space. In particular, challengers share particular conceptualizations of society, parenting, and the

nature of childhood. Society is viewed as a fragile backbone that is under attack from immoral forces while parenting is considered to be an important, boundary-setting role within the social moral order. Finally, children are conceptualized of as innocents whose status must be preserved at all costs.

### **A Fragile Society**

For challengers, society is structured as a backbone for life, but it is one that is quite fragile and will shatter if individuals do not adhere to certain values and morals. It is, in its most basic form, a structuring structure for challengers. For them, society consists of various levels of proximity and familiarity including the local community but is primarily conceptualized in terms of the nation as whole. American society has altered dramatically in the past fifty years and challengers view these changes with trepidation. In fact, for many challengers, these changes have sent American society on a course of destruction that needs to be reversed. Shifts in sexual mores and gender roles as well as the perception of pervasive vulgarity and violence throughout the media landscape are leading society, according to their discourse, on a path to destruction.

The objectionable materials that are the object of challenges are constructed by challengers as both a symptom of these changes and a symbol of them: If the shifts in society had not taken place, then objectionable material would not have been written or published in books, much less be available in public institutions in the first place. At the same time, the books—with their pervasive sexuality, violence, or other harmful material—represent the shifts themselves to challengers. According to the challengers’

discourse, the assaults on society have been especially taxing for the nuclear family and parenting, in particular, has become more challenging.

### **Parenting and Boundaries**

The family unit is one of the primary structures of society for challengers and throughout their discourse they describe changes to the family unit—outcomes of the social upheavals of the ‘60s—in apocalyptic terms. Parenting is perceived by challengers to be both “natural” and difficult. It is natural because one should automatically know to set boundaries regarding media consumption for one’s children. At the same time, parenting is also difficult because there are so many forces working against parents who, for example, attempt to set strict boundaries for their children.

The idea of parent as boundary setter is pervasive in challengers’ discourse. This is often described by challengers using a causal argument: If parents set clear boundaries, then their children will develop into morally sound adults. According to challengers, however, some parents are unable or unwilling to set such boundaries. These parents are “falling down on the job” and it is the duty of public schools and libraries to support them—and all parents—in their difficult role. For challengers, selecting objectionable material makes parenting harder and public institutions must help all parents set adequate boundaries for children by removing or relocating such materials. This charge to public institutions becomes even more important for challengers when they consider parents who are not fulfilling their roles as boundary setters and therefore compromising their children’s innocence. Challengers present themselves as monitors for public institutions

who will prevent all children from encountering objectionable material, even if other parents are unable or unwilling to do so.

### **Innocence and Childhood**

Throughout their discourse, challengers view childhood in two different ways. The first view constructs innocence as a state of ignorance. That is, children are a *tabula rasa* and do not have any knowledge of sexuality, vulgarity, or violence. Challengers who hold this first view describe these characteristics as learned behaviors that only become a part of someone's character if he or she is exposed to them at an early age. The second conceptualization of childhood innocence found in challengers' discourse holds that characteristics such as sexuality, vulgarity, and violence are latent behaviors. In this view, all human beings have aspects of these behaviors as part of their nature, but they only manifest themselves through exposure to material that contains sexuality, vulgarity, or violence. That is, one might become violent if one is exposed to texts or images that contain violence. If not exposed to such material, the trait remains dormant.

Regardless of how it is constructed, challengers view innocence as something that must be protected and the challenged material is seen as an assault on this inherent trait. Protection from objectionable materials is also linked to challengers' conceptualization of parents as boundary setters. By setting boundaries and attempting to remove or relocate materials in public institutions, parents maintain their children's innocence.

### **Public Institutions, Policies, and Procedures**

Book challenges represent the movement of a private act (determining what one's own children should read) into the public sphere. This movement is based in challengers'

particular understanding of what the public sphere is and how it operates. For them, this social sphere is a symbolic representation of community values and beliefs. Since they are supported by the community and—in the some respects—are the public face of the community to the wider society, institutions within the public sphere should only contain carefully selected, ordered knowledge.

### **Public Institutions**

The public library and school are vital parts of the local community for challengers. They both represent the community to the wider world and shape the values and morals of the next generation. As noted in Chapter 7, they are embodiments of the conversion of economic capital into symbolic capital. Libraries, in particular, are seen as embodiments of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. As symbolic objects, community-supported public institutions provide a particular image of the community to the wider society and it is this, as well as the sense that these institutions must be a place of safety, that so concerns challengers.

As noted above, throughout their discourse, challengers argue that public institutions must fulfill one of their primary roles in aiding parents in the difficult job of setting boundaries for children. This is partially accomplished by including only orderly, selected knowledge on their library shelves or in curricula. Although it is not explicit in challengers' discourse, the question of selection and whose values should be represented in collections and curricula undergirds many of challengers' arguments. As shown in the analysis, challengers view the librarians and administrators of public institutions as

proxies for community opinion and these selectors' decisions should match those of the community as a whole.

Challengers are also concerned with how knowledge is classified. Following Douglas's theory, ambiguous knowledge can be classified in many different ways while anomalous knowledge does not fit anywhere in a particular classification scheme. For challengers, the fact that a book containing ambiguous or anomalous knowledge is available in a public institution means that that institution is disordered—it is no longer a safe space for children.

The issue of selecting proper knowledge for public libraries and schools is more complex than it might seem at first glance due to the various stakeholders who shape public institutions. However, these stakeholders have differing amounts of cultural and symbolic capital and these differences greatly affect the outcomes of challenges. Although they are governed by elected officials, public institutions are bureaucratic and operated by non-elected staff and administrators who often use policies and procedures to mitigate the voices of community members in decision making. Staff and administrators of libraries and schools have their own symbolic capital that is designated through their titles and their expertise in their fields. Through the use of forms, meetings, and public comments, administrators and staff intend for challengers to get a fair hearing but not a vote on the outcome of the case. This study argues, following Bourdieu, that this is a form of symbolic violence as it is the administrators and other staff who set the parameters for the challengers to voice their concerns over the classification of materials within public institutions.



## **Ritual and Symbolic Violence**

A challenge case can be understood as a kind of ritualized of public discourse in two different ways. First, for challengers, it is a series of procedures (filling out forms, attending meetings, etc.) that are used in order to reclassify anomalous knowledge or reclassify ambiguous knowledge and these procedures are understood as a ritual to restore the public institution to its former status as a safe space for children. The challengers often note that, if the objectionable material is not removed or relocated, the institution can no longer be a place of safety in the community. On the other hand, staff and administrators use the rituals of challenge cases not to remove or relocate materials but to mitigate the voices of institutional outsiders. In some respects, the ritual is intended to allow a counterpublic (i.e., challengers) to “feel” as if they have some input over the workings of the institution even though, as a counterpublic with less capital and power within the institution, challengers have a voice and not a vote over the classification of materials within public libraries and schools.

Symbolic violence is a symbolic struggle wherein those in power employ hegemonic norms and procedures to dominate over other voices. In challenge cases, the symbolic capital of the public institution’s staff and administrators more often than not trumps the symbolic capital of the challengers. Although the final decision is often in the hands of an elected board; administrators, staff, and librarians use policies and procedures to lessen the likelihood of a challenge case ever reaching that level of intervention. Their use symbolic power within their institutions helps to ensure that their own classification systems will trump those of challengers.

### **Print Culture and Reading Practices**

As noted in Chapter 2, reading is neither a single action nor a solitary activity that is fixed across space and time but a social practice. The act of “reading” a text can mean that one is reading aloud to others or reading silently or even listening to an audiobook. The strategies used to interpret the text have also changed over time. For example, medieval reading practices often focused on the “fourfold senses” while today there is more of an emphasis on the critical distance of the reader from the text.

This study demonstrates that many of the people who challenge books conceptualize reading similarly. For them, reading is a powerful activity that can change a person’s life and guide an individual on the correct path or it can destroy their character. Challengers often have great respect for books as symbolic, material objects and it is imperative that the texts contained within them contain information that “edifies” the soul.

#### **The Book as Revered Objects**

As noted above, challengers consider reading to be a powerful activity and some of this influence is rooted in the symbolic power of the book itself. This symbolic authority operates in two ways: First, the book is powerful medium because it is an authoritative object within the marketplace of ideas. Second, challengers argue that presence of a particular text within a book confers legitimacy upon the text. These two conceptualizations of the power of the book are self-perpetuating: the book confers legitimacy to the text which increases the symbolic values of the book which confers legitimacy to the text.

This reverence for the book is clear throughout challengers' discourse. One result of this reverence is that they rarely suggest defacing or burning the books they are challenging. Instead, they argue that people who create books, authors and publishers should themselves be aware of the power of books and not allow inappropriate concepts and ideas to be included in them. That is, because a book is such a powerful object, those who create them should do everything in their power to keep "bad" ideas from receiving the legitimacy afforded by the book. Once a text is published, it is too late for the ideas to be withdrawn from the marketplace and it is incumbent upon the reader to have the skills to correctly interpret and respond to the text.

### **Mimetic Interpretive Strategies**

There are two prominent interpretive strategies described in challengers' discourse. The first concerns the mimetic characteristics of the immature imagination. For many challengers, children simply lack the maturity (that is, to use Davidson's terms, possess an undisciplined imagination) to have distance from a text. Therefore, when they read, texts are translated not simply into images but also experiences. For challengers, reading is an experiential activity—the reader goes through the same events as the narrator or protagonist. This means that reading about inappropriate behavior can lead directly to inappropriate behavior in one's life. Challengers argue that there is little to no distance between the immature reader and the text.

Another interpretive strategy that challengers discuss concerns the nature of truth and its relationship to text. This is intimately tied to the reverence for the book described above. Since the presence of text in a book confers legitimacy, the text must also be

“true.” For challengers, this often means that the voice of the narrator or protagonist must contain only factual truths in fictional texts. There is little room for polysemic interpretation or even unreliable narrators in challengers’ worldviews. The words in the text are what the author means. Challengers’ discourse makes little distinction between fiction and non-fiction and that which is read must be factually true, even if it is in the voice character in a novel. This is based in a common sense interpretive strategy of the text wherein the text is exactly as it appears. These ideas regarding common sense interpretive strategies and the truth of the text are directly related to the effects of reading on individual behavior.

### **The Effects of Reading**

Challengers often argue that reading texts that contain “bad” ideas or values can lead both short- and long-term harmful effects in children. As noted above, challengers’ discourse focuses on reading as a mimetic activity and therefore reading such material will result in damaging behavior. For example, with regard to short-term effects, some challengers argue that children who have been victims of sexual abuse or violence re-experience their trauma when they read a text that contains such events. Other challengers argue that reading about stereotypes will lead to children being hurt or embarrassed as a result of reading such texts.

In regard to the practice of reading’s long-term effects, challengers’ contend that children who read inappropriate material will turn out to have poor moral character. This argument is directly related to the power of reading wherein it is never considered to be an innocuous activity but one that challengers describe as having direct effects on one’s

character and behavior. This causal argument is crucial to understanding both challengers' worldviews and their arguments for removing and relocating books in public institutions.

### **Worldviews and the Discourse of Censorship**

This study argues that the concept of worldview provides the best lens for understanding the discourse of censorship. It takes the arguments of challengers seriously and maintains that they are operating from a rational systematic point of view that flows from their worldview. Following the work of Pierre Bourdieu, one's worldview consists of two types of structures that operate in tandem with each other. The first, *structuring structures*, is comprised of entities (broadly understood) in objective reality including institutions and people that organize and configure social space. They are used for as frameworks for cognition of the social world. For example, public libraries exist in objective reality and are institutions that collect and lend a given set of materials to their constituents. Public libraries usually have a basic hierarchical organizational structure consisting of paid staff and administration overseen by an elected board. To use Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's term, the "public library" in this example is a *type* (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Types are abstract, incomplete, and relevant constructions of objective reality. When one encounters a public library in the world, the structuring structures for the type "public library" are used to understand what the institutions is and how it is situated within a given community.

*Structured structures*, on the other hand, are used to impart subjective meaning onto the social world. The public library is not simply an institution that exists in

objective reality—it is an institution that “means something” to people. Their structured structure of “public library” is informed by their own experiences with their local public library and the discourse that surrounds public libraries in a particular society. For example, the existence of a local public library means that a particular community was and is willing to invest some of its resources into what the community believes is a public good. The role of the library is not solely mechanical but also, through the use of structured structures, imbued with social significance.

These structures operate within what Bourdieu’s calls *habitus*, a term that is somewhat commensurate with worldview. Throughout his writings, Bourdieu offers several definitions of the term. One states that habitus is “structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures” (Bourdieu, 1987, p. 72). In this instance, subjective reality operates as if it is objective reality. To use the example above, since the library is understood to be a place of social significance it operates as such a place in the lives of various community members. Habitus creates the common sense world and turns the historically situated into the natural (Bourdieu, 1987, p. 78). It is one’s habitus that provides the repertoires used by individuals in encountering a particular objector participating in an event.

As noted in chapter 1, a worldview is defined as one’s way of looking at the world that provides a roadmap for action. Worldviews consists of both how one perceives the world around oneself and how one projects meaning onto those perceptions. Although they consist of structured and structuring structures, worldviews are not necessarily coherent nor do they adhere to an ideal pattern. However, it is possible to

build an image of worldviews by examining the repertoires individuals use in everyday life. For example, this study identifies particular aspects of challengers' worldviews including their understanding of society, public institutions, and reading practices. These aspects of challengers' worldview aid our understanding of how challengers' understand the world as well as their actions in bringing a challenge against a particular book.

### **Challengers' Worldviews**

Challengers' worldviews conceptualize the social space of society as a series of interlocking spheres that influence each other. Starting with the family, these spheres move outward to the community, then to the nation. Of significance for understanding challenges' worldview is how deeply connected all of these circles are with one another. The overall organization as well as institutions within one sphere has direct effects on the others. That is, the social upheavals of society directly affect both public institutions of the community and the institution of the nuclear family. This also operates in the opposite direction; according to challengers, what happens to the family has major implications for what happens in society.

Challengers' discourse often espouses this view at a highly symbolic level. As noted in the Chapters 6, 7, and 8, the presence of a particular book in a public institution is both a symptom and the cause of the destruction of society. For challengers, when a community "endorses" a particular book by having it in the curriculum or library shelves, this both means that the community itself has lost its standards and the community will continue to be unhealthy because it allows such inappropriate material. Without the remedy of removing or relocating the book, the community and therefore society will

continue to decline. It is this issue of decline that most concerns challengers and characterizes much of the intensity found in the discourse of censorship. In order to protect society, the offending material must be removed or relocated. This is seen as one step that the local community can take to stave off the impending disaster. If the books are not removed or relocated challengers' argue, then the effects of allowing such objectionable ideas into the marketplace of ideas will first be felt by the children that challengers are trying to protect and then move outward into society.

It is the fear of these effects that leads directly to challengers' behavior. Challenging books is a method of relocating ambiguous materials within or removing anomalous material from public institutions that are part of the public marketplace of ideas within the public sphere. If the challenge is successful, order is restored and children will no longer be in danger in these institutions and the dire effects on society will no longer be a feared outcome. Challengers' discourse is primarily focused on staving off these effects.

As noted in Chapter 1, the discourse of censorship is a culturalist discourse that combines both language and symbolic power. When challengers use this discourses to justify their actions, they are acting as *bricoleurs*. They pull from well-known and often well-respected discourses to argue for a particular type of knowledge to be removed from the public institutions. It is possible that these discourses are used because it is difficult to discuss censorship in modern society. The United States values "freedom" in a general sense as well as the First Amendment right to freedom of speech that is codified in the



Constitution and challengers are arguing that this freedom should be curbed for a certain group of people.

The discourse of censorship can be understood as a discourse of both anxiety and action. It focuses on the reasons why certain types of knowledge should not be made available to particular population and is rooted in many different spheres. Challengers employ arguments from religious and scientific domains as well as a foundation regarding the power of books and reading. As noted in Chapter 3, the common sense interpretive strategy found throughout the discourse of censorship is rooted both common sense philosophy and the concept of scientific Christianity which views the Bible as a book of scientific facts.

Challengers employ martial language, particular the terms war and assault, to discuss the impending destruction of society. Although this study did not focus on the religious characteristics of challengers, Bible verses and stories appear throughout their discourse to bolster moral behavior and character. Causal or “slippery-slope” arguments employed by challengers’ draw on scientific studies concerning the brain development and the causes of “immoral” behavior as well as the idea that certain texts are a “gateway drug” to poor moral character. These discourses are combined by challengers to justify the removal or relocation of books in public institutions.

### **Contributions to Theory and Future Research**

This study contributes to several areas of research: intellectual freedom and censorship, reading research, and the sociology of knowledge. In the area of intellectual freedom and censorship, instead of focusing on the practical philosophy that constitutes

much of the research in this area of library and information science, this study concentrated on the discourse of people who challenge materials in public libraries and schools. In regard to reading research, the study presents some shared interpretive strategies of a particular interpretive community and provides some insight into how this community constructs the practice of reading. The study's contribution to the sociology of knowledge is related to the practice of reading and how a particular community understands the effects of knowledge on an individual, as well as how worldviews influence the classification of certain types of knowledge.

There are a few avenues for future research that might come out of this study. Two areas relate directly to challengers' understanding of reading practice. The first would investigate the meaning of the term "inappropriate" found throughout challengers' discourse. Although the phrase is ubiquitous in the discourse of censorship, it seems to operate as a "catch-all" for any material that is considered to be objectionable. Research questions might focus on the specific texts that are determined to be inappropriate and the semantic underpinnings of the term which seem to directly relate to issues of propriety and maturity.

The second area of research regarding reading practices would center on the issue of reading aloud. Throughout many of the hearings and interviews, challengers often felt compelled to voice the portions of text that they considered to be inappropriate. Although the readings were demarcated by apologies, challengers would often feel it was necessary to verbalize the same texts that they wished to have removed or relocated. Research questions would center on the relationship between inappropriate text and

reading aloud as well as the issue of discussion of challenged texts in classrooms. It is possible that this phenomena is related to interpretive strategies related to the differences between the possibility of intervention when reading aloud and the unmediated nature of reading silently.

Another rhetorical analysis will focus on the staff, administrators, and librarians in public institutions respond to challenge cases particularly with regard to the ritual of public discourse. Throughout this study it was argued that these individuals engage in symbolic violence throughout challenge hearings. Librarians and other staff and administrators institute policies and procedures in public institutions to mitigate the voices of outsiders. One area of research might focus on how these stakeholders on the other side of challenge cases perceive their own policies with regarding to the removal and relocation of materials.

### **Personal Reflection**

Although it did not become one of the cases used in this study, two statements from one of the pilot interviews encapsulate the discourse used in challenge case and were instructive for analyzing the discourse of censorship. The first was from one of the pilot study interviewees, Cathy W. As noted in Chapter 5, the interview was quite brief, but her answers to the questions were direct. When the researcher asked why she found the challenged material inappropriate she answered:

I would guess that it would have been sexual content. Because those are the things that I find most offensive. When there is something in a magazine that is sexually explicit or suggestive and I don't think it's appropriate for the age or I don't think it's something that should be paid for by tax money, then I don't feel comfortable with that (Cathy W. Interview).

Later in the interview, after being asked what she thought the effects of reading such material might be, Cathy stated:

I just think that when you have children or anyone who might be sexually aroused by sexually explicit material and that is not a behavior that you want in young children or young teens. Then I don't see that as a healthy environment for them (Cathy W. Interview).

These short statements summarized many of the themes found throughout this study and provided a gateway to many features of the analysis. Cathy states that sexually inappropriate material should not be paid for by the community and reading has direct effects, some of which are not desirable in children. Although many of the challengers throughout the case did not use the same blunt language as Cathy, their arguments echo her concerns.

Another statement came from a blog that the researcher found through the Google alerts that were used to discover challenge case. Although the blog did not refer to a particular case, the author succinctly stated the issue of symbolic violence in an entry titled "Censorship and objecting to a library book." While reading a collection development textbook, the author, a library director, finds an example of a request for reconsideration. The form includes five questions from "did you read and examine the entire item?" to "What do you feel might be the result of using this item?" The author of blog makes the following observation:

It is not until you get down to the fifth question that the form addresses the core of the issue: , "To what in the item do you object?" The questions before this just force you to jump through hoops in an effort 1) to discourage you from objecting, 2) to make you feel like your objection has been heard, or 3), to give librarians reason to dispute your objection.

You should not allow this to mislead you, however. The fact is that librarian has absolutely no intention of removing the item! To do so would—in

her mind—constitute censorship which in the library world is a sin much worse than allowing children to view pornography on their computers! In fact, the librarian may even forward your objection to the American Library Association's Intellectual Freedom Committee where it can be recorded as a “censored book” and celebrated in their annual “Banned Books Week.”  
 (<http://www.reclinercommentaries.com/2012/03/censorship-and-objecting-to-library.html>).

This statement is clearly a description of symbolic violence put forward by someone who, although they are a librarian themselves, objects to librarians’ mitigation of outside voices when it comes to material on their shelves. Although the researcher had been wrestling with this idea for some time, this explicit statement of the struggle over classification helped solidify some of the themes that are prevalent in the discourse of censorship.

In order to understand challenge cases, one must grasp the concepts of symbolic capital, symbolic power, and symbolic violence. It is also vitally important to understand that, although other issues such as politics or religion, challenge cases at their heart are about reading and the effects of reading on the individual. Without understanding why people are challenging books, in the first place, librarians will never be able to adequately address challenge cases when they arise in their institutions. This study is one step in bridging the gap between challengers, librarians, staff, and administrators over the issue of classification of materials.

### **Appendix A: Request for Reconsideration Example**

The school board of Mainstream County, U.S.A., has delegated the responsibility for selection and evaluation of library/educational resources to the school library media specialist/curriculum committee, and has established reconsideration procedures to address concerns about those resources. Completion of this form is the first step in those procedures. If you wish to request reconsideration of school or library resources, please return the completed form to the Coordinator of Library Media Resources, Mainstream School Dist., 1 Mainstream

Plaza, Anytown, U.S.A.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Do you represent self? \_\_\_\_ Organization? \_\_\_\_

1. Resource on which you are commenting:

\_\_\_\_ Book \_\_\_\_ Textbook \_\_\_\_ Video \_\_\_\_ Display \_\_\_\_ Magazine \_\_\_\_

Library Program

\_\_\_\_ Audio Recording \_\_\_\_ Newspaper \_\_\_\_ Electronic information/network

(please specify)

\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Author/Producer \_\_\_\_\_

2. What brought this resource to your attention?
3. Have you examined the entire resource?
4. What concerns you about the resource? (use other side or additional pages if necessary)
5. Are there resource(s) you suggest to provide additional information and/or other viewpoints on this topic?

Revised by the American Library Association Intellectual Freedom Committee

June 27, 1995

Source:

<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/banned/challengeslibrarymaterials/copingwithchallenges/sampleconsideration>

## **Appendix B: Library Bill of Rights**

The American Library Association affirms that all libraries are forums for information and ideas, and that the following basic policies should guide their services.

I. Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all people of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.

II. Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.

III. Libraries should challenge censorship in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.

IV. Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.

V. A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views.

VI. Libraries that make exhibit spaces and meeting rooms available to the public they serve should make such facilities available on an equitable basis, regardless of the beliefs or affiliations of individuals or groups requesting their use.

Adopted June 19, 1939, by the ALA Council; amended October 14, 1944; June 18, 1948; February 2, 1961; June 27, 1967; January 23, 1980; inclusion of "age" reaffirmed January 23, 1996. Source: <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/>



### **Appendix C: Code of Ethics**

As members of the American Library Association, we recognize the importance of codifying and making known to the profession and to the general public the ethical principles that guide the work of librarians, other professionals providing information services, library trustees and library staffs.

Ethical dilemmas occur when values are in conflict. The American Library Association Code of Ethics states the values to which we are committed, and embodies the ethical responsibilities of the profession in this changing information environment.

We significantly influence or control the selection, organization, preservation, and dissemination of information. In a political system grounded in an informed citizenry, we are members of a profession explicitly committed to intellectual freedom and the freedom of access to information. We have a special obligation to ensure the free flow of information and ideas to present and future generations.

The principles of this Code are expressed in broad statements to guide ethical decision making. These statements provide a framework; they cannot and do not dictate conduct to cover particular situations.

- I. We provide the highest level of service to all library users through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests.
- II. We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources.

- III. We protect each library user's right to privacy and confidentiality with respect to information sought or received and resources consulted, borrowed, acquired or transmitted.
- IV. We respect intellectual property rights and advocate balance between the interests of information users and rights holders.
- V. We treat co-workers and other colleagues with respect, fairness, and good faith, and advocate conditions of employment that safeguard the rights and welfare of all employees of our institutions.
- VI. We do not advance private interests at the expense of library users, colleagues, or our employing institutions.
- VII. We distinguish between our personal convictions and professional duties and do not allow our personal beliefs to interfere with fair representation of the aims of our institutions or the provision of access to their information resources.
- VIII. We strive for excellence in the profession by maintaining and enhancing our own knowledge and skills, by encouraging the professional development of co-workers, and by fostering the aspirations of potential members of the profession.

Adopted at the 1939 Midwinter Meeting by the ALA Council; amended June 30, 1981; June 28, 1995; and January 22, 2008.

Source: <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/proethics/codeofethics/codeethics>

### Appendix D: Freedom to Read Statement

[...]The freedom to read is guaranteed by the Constitution. Those with faith in free people will stand firm on these constitutional guarantees of essential rights and will exercise the responsibilities that accompany these rights.

We therefore affirm these propositions:

1. *It is in the public interest for publishers and librarians to make available the widest diversity of views and expressions, including those that are unorthodox, unpopular, or considered dangerous by the majority.*

Creative thought is by definition new, and what is new is different. The bearer of every new thought is a rebel until that idea is refined and tested. Totalitarian systems attempt to maintain themselves in power by the ruthless suppression of any concept that challenges the established orthodoxy. The power of a democratic system to adapt to change is vastly strengthened by the freedom of its citizens to choose widely from among conflicting opinions offered freely to them. To stifle every nonconformist idea at birth would mark the end of the democratic process. Furthermore, only through the constant activity of weighing and selecting can the democratic mind attain the strength demanded by times like these. We need to know not only what we believe but why we believe it.

2. *Publishers, librarians, and booksellers do not need to endorse every idea or presentation they make available. It would conflict with the public interest for them to establish their own political, moral, or aesthetic views as a standard for determining what should be published or circulated.*

Publishers and librarians serve the educational process by helping to make available knowledge and ideas required for the growth of the mind and the increase of learning. They do not foster education by imposing as mentors the patterns of their own thought. The people should have the freedom to read and consider a broader range of ideas than those that may be held by any single librarian or publisher or government or church. It is wrong that what one can read should be confined to what another thinks proper.

3. *It is contrary to the public interest for publishers or librarians to bar access to writings on the basis of the personal history or political affiliations of the author.*

No art or literature can flourish if it is to be measured by the political views or private lives of its creators. No society of free people can flourish that draws up lists of writers to whom it will not listen, whatever they may have to say.

4. *There is no place in our society for efforts to coerce the taste of others, to confine adults to the reading matter deemed suitable for adolescents, or to inhibit the efforts of writers to achieve artistic expression.*

To some, much of modern expression is shocking. But is not much of life itself shocking? We cut off literature at the source if we prevent writers from dealing with the stuff of life. Parents and teachers have a responsibility to prepare the young to meet the diversity of experiences in life to which they will be exposed, as they have a responsibility to help them learn to think critically for themselves. These are affirmative responsibilities, not to be discharged simply by preventing them from reading works for which they are not yet prepared. In these matters values differ, and values cannot be legislated; nor can

machinery be devised that will suit the demands of one group without limiting the freedom of others.

5. *It is not in the public interest to force a reader to accept the prejudgment of a label characterizing any expression or its author as subversive or dangerous.*

The ideal of labeling presupposes the existence of individuals or groups with wisdom to determine by authority what is good or bad for others. It presupposes that individuals must be directed in making up their minds about the ideas they examine. But Americans do not need others to do their thinking for them.

6. *It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians, as guardians of the people's freedom to read, to contest encroachments upon that freedom by individuals or groups seeking to impose their own standards or tastes upon the community at large; and by the government whenever it seeks to reduce or deny public access to public information.*

It is inevitable in the give and take of the democratic process that the political, the moral, or the aesthetic concepts of an individual or group will occasionally collide with those of another individual or group. In a free society individuals are free to determine for themselves what they wish to read, and each group is free to determine what it will recommend to its freely associated members. But no group has the right to take the law into its own hands, and to impose its own concept of politics or morality upon other members of a democratic society. Freedom is no freedom if it is accorded only to the accepted and the inoffensive. Further, democratic societies are more safe, free, and

creative when the free flow of public information is not restricted by governmental prerogative or self-censorship.

7. *It is the responsibility of publishers and librarians to give full meaning to the freedom to read by providing books that enrich the quality and diversity of thought and expression. By the exercise of this affirmative responsibility, they can demonstrate that the answer to a "bad" book is a good one, the answer to a "bad" idea is a good one.*

The freedom to read is of little consequence when the reader cannot obtain matter fit for that reader's purpose. What is needed is not only the absence of restraint, but the positive provision of opportunity for the people to read the best that has been thought and said.

Books are the major channel by which the intellectual inheritance is handed down, and the principal means of its testing and growth. The defense of the freedom to read requires of all publishers and librarians the utmost of their faculties, and deserves of all Americans the fullest of their support.

We state these propositions neither lightly nor as easy generalizations. We here stake out a lofty claim for the value of the written word. We do so because we believe that it is possessed of enormous variety and usefulness, worthy of cherishing and keeping free. We realize that the application of these propositions may mean the dissemination of ideas and manners of expression that are repugnant to many persons. We do not state these propositions in the comfortable belief that what people read is unimportant. We believe rather that what people read is deeply important; that ideas can be dangerous; but that the

suppression of ideas is fatal to a democratic society. Freedom itself is a dangerous way of life, but it is ours.

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This statement was originally issued in May of 1953 by the Westchester Conference of the American Library Association and the American Book Publishers Council, which in 1970 consolidated with the American Educational Publishers Institute to become the Association of American Publishers.

Adopted June 25, 1953, by the ALA Council and the AAP Freedom to Read Committee; amended January 28, 1972; January 16, 1991; July 12, 2000; June 30, 2004.

Source: <http://www.ala.org/offices/oif/statementspols/ftstatement/freedomreadstatement>

**Appendix E: General Google Alerts**

“library board” meeting OR hearing book

banned book

book “public comment”

book “public hearing”

censorship library

library book hearing OR meeting

library “public hearing” book

library book challenge

library book complaint

library book reconsideration

library committee meeting OR hearing



### **Appendix F: Case Specific Google Alerts**

“blue springs school district” “hold still”

“bluest eye” brookfield

“borrowed time” Cheatham School

“columbia county library” mansbach

“dade county” “absolutely true”

“grand rapids” “history alive”

“hold still” “blue springs”

“hunt club” charleston school board

“in cold blood” glendale

“montana 1948” merrill

“my mom’s having a baby” carrollton library

“running with the buffaloes”

“stuck in the middle” buckfield

“study in scarlet” albermarle

Arizona hb2563 bible

brookfield “bluest eye”

easton “nickled and dined”

huffman independent blackburn

kalida lush

knox county “looking for alaska”

pickens county romeo juliet

Plymouth-Canton school board beloved

tangled borger

troy area school board "kite runner"

tucson unified books

westfield book alexie

**Appendix G: Freedom of Information Act Request Letter**

Dear Records Request Officer:

Pursuant to the [State's Freedom of Information Act], I request access to and copies of any documents that relate to the [Date] challenge of the book [Title] at [Place].

This might include the original complaint, emails, letters, board meeting minutes, and any audio recordings of relevant meetings.

I am willing to pay any processing and copying fees for the documents. Please simply inform me of the costs in advance.

If my request is denied in whole or part, I ask that you justify all deletions by reference to specific exemptions of the act.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Emily Knox

### Appendix H: Document Types

Place	Date	Challenged Institution	Documents	Request for Recon- sideration	Emails	Letters	Meeting Minutes	Comm- ittee Reports	Petition
Carrollton, TX	2011	Carrollton Public Library	Yes	1					
Central York, PA	2010	Central York School District	No	0	0	0	0	0	
Clarkstown, NY	2011	Clarkstown Board of Education	Yes	2				1	
Conway, SC	2011	Horry County Board of Education	Yes						
Greensboro , NC	2010	Guildford County Board of Education	Yes	1			1		
Helena, MT	2010	Helena School District	Yes	1		4			
Lewiston, ME	2007	Lewiston Public Library	Yes			2	1		
Merrill, WI	2011	Merrill Area Public Schools	Yes	39		5			
New Bedford, NH	2011	Bedford Board of Education	Yes				1		
Seattle, WA	2010	Seattle Public Schools	Yes		1	4			
Spring Hill,	2010	Hernando	Yes	2					

FL		County Board of Education							
Stockton, MO	2010	Stockton School District	Yes	1		17			
West Bend, WI	2009	West Bend Public Library	Yes	1		2			1
<b>Totals</b>				<b>46</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>

### **Appendix I: Email Interview Request**

Dear [ ]:

My name is Emily Knox and I'm a graduate student at Rutgers University. As part of my research project I look at books challenges at libraries around the country. I found your name and address through [ ]. I would like to interview you in order to learn more about your position on this issue and hear more about your efforts. I am particularly interested in hearing your side of this issue and your feelings regarding inappropriate books in libraries.

If you are interested, I can send you more information about myself and my research.

Please feel free to get in touch with me at any time. My phone number is 917-628-8349 and my email address is ejknox@eden.rutgers.edu.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Emily

Emily Knox, MA, MLS

Doctoral Candidate/Teaching Assistant

2011-2012 CISSL Barham Scholar

Department of Library and Information Science

School of Communication and Information (SC&I)

Rutgers University

**Appendix J: Interview Request Letter 1**

Dear [ ] :

Thank you for agreeing to an interview. I am a Doctoral Student in the Department of Library and Information Science at Rutgers University School of Communication & Information. My research involves finding out why people would like to have certain materials removed or reclassified within libraries. It is my belief that this knowledge would enable librarians to better respond to the needs of local communities.

The interview will take place at a time and location of your choosing. The consent forms (one for the interview and another for audio recording) are attached to this email.

My research is approved by the Institutional Review Board of Rutgers University and conducted under the direction of my faculty advisor, Dr. Marija Dalbello, an Associate Professor at the Rutgers University School of Communication & Information.

If you have any questions regarding the interview specifically or my research in general, please feel free to contact me via email at [ejknox@eden.rutgers.edu](mailto:ejknox@eden.rutgers.edu) or via phone [917-628-8349](tel:917-628-8349).

Thank you for your consideration and I hope to hear from you soon.

Best Regards,

Emily Knox

## **Appendix K: Interview Request Letter 2**

Dear [ ]:

Thank you so much for getting in touch with me and agreeing to do an interview. Just a little bit about me: I am a doctoral student in the Department of Library and Information Science at Rutgers University School of Communication & Information. My research involves finding out why people would like to have certain materials removed or reclassified within libraries. It is my belief that this knowledge would enable librarians to better respond to the needs of local communities.

The interview can be conducted over the phone and would take place at a time and location of your choosing. The consent forms, which are required by the University, are attached to this email. There is one form for the interview and another for audio recording. Signed forms can be returned to me via email or USPS.

My home address is: [ ]

My research is approved by the Institutional Review Board of Rutgers University and conducted under the direction of my faculty advisor, Dr. Marija Dalbello, an Associate Professor at the Rutgers University School of Communication & Information.

If you have any questions regarding the interview specifically or my research in general, please feel free to contact me via email at [ejknox@eden.rutgers.edu](mailto:ejknox@eden.rutgers.edu) or via phone [ ].

Thank you for your consideration and I hope to hear from you soon.

Best regards,

Emily



### **Appendix L: Interview Consent Form**

Dear Interviewee,

You are invited to participate in a research study that is being conducted by Emily Knox, a doctoral student in the Department of Library and Information Science at Rutgers University under the guidance of her faculty advisor Marija Dalbello, an Associate Professor in the Department of Library and Information Science at Rutgers University. The purpose of this research is to find out why people would like to have some materials removed from or reclassified within libraries.

Approximately 30 people will participate in the study. The study procedure includes an interview of each person lasting approximately 1 hour.

This research is confidential. Confidential means that the research records will include some information about you, such as your name, city/state of residence, and approximate age. I will keep this information confidential by limiting individual's access to the research data and keeping it in a secure location.

Emily Knox, the principal investigator, and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, your name will be feigned, that is, a fake name will be used. All study data will be kept indefinitely for research purposes.

There are no foreseeable risks to participation in this study.

You will not receive direct benefits from participating in this research. However there are potential benefits to society and the advancement of social science research generally and library and information science in particular.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, and you may withdraw at any time during the study procedures without any penalty to you. In addition, you may choose not to answer any questions with which you are not comfortable.

If you have any questions about the study or study procedures, you may contact me, Emily Knox, at [ ] or ejknox@eden.rutgers.edu or you can contact my advisor, Marija Dalbello, at 732-932-7500 ext. 8215 or dabello@rutgers.edu

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University at: Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 3 Rutgers Plaza, New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559  
Tel: 732-932-0150 ext. 2104, Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Sign below if you agree to participate in this research study:

Subject (Print ) \_\_\_\_\_

Subject Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Principal Investigator Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix M: Audio Consent Form

### Audio Consent Form

You have already agreed to participate in a research study that investigates why people would like to have some materials removed from or reclassified within libraries. This research is being conducted by Emily Knox, a doctoral student in the Department of Library and Information Science at Rutgers University under the guidance of her faculty advisor, Marija Dalbello, an Associate Professor in the Department of Library and Information Science at Rutgers University.

I am asking for your permission to allow me to audiotape this interview as part of the research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate.

The recording will be used solely for analysis by the researcher.

The recording will include your name.

The recording will be stored in a locked file cabinet and linked with a code to your identity and will be retained indefinitely for research purposes.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording for any other reason than those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Subject (Print ) \_\_\_\_\_

Subject Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Principal Investigator Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix N: Sample Interview Protocol**

### *Questions for Challenger:*

#### Cluster 1: Reading

What sort of books [or materials] do you enjoy reading? Why?

Have any books had a major impact on your life? How?

What do you think happens when people read?

#### Cluster 2: The Library in Society

What are your earliest memories of a library?

What do you think is the purpose of the public library in America?

Do you think that American public libraries live up to this purpose?

What do you think libraries should do differently?

#### Cluster 3: Inappropriate Materials in the Library

How did you first become aware that there were inappropriate materials in the library?

How did you feel when you became aware of these materials? What did you do after you became aware of the [book, magazine, etc.]?

What is inappropriate about these materials? Can you tell me more about them?

What was the response of the library to your request?

What did you think of this response?

Has anyone else expressed this point of view regarding this material?

Why do you think the library keeps these materials?

What do you think the library should do with these materials?

### Appendix O: Challenge Cases

Place	Date	Challenged Institution	Challenged Material	Documents	Hearing	Interviews
Carrollton, TX	2011	Carrollton Board of Education	<i>My Mom's Having a Baby</i>	Yes	No	Yes
Central York, PA	2010	Central York School District	<i>Stolen Children</i>	No	No	Yes
Clarkstown, NY	2011	Clarkstown Board of Education	<i>Perks of Being a Wallflower</i>	Yes	Yes	No
Conway, SC	2011	Horry County Board of Education	<i>Push</i>	Yes	Yes	No
Greensboro, NC	2010	Guildford County Board of Education	<i>Hoops</i>	Yes	No	No
Helena, MT	2010	Helena School District	<i>Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lewiston, ME	2007	Lewiston PL	<i>It's Perfectly Normal</i>	Yes	No	No
Merrill, WI	2011	Merrill Area Public Schools	<i>Montana 1948</i>	Yes	Yes	No
New Bedford, NH	2011	Bedford Board of Education	<i>Water for Elephants</i>	Yes	Yes	No
Seattle, WA	2010	Seattle Board of Education	<i>Brave New World</i>	Yes	No	No
Spring Hill, FL	2010	Hernando County Board of Education	<i>Snakehead</i>	Yes	No	No
Stockton, MO	2010	Stockton School	<i>Absolutely True Diary</i>	Yes	Yes	No

		District	<i>of a Part-Time Indian</i>			
West Bend, WI	2009	West Bend Public Library	Various	Yes	Yes	No

## Appendix P: Original Coding Scheme

### 1.0 Institutions

1.1 ALA Library

1.1 Communities

1.2 Public schools

### 2.0 Justification

2.1 Appeals

2.1.1 Common Sense

2.1.2 History

2.1.3 Majority

2.1.4 Religion

2.1.5 Law

2.2 Innocence

2.2.1 Corrupting children

2.2.2 Protecting children

2.3 Expertise

2.4 Censorship Positive

2.4.1 Children agree with censorship

2.4.2 Moving books not censorship

2.4.3 Censorship happens anyway

2.5 Safety

### 3.0 Power and Control

3.1 Library Control

3.1.1 3.1.0 Aggression

3.1.2 Collection

3.2 Community Control

3.2.1 Community standards

3.3 Authority

3.4 Classification

3.4.1 Books

3.4.2 Young adult

3.4.3 Children

3.4.4 Movies

3.4.5 Stumble upon

3.5 Parental Control

3.5.1 Parental Rights

3.6 Judgment

3.7 Legitimacy

3.8

3.9 Morality

3.9.1 Homosexuality

- 3.10 ALA Control
- 4.0 Reading Practices**
  - 4.1 Problems
    - 4.1.1 Inappropriate
    - 4.1.2 Suitability
    - 4.1.3 Offensive
    - 4.1.4 Graphic
  - 4.2 Reading effects
    - 4.2.1 Embarrassment



## Appendix Q: Final Coding Scheme

### 1.0 Worldview

- 1.1 Appeals
  - 1.1.1 Common Sense
  - 1.1.2 History
  - 1.1.3 Christianity
    - 1.1.3.1 Bible
  - 1.1.4 Morality
  - 1.1.5 Law
    - 1.1.5.1 Constitution
    - 1.1.5.2 Local Law
  - 1.1.6 Majority Rule
  - 1.1.7 Policy
- 1.2 Children
  - 1.2.1 Innocence
  - 1.2.2 Corrupting Children
  - 1.2.3 Characterizations
- 1.3 Expertise
  - 1.3.1 Parents
  - 1.3.2 Teachers
  - 1.3.3 Social Workers
  - 1.3.4 Other roles
- 1.4 Censorship
  - 1.4.1 Positive
  - 1.4.2 Only by government
  - 1.4.3 Definitions
  - 1.4.4 Banning Books
    - 1.4.1 Justifications
    - 1.4.2 Slippery Slope
- 1.5 Inappropriate Material
  - 1.5.1 Characterizations
  - 1.5.2 Determinations
- 1.6 Safety
  - 1.6.1 In library
  - 1.6.2 In school
  - 1.6.3 In community
- 1.7 Society
  - 1.7.1 Morality
  - 1.7.2 Values
  - 1.7.3 Changes over time
- 1.8 Community
  - 1.8.1 Control
  - 1.8.2 Standards

- 1.8.3 Values
    - 1.8.4 Evaluation of Library Materials
  - 1.9 Parents
    - 1.9.1 Control
    - 1.9.1 Rights/Authority
    - 1.9.2 Roles
      - 1.9.2.1 Not fulfilling role
  - 1.10 Classifications
    - 1.10.1 Age
    - 1.10.2 Books
    - 1.10.3 Movies
      - 1.10.3.1 Ratings
    - 1.10.4 Music
      - 1.10.4.1 Ratings
  - 1.11 Responses
    - 1.11.1 Various Feelings
    - 1.11.2 Actions
  - 1.12 Judgment
  - 1.13 Taste
  - 1.14 Legitimacy
- 2.0 Libraries and Other Institutions**
- 2.1 Public Library
    - 2.1.1 Procedures
    - 2.1.2 Collections
    - 2.1.3 Librarians
    - 2.1.4 Responses
    - 2.1.5 Policies
    - 2.1.6 Space
  - 2.2 School Library
    - 2.2.1 Procedures
    - 2.2.2 Collections
    - 2.2.3 Librarians
    - 2.2.4 Responses
    - 2.2.5 School Policies
      - 2.2.5.1 Curriculum
    - 2.2.6 Space
    - 2.2.7 School Administrators
  - 2.2 Local government
  - 2.3 ALA
  - 2.4 ACLU
  - 2.5 Other institutions
  - 2.6 Helping parents
- 3.0 Reading Practices/Effects/Books**
- 3.1 Practices

- 3.1.1 Previewing Material
  - 3.1.2 Reading aloud
  - 3.1.3 Discussion
- 3.2 Effects
  - 3.2.1 Embarrassment
  - 3.2.2 Inculcation of values
  - 3.2.3 Implantation of knowledge
  - 3.2.4 Loss of innocence
- 3.3 Writing
  - 3.3.1 Appropriate
  - 3.3.2 Storylines
  - 3.3.3 Cannot be read aloud
- 3.4 Books
- 3.5 Pornography Arguments.

## Data References

Note: In quotations brackets [] indicate missing material while ellipses ( ...) indicate a pause in the statement.

*Carrollton, TX*  
Interview

*Central York, PA*  
Interview

*Clarkstown, NY*  
Request for Reconsiderations dated  
5/31/2011, 6/7/2011, 6/11/2011, 6/13/2011, 6/16/2011  
Hearing Female Speaker #5  
Hearing Female Speaker #6  
Hearing Female Speaker #8  
Hearing Male Speaker #1  
Hearing Male Speaker #3  
Hearing Male Speaker #4  
Hearing Male Speaker #6  
4 Letters with dates redacted

*Conway, SC*  
Hearing Male Speaker #1

*Helena, MT*  
3 Undated letters  
Request for Reconsideration 10/28/2010  
12/3/2010 Letter  
Helena Interview

*Lewiston, ME*  
8/20/2007 Letter  
1/30/2008 Letter

*Merrill, WI*  
Hearing Female Speaker #2  
Hearing Female Speaker #3  
Hearing Female Speaker #6  
Hearing Female Speaker #7  
Hearing Female Speaker #11

Hearing Male Speaker #1  
Hearing Male Speaker #6  
2 letters dated 6/10/2011  
6/13/2011 Letter  
2 Letters dated 6/15/2011  
9/27/2011 Letter

*New Bedford, NH*  
Hearing Male Speaker #5

*Seattle, WA*  
3/14/2010 Letter  
8/23/2010 Letter

*Spring Hill, FL*  
Request

*Stockton, MO*  
Hearing Male Speaker #1  
Hearing Male Speaker #3  
Hearing Male Speaker #4  
Hearing Male Speaker #5  
Hearing Male Speaker #6  
Hearing Male Speaker #8  
Hearing Male Speaker #9  
5/5/2010 Letter  
2 letters dated 5/10/2010  
5/13/2008 Letter

*West Bend, WI*  
Petition

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