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Self-censorship by middle school librarians

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SELF-CENSORSHIP BY MIDDLE SCHOOL LIBRARIANS

by
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ABSTRACT

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SELF-CENSORSHIP BY MIDDLE SCHOOL LIBRARIANS
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Middle school librarians are faced with difficult decisions when choosing

books for the middle school library collection because of the students' ages, and

involvement from the administration, staff, parents and special interest groups who

want to protect children from certain material. Middle school librarians may

willingly or unwillingly participate in self-censorship to avoid confrontation. Middle

school librarians in New Jersey were surveyed to investigate self-censorship

practices. They were asked to share information about their library collection, their

library policies and procedures and their thought processes during book selection.

Based on the results of the study it was concluded that middle school librarians'

philosophies of book selection, students' right to read, and censorship vary and that

middle school librarians struggle with self-censorship.

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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Censorship is the act of people imposing their personal, moral, or political views on others by suppressing access to materials or information. The materials censored may include books, magazines, music, pictures, film, art, television shows, comics, ideas or any other type of expression. Government, individuals or groups censor materials that they find offensive. Censors work to keep other people from having access to the information they oppose. Censors pressure public institutions, such as libraries, to remove materials so the public will not be able to view or read the information. They restrict the ability of others to be able to decide for themselves. Censors want to make the decisions for others based on their views.

One of the major goals of the censor is to protect children, weak people and others who are easily influenced. They aim to improve society by imposing their own moral values on others. They consider the material they attempt to censor to be morally corrupting and offensive. The content often censored includes: political, sexual, offensive language, racial, gender and religion. Censors believe certain content to be dangerous to other people, public intuitions and to society as a whole.

Policies Supporting Intellectual Freedom

There are numerous governmental and professional documents for librarians that support intellectual freedom. According to the American Library Association, intellectual freedom is the "… right of every individual to both seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction"(American Library Association, 2007c). Intellectual freedom allows free access to explore all sides of an idea. It is important because it allows people to "hold, receive, and disseminate ideas" (American Library Association, 2007c). Our democratic society is based on intellectual freedom.

All American citizens, students included, are guaranteed the right of Freedom of Speech by the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States. The First Amendment states, "Congress shall pass not law respecting establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press; or the right of people to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances"(First Amendment Center, 2007). Article nineteen of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights also guarantees the freedom of expression. It states, "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference, and to see, receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers"(First Amendment Center, 2007).

The "Libraries: an American Value" statement from the American Library Association was adopted in 1999. This statement defends the rights of citizens, including children and teenagers, to use library resources and services. The right to obtain free

access to books and other resources in the library is considered "imperative for education, employment, enjoyment, and self-government" (American Library Association, 2007c).

Recognizing the importance of the role of educators, including school librarians, have in up in upholding the tenants of intellectual freedom the National Council for Teachers of English developed a position statement titled "The Students' Right to Read." This statement outlines useful information about censorship's affect on the students and teachers and provides a program of action to ensure the students' right to read whatever they choose. English teachers and librarians are instructed to select reading materials for the students based on student needs rather than avoiding works of literature for fear of being challenged and censored (NCTE, 2006).

The Island Trees Union Free School District verses Pico United States Supreme court decision has had an impact on the school library. In this court case students and parents challenged the school board's removal of books from the school library. The result of the court decision set limits on the ability of parents and the school board to remove books from the school library. It established that parents may only exercise the right to limit information for their own children, not for others (Gottlieb & The Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication, 1990).

"Access to Resources and services in the school Library Media Program: An interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights" is a relevant and useful document for school librarians. The document defines the role of the school library media specialist in promoting intellectual freedom. The school library is described as a "learning laboratory for students as they acquire critical thinking and problem solving skills" (American Library Association, 2000). The school library media specialist should "provide resources

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and services that create an atmosphere of free inquiry" (American Library Association, 2000). The Library collection should be "...appropriate to the needs and developmental and maturity levels of the students" (American Library Association, 2000). This document mentions that those who are involved in the collection development process should employ education criteria to select resources "unfettered by their personal, political, social or religious views"(American Library Association, 2000). School library media specialists are called to "...resist efforts by individuals or groups to define what is appropriate for all students or teachers to read, view, hear or access..." (American Library Association, 2000). The document recognized that resources are limited due to age or grade level restrictions.

Librarians should be dedicated to upholding the students' First Amendment rights and the related professional statements. The librarian should support intellectual freedom, encourage critical thinking and provide a quality collection of library materials representing diverse views. Librarians are responsible for fighting attempts at censorship, including their own. According to the "Access to Resources and Services in the School Library Media Program: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights," school librarians "...assume a leadership role in promoting the principles of intellectual freedom within the school by providing resources and services that create and sustain an atmosphere of free inquiry"(American Library Association, 2002).

Censorship in the School Library

Seventy-one percent of the reported challenges to materials reported to the Office of Intellectual Freedom database during the years 2000- 2005 took place in schools or school libraries. The total number of challenges during these years was three thousand nineteen. Over sixty percent of the total challenges to any institution during those years were made by parents. Nine percent of the challenges were from an administrator. The library materials were challenged for the following reasons in order of greatest number of challenges to least: offensive language, sexually explicit, other, unsuited to age group, violence, occult/Satanism, homosexuality, religious viewpoint, political viewpoint, drugs, racism, nudity, sex education, anti-family, insensitivity, inaccurate, suicide, anti-ethnic, abortion, sexism. These statistics did not completely represent the total number of challenges made to materials in schools and school libraries since most challenges are not reported to the Office of Intellectual freedom. The actual numbers may much higher (American Library Association, 2007a).

Parents, special interest groups, students, teachers, and administration are among the censors of school library materials. The material censored often contains content that is true to life and relevant to the students. When an item is challenged in the school library, the librarian is put under emotional stress and professional pressure from the censor, administration, and others. Therefore he or she may avoid putting themselves in a situation where an item is challenged by choosing not to purchase the potentially controversial item. Self-censorship occurs when the decision not to include material in

the library collection is based upon disapproval of the material or to avoid challenges. The self-censorship by librarians is particularly disturbing since by the tenants of the profession they are the ones with the most responsibility to protect the freedom of access to information.

Librarians may participate in self-censorship for two main reasons. Librarians my willingly choose to exclude items from the collection based on their own biases or to avoid challenges from others. Librarians need to be aware of their own biases and potential for excluding material based upon their political, moral or religions views which would impact selection. They also need to fight the survival urge to keep books out of the collection in order to avoid challenges. Inclusion of material in the school library collection should be based on the grade level appropriateness, quality, and content in order to meet the academic and interest needs of the students.

Statement of Problem

Librarians are professionally expected to uphold the principles of intellectual freedom. School librarians are often faced with personal, professional and political barriers which lead them to practice self-censorship during acquisitions.

Self-censorship by the school librarian is often an attempt to avoid confrontation with parents, community members, administration and the board of education. Selection development policies are necessary documents in the school library and are intended in part to help prevent censorship.

Censorship by the school librarian includes more than just removing a book from the collection. It also includes omitting books positively recommended by professional library journals on the students reading and interest level from acquisitions based on personal or societal views. School librarians may also censor books by shelving them on a restricted shelf with limited access, perhaps by parental permission. Censorship denies access to books because they may be found offensive. Censorship of books is based on a desire to keep students from accessing material based on disapproval. There is a need for school librarians at the middle school level to be aware of the extent that they are practicing self-censorship of library materials.

This study was an investigation into the practices of self-censorship of middle school librarians using a survey of the availability of controversial, but highly regarded books in the middle school library. A questionnaire eliciting responses about self-censorship practices and reaction to specific books that have received positive recommendations in professional journals and were at the middle school reading and interest level and their inclusion or exclusion from the library collection was used.

Definition of Terms

Acquisitions: "The process of obtaining hardware and resources for a library collection. Materials may be obtained through purchase, gifts, or lease plans" (McCain & Merrill, 2001, p. 3).

Banned book: "a book that has been removed or prohibited from a library media center" (McCain & Merrill, 2001, p. 18).

Censorship: "Prohibition of the production, distribution, circulation, or display of a work by a governing authority on grounds that it contains objectionable or dangerous material" (Reitz, 2007).

Challenged material: "Material that has received either or both of the following: (1) an oral complaint about the presence or appropriateness, or both, of the item in a library media center or (2) a written complaint, which is part of a formal process specified in a library media selection policy, about the item's presence or appropriateness. Materials are typically challenged because they contain sex, profanity, drugs, witchcraft, the occult, racism, ageism, sexism, lack of respect for authority, depressing scenes, and violence, among others"(McCain & Merrill, 2001, p. 35).

Freedom to Read Statement: "A document endorsed by the American Library Association, the Association of American Publishers, and other organizations to promote open (access) to ideas in books; to support he concept that publishers, librarians, and booksellers need to have books reflecting a diversity of views; and to oppose censorship efforts"(McCain & Merrill, 2001, p. 77).

Intellectual freedom: According to the American Library Association intellectual freedom is "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"(American Library Association, 2007b).

"The freedom of inquiry and expression as established in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution"(McCain & Merrill, 2001, p. 98).

Library media center: "An area in a school that contains varied formats of materials and equipment with programs and services provided by a library media specialist and the additional staff as needed and as funds are available. It functions as a learning laboratory for students. This is the more current term for school library"(McCain & Merrill, 2001, p. 113). For the purpose of this study the term school library may be used interchangeably with the term library media center.

Library media specialist: "The professional administrator of a library media center who has the appropriate degree and meets the requirements for state certification..." (McCain & Merrill, 2001, p. 114). For the purpose of this study terms library media specialist, educational media specialist, school librarian, and school library media specialist are interchangeable.

Middle school: For the purposes of this study middle school is defined as any school containing students in grades six to eight.

Middle school reading level: For the purpose of this study, books are considered at a middle school reading level if their Lexile Reading Level is between 650 and 1150. These numbers represent the Lexile Reading Levels from grade four to grade nine. These numbers were chosen since middle school students have a wide range of reading levels (Ebsco Publishing, 2007).

Middle school interest level: For the purpose of this study, books are considered at a middle school interest level if they are recommended for students in grades five to eight by Novelist, Follett or a professional review source. Books which have an interest level of grade nine and up were excluded from the study since those titles are more likely to contain young adult material.

Office for Intellectual Freedom: "A unit of the American Library Association that implements policies concerning intellectual freedom as address in the Library Bill of Rights. Education of librarians and the public about intellectual freedom as it relates to libraries is one of Office of Intellectual Freedom goals"(McCain & Merrill, 2001, p. 141).

OPAC: OPAC is an abbreviation for Online Public Access Catalog. OPACS are "a database composed of bibliographic records describing the books and other materials owned by a library or library system, accessible via public terminals" (Reitz, 2007). OPACs may be accessed in the library and in some cases on the Internet from a link on the library's Website.

Positive recommendations: For the purpose of this study this term refers to favorable reviews from professional library journals. Favorable reviews may include, but are not limed to the words: "recommended", "highly recommended", "engrossing", "kids will love", "great story", "a timeless jewel", "fun" and much more. The positive recommendations were found in professional library journal reviews such as *Book List, Kirkus, Publisher's Weekly, School Library Journal,* and *Library Journal.*

Potentially controversial books: For the purpose of this study this term refers to books that have been challenged or banned in libraries between the years 2000 and 2006. These books were on one of the "Books Challenged or Banned" lists compiled by Robert P. Doyle and published by the American Library Association Office of Intellectual Freedom from the years 2000 to 2006.

Self-censorship: "the act of censoring library materials to avoid offending others without an authority pressuring one to do so"(Answers Corporation, 2007).

Selection: "The process of evaluating and deciding on items to purchase for a library media center"(McCain & Merrill, 2001, p. 171).

Selection criteria: "The criteria used by library media specialists for evaluating and selecting items to add to a collection"(McCain & Merrill, 2001, p. 177).

Selection policy: "A policy developed by a school or a school board, or both to guarantee students access to a broad range of ideas and materials. These include policies on collection development and procedures for the review of resources that are questioned or challenged as to suitability for a library media center or students. The policy provides for a timely and fair hearing for all concerned and ensures that proper procedures are applied"(McCain & Merrill, 2001, p. 177).

Selection tools: "Basic bibliographies and reviews from journals that aid in the selection of materials for a library media center" (McCain & Merrill, 2001, p. 178).

Young Adult: For the purpose of this study a young adult a person from about the age of twelve to about the age of eighteen

Assumptions and Limitations

This study assumed that the school librarians were aware of their responsibility to uphold the students' intellectual freedom rights. This study was limited to responses made by middle school librarians working in New Jersey public schools. Since a number of the survey questions were subjective, the study was limited to the possibly biased nature of their responses. No attempt was made to identify or compare the size of the collection or student body of the responding libraries. This study was limited to questions about censorship of books in the library collection. Censorship of art, music, pictures, ideas etc., was not addressed.

The researcher attempted to choose the books for inclusion in this study objectively. The very nature of the process of selecting the books does not allow for complete objectivity. This study was limited by this fact.

The questionnaire for this study was completed entirely on the Internet. The assumption was that all New Jersey school librarians had reasonable access to the Internet.

Most young sdult books were excluded from the book list in this study if the recommended interest level began at seventh or eighth grade and went up to the end of high school. The results of this study would have been much different if these young adult books were included in the book list. The young adult books contain topics that are realistic, true to life and honest. It was assumed that most middle school librarians use

the same strategy and purchase only books which reviews suggest for middle school students, not high school.

An additional limitation was that books were the only type of library material chosen for inclusion in this study. This study did not address censorship of videos, artwork, music, multimedia, Websites, or other materials.

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CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Several recent studies concerning the self-censorship practices of librarians were

conducted. The research appeared to have taken place in public libraries and in high

school libraries.

In 2002 Ken P. Coley completed a study titled, "Moving toward a method to test

for self-censorship by school library media specialists. This study utilized an analysis of

holdings in school library young adult collections to determine practices of self-

censorship by the school library media specialist. The researcher purposefully decided

not to use questionnaires or interviews which "might not allow for an objective

description of selection decisions and acquisition practices" (Coley,2002).

Coley created a list of potentially controversial young adult titles that had

received supporting reviews, awards or recommendations for inclusion on reading lists.

Coley examined the OPACs of one hundred randomly selected Texas high schools that

were a part of the state's online union catalog for ownership of the titles on the list.

Libraries owning less than fifty percent of the titles on the list were considered to be

influenced by self-censorship (Coley, 2002). Coley concluded that eighty percent of the

libraries surveyed showed signs of self-censorship. Coley presented the data in labeled

tables. He mentioned several ways to further the research including increasing the

number of schools in the study and lengthening the book list. The increases mentioned

would improve the reliability of the outcomes. A comparison of fiction and nonfiction controversial books would also be beneficial.

Kim Moody completed a study titled "Censorship by Queensland Public Libraries: Philosophy and Practice" in 2004. It was published in *Aplis*, Australian Public Libraries and Information Services, a professional library journal in Australia. Moody used a written questionnaire to survey Australian public librarians on the attitudes towards the public right to information and to determine the degree of censorship practices in public libraries. Moody randomly selected one hundred fifty-one public libraries in Australia. She sent the surveys via e-mail and mailed reminders. The response rate to the survey was only 17.4% (Moody, 2004).

The importance of the problem was clearly identified in Moody's study. The research defined free access to information and provided the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) statement for support. This statement is the equivalent of American Library Association's Freedom to Read statement. Australian libraries are expected to support the ALIA position and act accordingly. Moody cited previous research by self-censorship of librarians. She recognized that the previous research revealed a trend of public librarians who "stated anticensorship attitudes are not always indicative of censorship behaviors" (Moody, 2004).

The results of the study were clearly described and charts were included. Despite the low number of study participants, Moody concluded that Australian pubic librarians were aware of the ALIA Freedom to Read statement and supported intellectual freedom. The result of the hypothetical questions of acquisition situations however produced results inconsistent with the librarians stated support of intellectual freedom. Their

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answers to some of the questions indicated censorship behaviors. Labeling to limit access rather than removing items from the library, was to be the most common response to dealing with controversial titles. The researcher indicated that more professional development would be useful in helping librarians recognize personal biases and develop their understandings of intellectual freedom and skills or how to apply the knowledge (Moody, 2004).

Kim Moody developed a list of questions that librarians can ask themselves when they were making collection development decisions. Some of the questions were: "What are my own biases? Do they impact my work? What is my reason for including and excluding items for the collection? Am I ensuring a balance of views on contentions issues within the collection?" (Moody, 2004).

Moody recognized the need for further studies with more participants. Although this study took place in Australia, it is still relevant to this current study since both were conducted recently in a democratic society with professional associations dedicated to individuals' right to read.

In 2005 Nicholas K. Bellows performed research for his master's degree in Library Science. The study was called "Measuring Self-Censorship in School Media Centers." His study closely resembled Coley's earlier work in 2002. Bellows investigated self-censorship of school library media specialists in Florida public high schools. He researched the library holdings of a list of current, highly reviewed and potentially controversial books in selected high schools. Bellows chose the twenty-five controversial young adult titles published between the years 2000 and 2004. He also attempted to compare the holdings of the controversial list to a list of twenty-five "safe"

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or non-controversial books of the same caliber. Bellows chose one hundred two school libraries at random with an equal number of schools in each of his population categories.

The researcher gathered data about the holdings in each of the high school libraries by searching the OPACs, which were available online through SUNLINK, Florida's Union Catalog. The results of the study were presented in charts, graphics and narrative. The research even presented results according to the geographical areas of Florida. Nicholas K. Bellows used Coley's criteria to analyze the results. The criterion was that if the library had fewer than 50% of the books on the list in their collection the conclusion was that the librarian participated in self-censorship. The results of Bellow's study showed that 74.5% of the Florida high school libraries investigated contained evidence of self-censorship. The schools with lower enrollment tended to own fewer of the controversial titles than the larger libraries" (Bellows, 2005).

Bellows mentioned that further research could investigate a larger number of controversial titles and survey a larger number of schools. He was interested to find out if the trend of self-censorship was the same around the country.

Since Bellows used the OPACs to learn about holdings instead of relying on the librarians to participate he had adequate data for his study. Revision of his book selection process to include books that have already been challenged or banned would be useful. It would be helpful for further research to determine if the trends indicated by his study are the same across the country.

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CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study attempted to answer the research questions by investigating the holdings of positively recommended books which contained potentially controversial content. The books on the list contained content which may be challenged by individuals, administrators or special interest groups. The study further asked middle school librarians questions to help determine their practices of self-censorship.

The research questions address in this study include:

1. What percentages of the potentially controversial books are in the middle school libraries?

2. What are the librarians' feelings, actions, and experiences in regards to practices of self-censorship?

Selection of Books

The sixteen books chosen for this study met several criteria that determined that they should be part of a middle school library collection and were likely to be challenged.

The first criteria used in order for a book to be considered for inclusion in this study was that it must have been on one of Robert P. Doyle's list of "Books Challenged or Banned" during the years 2002 to 2006. Each year Robert P. Doyle, from the American Library Association Office of Intellectual freedom, created a bibliography of books that were challenged, restricted, removed or banned as reported in the "Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom." The second criteria was that the book needed to be at the middle school reading and interest level. The final required criteria was the book had to have earned at least two positive recommendations in professional library journals.

Required criteria:

1. The book was on one of the "Books Challenged or Banned" lists by Robert P. Doyle between the years 2002 and 2006.

2. The books were at the middle school reading level and interest level. Books labeled as young adult books on reviews or in Follett Titlewave were not included in this study.

3. The books earned at least two positive recommendations in professional library journals reviews.

Additional criteria: Each book on the consideration list was given one point for each additional criterion it met. The books with the most point on the list were chosen for this study.

1. Book had four or more reviews in professional library journals.

2. Book received or more "starred" or "highly recommended" reviews from professional library journals.

3. Book was on more than one of the "Books Challenged or Banned" lists by Robert P. Doyle between the years 2002 and 2006.

4. Book was nominated for or received a literary book award.

5. Book was included in the American Library Association list "The 100 Most Frequently Challenged Books 1990-2000."

In order for a book to be included in the study sample it had to meet the three required criteria. Each book was then awarded one point for each of the additional criteria met. The books with the most points were the ones chosen for the purpose of this survey. The purpose of the criteria was to try to create an objective list. Each book under consideration for inclusion in the study was evaluated according to the above criteria. Books labeled as young adult on the interest level were only chosen for consideration if the reading level was at the middle school level and that they were recommended for students at the middle school level by the accompanying book reviews. The sixteen books that met the most criteria became part of the study list. A database of the books and criteria was crated and used to determine which books met the most criteria. (see Appendix B)

Selection of Libraries

All New Jersey middle school librarians were asked to participate in this study. A list of schools was obtained from the New Jersey Department of Education Website. The e-mail addresses were obtained from the schools' Websites when available. The librarians whose e-mail addresses were available on the school or library Websites were invited to participate in the study via e-mail.

Questionnaire Design and Implementation

Participants completed the questionnaire online survey site, SurveyMonkey. The participants in the study were given a questionnaire that presented a checklist of twenty-five potentially controversial books. Each librarian asked to check their OPAC to find out if their library contained the books in question. If the school library had their OPAC available online they were given the option to have the researcher check for the books. The survey of the holdings helped to show which potentially controversial books were on the shelves in New Jersey middle school libraries. The librarians were also asked questions about the demographics of the library, their views of intellectual freedom and how they applied their views to collection development in their middle school library. The question about the librarian's views of intellectual freedom helped to shed light on the actual beliefs and practices of New Jersey librarians. The combination of

information gathering strategies helped to get a complete picture of practices of self-censorship practices of the school librarian.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability was established by pretesting with three candidates for school librarianship certification who were not included in the sample. Based on the pretest, needed changes were made to the survey and cover letter. Reliability was also ensured by using a number of questions about self-censorship from the New York Library Association. (New York Public Library Association, 2003).

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was created on SurveyMonkey. The questionnaire contained eighteen questions. Two of the questions required multiple responses. Most of the questions included a comment box for comments or to type in an original response to the question that was not listed. An additional comment page was added to the end of the survey to elicit reactions to the survey.

The e-mail sent to the participants contained a link to the questionnaire on SurveyMonkey. The response choices for the questions included drop down menus, radar boxes, multiple choice and comment boxes. SurveyMonkey managed the list of

potential participants and the responses received. The SurveyMonkey services collected

all of the responses for the survey and presented the information in table form for

analysis. The service was also used to download the responses. Microsoft Excel was

used for the purpose of creating graphs and tables for presenting the results of the study

in a graphic format. Microsoft Word was used to create the report. (see Appendix C)

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Response and Implementation

The survey was sent to the middle school librarians throughout the state of New Jersey by way of e-mail and a Web response on SurveyMonkey. The initial request for participation was e-mailed on February 26th, 2008. A second request was e-mailed to the people who did not respond to the first request on March 5th, 2008. A total of two hundred eleven requests to participate were e-mailed. A total of eighty-two responses were completed for a response rate of 39%. Seventy-two of the respondents completed the survey in its entirety.

A large number of people who were invited to participate in the study clicked on the SurveyMonkey link for the questionnaire, but choose not to answer any questions. These responses were not recorded and their response was not considered.

Presentation of Results

Study participants were required to identify themselves as a librarian of students in grades six to eight. If any of the people did not serve middle school students they were not able to continue with the survey. As a result one hundred percent of the participants served students in grades six to eight.

Participants were asked to identify in which county the students they serve reside in question number one in part two. Seventy-four people responded to this question; eight skipped this question. The largest number of participating librarians worked in Burlington and Bergen County libraries. The New Jersey counties that did not have any responses were Mercer, Morris, Ocean, Passaic, Salem, Union, and Warren, Hunterdon (Figure 1).

In response to question three in part two fifty five percent of the people surveyed stated that their school library had a board approved collection development policy that deals with challenges to books. Fifteen percent stated that they had a collection development policy, but it was not board approved. Thirty one percent did not have a board approved collection development

Figure 1
Percent of Participants in New Jersey Counties.
n=82

Legend:
- Atlantic
- Bergen
- Burlington
- Camden
- Cape May
- Essex
- Gloucester
- Hudson
- Middlesex
- Monmouth
- Somerset

Pie chart values: 1%, 8%, 16%, 16%, 13%, 1%, 8%, 11%, 1%, 14%, 11%
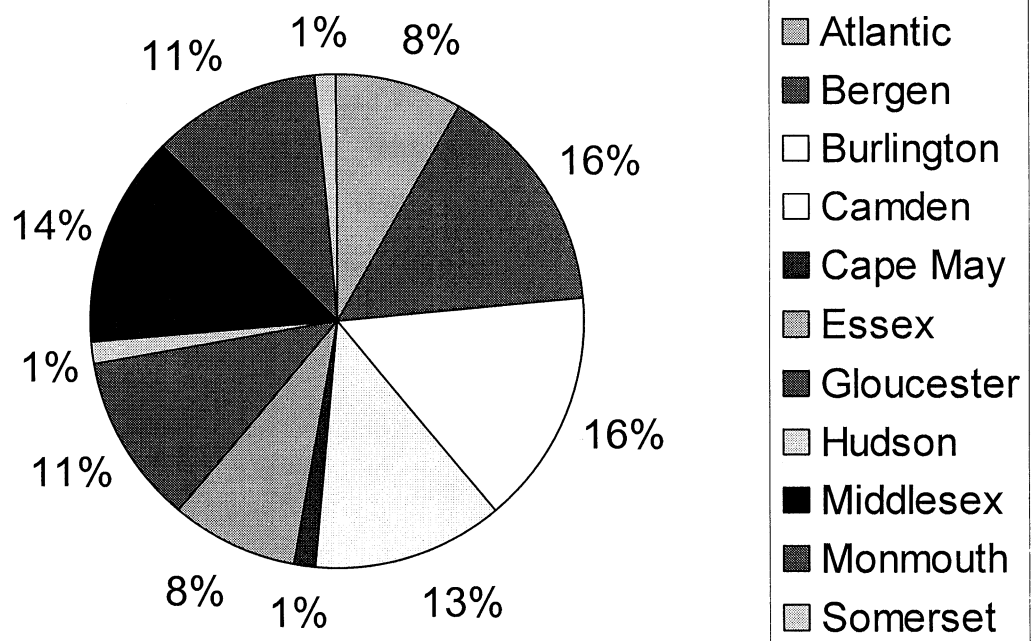
policy that dealt with challenged to books (Figure 2). There were ten comments entered into the comment field. Some of the comments entered were:

- "Tried to get one but the administrator was not receptive"

- "I don't know"

- "It is under construction and will (hopefully) be approved this school year"

- "No, although supervisors have been advised to do so since 1993"

- "It is very dated, but it still works"

- "I am not sure, I believe we do"

- "Revised policy, pending board approval"

Books in the Library Collection

In question four in part two librarians were asked to check their OPAC to determine whether or not their library collection contained copies from a list of sixteen books. The books in the list were ones which met the criteria explained in detail in Chapter III. Figures 3, 4, 5 and 6 show the results of the survey of books.

The books that were included in the library collections most often were: *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, Harry Potter series books by J.K. Rowling, and *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry* by Mildred Taylor. The books that were least likely to be included in the

Figure 2
Percentage of Board Approved Collection
Development Policies
n=82

No
31%

Yes
54%

Yes, but not
board
approved
15%
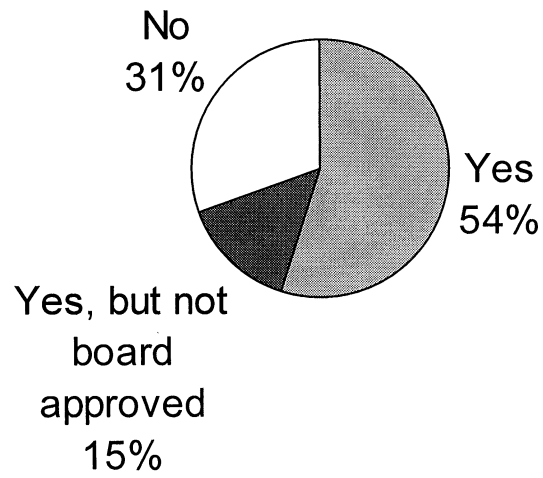
Figure 3
Percentage of Books in Collections A
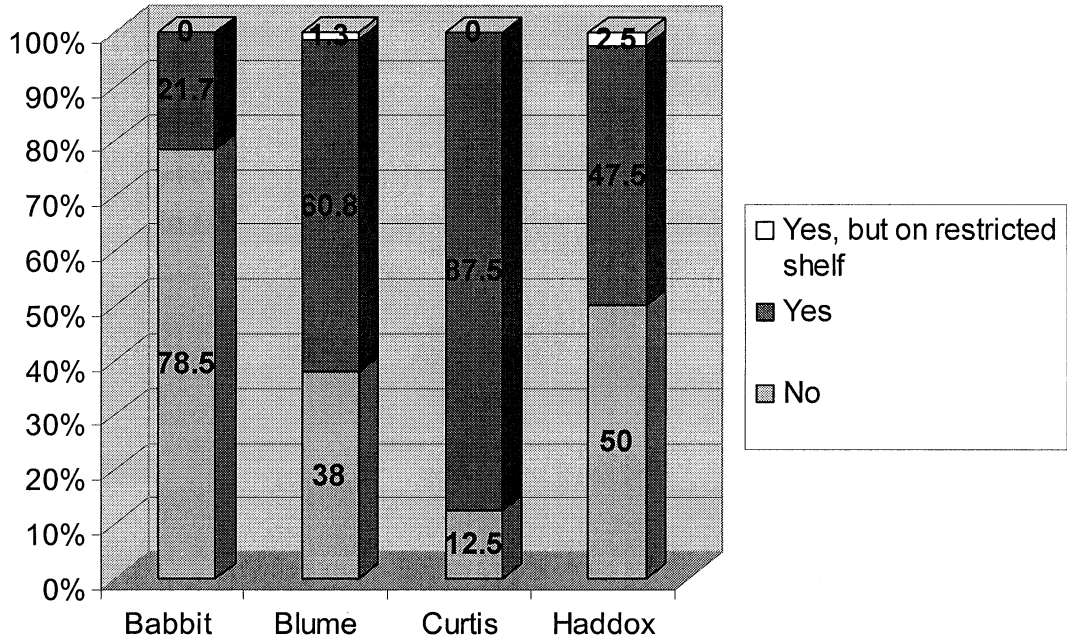
Key for book titles and authors

Babbit = *The Devil's Storybook* by Natalie Babbit

Blume = *Deenie* by Judy Blume

Curtis = *The Watsons Go to Birmingham* – 1963 by Christopher Paul Curtis

Haddox = *Don't You Dare Read Tthis, Mrs. Dunphrey* by Margaret Peterson Haddox

Figure 4
Percentage of Books in Collections B

Legend:
- □ Yes, but on restricted shelf
- ■ Yes
- ▨ No

Chart values:
- Harris 1: 6.3, 12.7, 81
- Harris 2: 0, 0, 95
- I saw: 0, 7.7, 92.3
- Lowry 1: 0, 66.2, 33.8
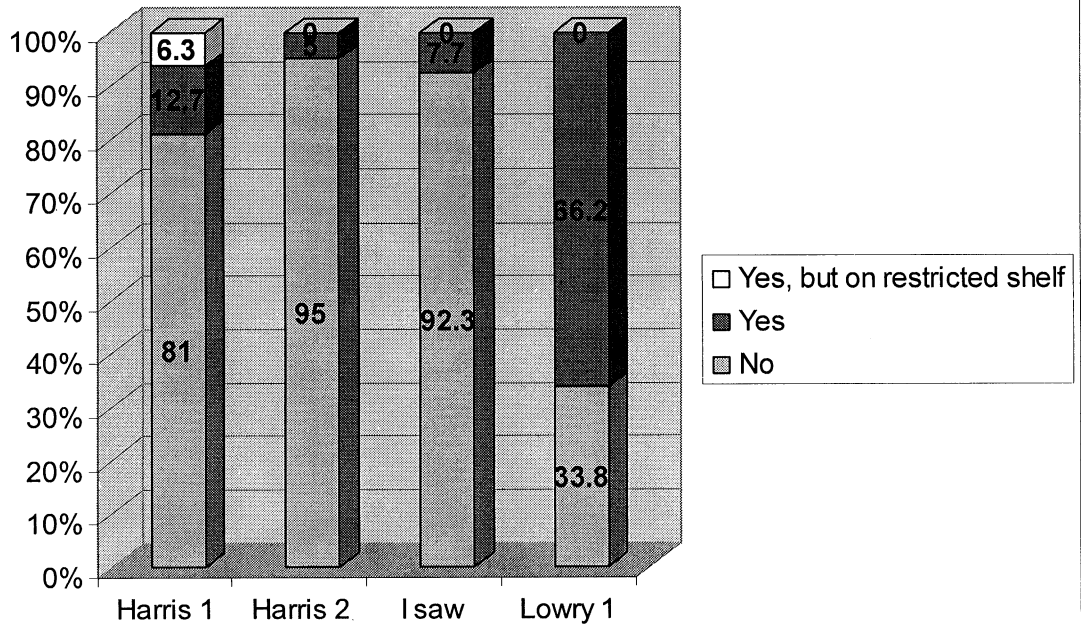
Key for book titles and authors

Harris 1 = *It's Perfectly Normal: A Book Aabout Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex and Sexual Health* by Robbie Harris

Harris 2 = *It's so Amazing! A Book About Eggs, Sperm, Birth, Babies and Family* by Robbie Harris

I saw = I *saw Esau: The Schoolchild's Pocket Book* edited by Iona and Peter Opie

Lowry 1 = *Anastasia Again* by Lois Lowry

Figure 5
Percentage of Books in Collections C

	Lowry 2	Naylor	Patterson	Rowling
Yes, but on restricted shelf	1.3	1.3	0	0
Yes	98.8	91.1	94.9	98.8
No	0	7.6	5.1	1.2
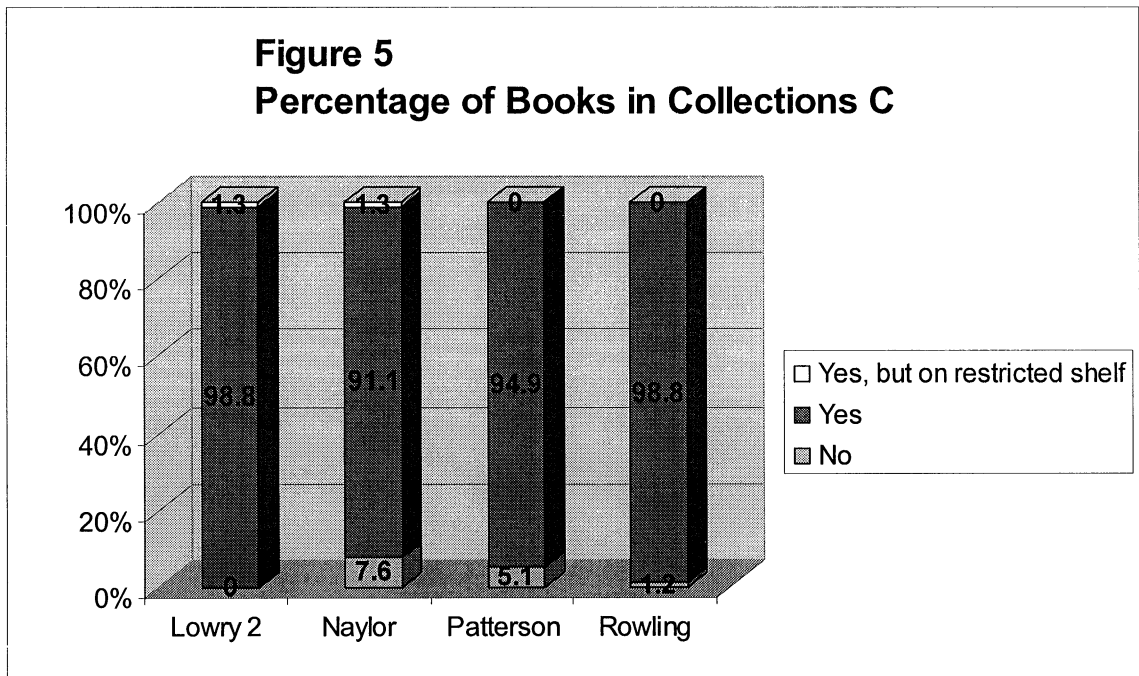
Key for book titles and authors

Lowry 2 = *The Giver* by Lois Lowry

Naylor = Any book in the *Alice Series* by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor

Patterson = *Bridge to Terabithia* by Katherine Patterson

Rowling = Any book in the *Harry Potter Series* by J.K Rowling

Figure 6
Percentage of Books in Collections D
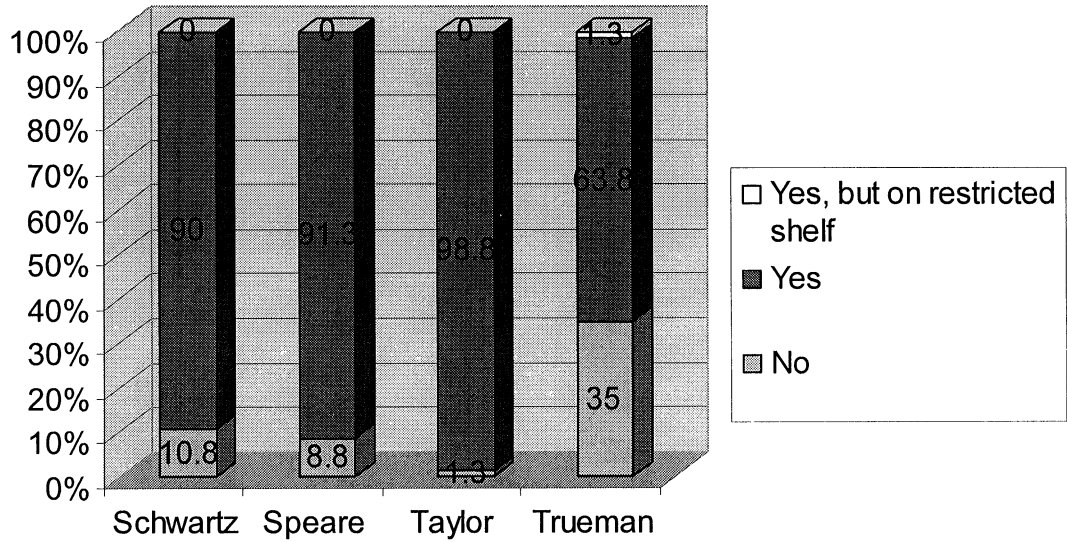
Key for book titles and authors

Schwartz = Any book in the *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark* series by Alvin Schwartz

Speare = *Witch of Blackbird Pond* by Elizabeth George Speare

Taylor = *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry* by Mildred Taylor

Trueman = *Stuck in Neutral* by Terry Trueman

library collections were: *It's so Amazing!: A Book About Eggs, Sperm, Birth, Babies and Family* by Robbie Harris, *I saw Esau: The Schoolchild's Pocket Book* edited by Iona and Peter Opie.

Challenges

The survey questioned whether or not an administrator, teacher, or other person or group challenged a book or books in the library in question one of part three. Thirty-seven percent of the librarians experienced a challenge to a book or books by an administrator, teacher, or other person or group (Figure 7). There were thirty responses in the comment field. Some of the responses included:

- "At times parents complain to the principal about content or language"

- "Teachers often come to me with concerns about language in books"

- "Board members object to one of my books. Our book challenge committee meets this Thursday"

- "Parents several years ago challenged books"

- "A parent felt Young Adult books were inappropriate for a middle school library"

Several dates of challenges and titles of books that were challenged were given in the comment field. Some of the titles and authors included: *Anything to Win, Forever in Blue, Cut* by McCormack, *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeline L'Engle, *Deal With It!*, Gossip

Figure 7
Percent of Challenges to Books
n=82

37, 37%

63, 63%

No
Yes
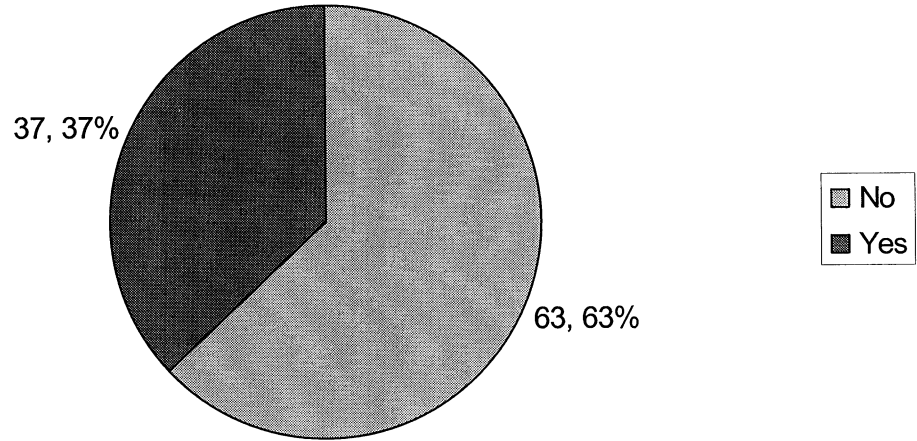
Girl books, *Mississippi Bridge* by Mildred Taylor, *Give the Boy a Gun*, *Heroes* by Robert

Cormier, *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson, and *Yankee Girl* by Rodman.

Librarians' Decisions

Librarians were asked if they ever removed objectionable material without going

through a formal reconsideration of materials process in question two of part three.

Sixteen percent of the librarians admitted that they had removed a book without going

through a formal reconsideration of materials process (Figure 8). Some of the fourteen

comments included:

- "I am told that books must be removed. There is no process"

- "I made the decision myself (to remove the book) after I read the book. It was

  highly recommended in a review journal so I was not aware of the language use"

- "I sent book to the high school"

- "Since we as yet do not have a collection development policy and I did not have

  tenure, I just quietly removed the book from the shelf"

- "The principal asked me to remove the book"

- "I removed the book from the system. I felt the teacher was right with her

  concern"

- "If the book is not wonderful literature I don't feel necessitated to fight for it"

Figure 8
Percent of Librarians Who Removed Book(s)
from Collection Without Reconsideration
Process
n=82

16, 16%

84, 84%

- No
- Yes
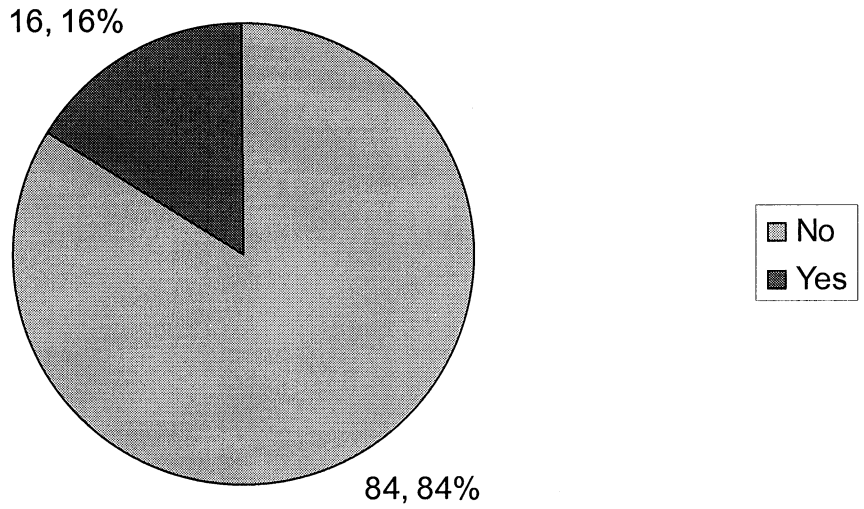
The survey respondents were asked if they ever decided not to purchase a popular book because it might be challenged by administration, parents, teachers or other pressure books in the community in question three of part three. 41.3% of the participants responded that they did decide not to purchase a popular book because it might be challenged by administration, parents, teachers, or other pressure groups (Figure 9). There were thirty one comments left in the comment box. Some of the comments were:

- "After 20 plus years in the district I have learned to pick my battles"

- "I have difficulty with the word popular. I have not added some books that are popular, but I do not feel that the quality and content are correct for this library collection, especially if it is not a recommended book or is listed for an older age range"

- "I admit to not purchasing some... we have a limited budget"

- "I found it too graphic and depressing.. so I guess I censored i."

- "The book was not suitable for the media center"

- "Some young adult books have very explicit sex"

- "So many books to choose from that I don't' feel it necessary to purchase a book that might cause problems"

- "I need to have several favorable review before I will buy it"

- "Being in middle school, I need to consider age appropriate material. Even if they are listed as such, doesn't always mean that they are"

Figure 9
Percentage of Librarians Who Decided Not to Purchase
Popular Book
n=82

41%

59%

No
Yes
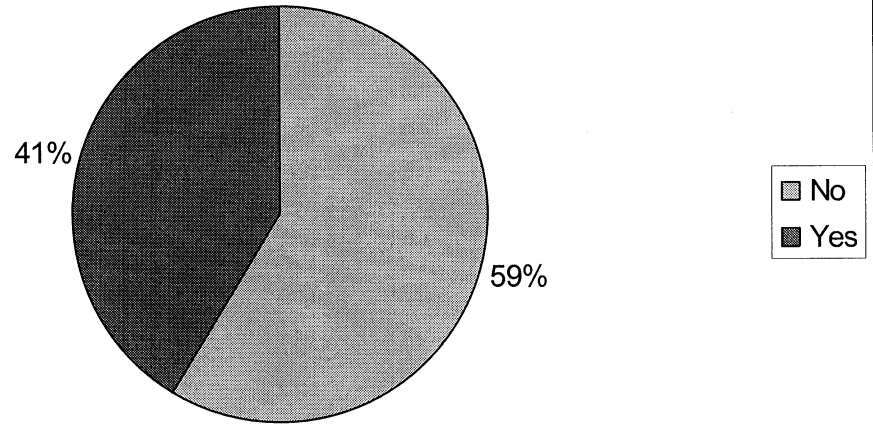
- "I don't buy any books dealing with gay or lesbian themes"

- "Middle school is a very tricky place to be as a librarian... we serve a wide range of maturity levels and I am fearful that a book with sophisticated themes would end up the hand of a sixth grader"

In question four of part three the librarians were asked if they have ever removed a book from the library collection because it contained material that they felt was potentially controversial. Over forty-one percent of the librarians said that they had removed a book from the library collection because it contained material that they felt was potentially controversial (Figure 10). Thirty two comments were left for this question. Some of the comments were:

- "It is very difficult to walk the line between censorship and selection"

- "Some books with a sexual content or language not suited for this level"

- "Felt the book was inappropriate once purchased and read"

- "I didn't buy administrator did"

- "The title was not politically correct"

- "Dealt with rape and oral sex"

- "Subject too mature for student"

- "I have sent books to the high school because of themes I thought were more intended for high school"

Figure 10
Percentage of Librarians Who Removed Book(s)
from Collection Because They May Be
Controversial
n=82

41%

59%

No
Yes
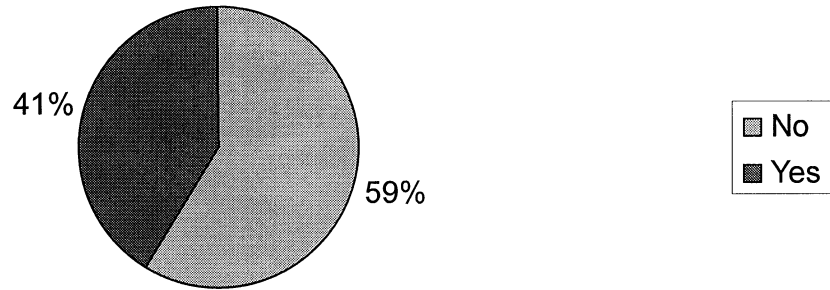
- "Sometimes I have received a book I consider unsuitable, and I discard it or donate it to the public library"

- "I have occasional sent books to the high school library that had content and language generally considered "to mature" for middle school"

- "Not exactly controversial topics, just if the topic was too mature for middle school"

- "Personal review of questionable purchases has caused me to remove books with explicit sexual scents or extreme profanity"

- "I ordered a book that I read and felt was too mature"

- "Content was acceptable, pictures were too explicit"

Participants were asked if they have ever restricted a student's use of a library book for any reason in question five of part three. Over forty-four percent of the librarians said that they had restricted a student's use of a library book (Figure 11). There were thirty-two comments left in response to this question. They include:

- "YA label collection is for 6th to 8th graders only"

- "I had a parent ask that their child not be allowed to read Harry Potter books for religious reasons"

- "child not mature enough"

- "only for overdue books"

- "if he or she is using the information or pictures in an immature way… bothering other children, interrupting classroom function etc."

Figure 11
Percent of Librarians Who Restricted a
Student's Use of a Library Book
n=82

44%

56%

No
Yes
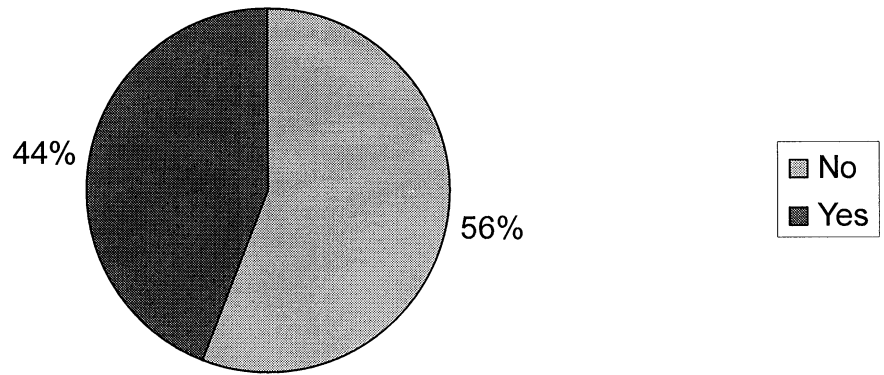
- "told a 4th grader that it was more mature subject area"

- "6th graders must have a YA note to read the YA books"

- "yes, first based on the reading level of the book vs. the ability of the reader. Then the maturity and age of the reader"

- "students fooling around and making fun of a book on sex/contraception"

- "I discourage the 5th grade students from reading the YA materials"

- "immature student or reading level too difficult"

- "book not age appropriate"

- "If I feel it is too mature for a student, I will strongly suggest another one"

- "The only time I restrict take out use is when a students does not return a book or if they have lost a book they are restricted until they pay for it"

- "parental request"

The survey participants were asked if they purchase young adult books for the middle school library in question six of part three. Forty-eight percent said that they purchase young adult books for the library on a regular basis. Over forty-nine percent of the librarians responded that they sometimes purchase young adult books for the library. Two and a half percent of the librarians said that they did purchase young adult books at all (Figure 12).

The middle school librarians were asked if they label books that have a mature content such as labeling young adult books with a YA sticker in question seven of part

Figure 12
Percent of Librarians Who Purchase Young Adult Titles
n=82
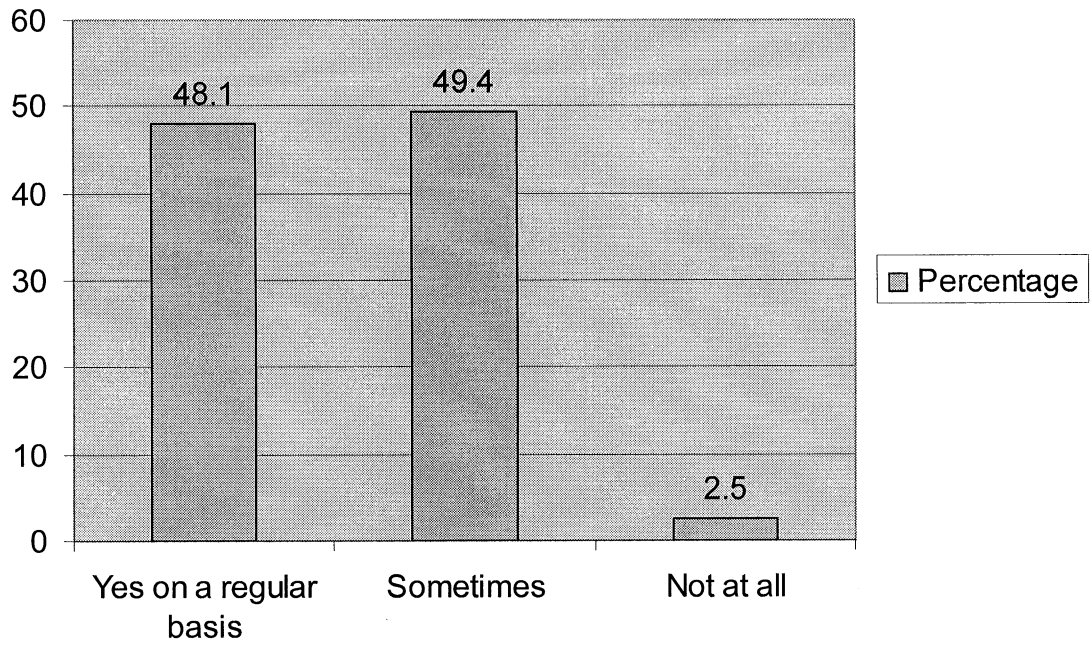
three. Seventy-nine percent of the librarians said that they did label books, while twenty-one percent did label (Figure 13). Some of the people commented:

- "Graphic novels that publishers signify as for teens"

- "Spine label says YA inside cover leveled 'For Mature Readers"

- "yes – a yellow YA sticker – Only because my principal wanted me to mark them"

- "Strictly as a tool to help older students with selection process"

- "To indicate a more mature audience".

Librarians were then asked if they restricted the checkout of the books labeled as young adult in question eight in part three. More than sixty-three percent of the librarians who labeled the books with YA stickers did not restrict students based on age or grade. Over thirty-six percent of the librarians restricted YA labeled books based on age or grade (Figure 14).

The librarians were given a list of types of content and were asked to indicate the likeliness that they would purchase a book for the middle school library with that content in question one of part four (Table 1). The content that they would most likely to purchase for the middle school library included political issues and racial issues. The content that they were least likely to purchase was books with sexual content and offensive language.

Figure 13
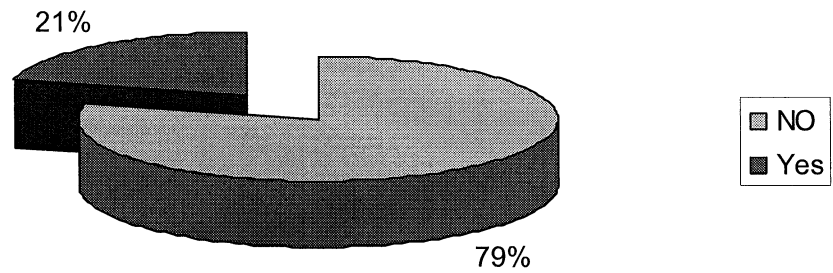**Percent of Librarians Who Label Young Adult Books**
n=82

21%

79%

NO
Yes

Figure 14
Percent of Librarians Who Restrict Checkout of
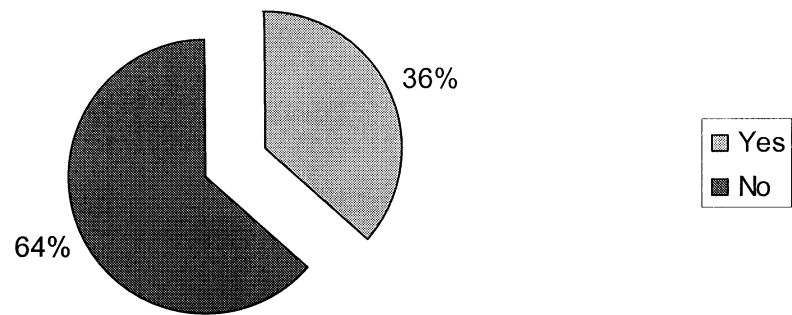**Young Adult Books Based on Age or Grade**
n=82

36%

64%

Yes

No

Table 1
Librarian's Likeliness to Purchase Books with Specific Content

Content	Not likely to purchase	May purchase	Likely to purchase
Sexual content	37.3 (29)	54.5 (42)	7.8 (6)
Rape	26.3 (20)	64.8 (52)	5.3 (4)
Gangs	5.3 (4)	71.1 (54	23.7 (18)
Homosexual content	23.7 (18)	64.5 (49	11.8 (9)
Offensive language	37.7 (29)	54.5 (42)	7.8 (6)
Political issues	0	53.2 (41	46.8 (36)
Racial issues	0	54.5 (42	45.5 (35)
Drug use / abuse	2.6 (2)	63.6 (49)	33.8 (26)
Child abuse	3.9 (3)	72.6 (55)	23.7 (18)

The survey participants were then given a number of quotations to read. They were then asked what their actions would be after reading the passage. In question two of part four hey were asked to image that they were browsing a book in the collection and came across the following text in Table 2.

Table 2
Quotation from *The Giver* by Lois Lowry
"..(he) began very carefully to direct the needle into the top of the newchild's forehead, puncturing the place where the fragile skin pulsed. The newborn squirmed and wailed faintly.. He pushed the plunger very slowly, injecting the liquid into the scalp vein until the syringe was empty... the newchild, no longer crying, moved his arms and legs in a jerking motion. Then he went limp. His head fell to the side, his eyes half open. Then he was still. ... "He killed it! My father killed it!"

They were also informed that the book had a reading level of 6.0 and the recommended interest level was grades 5-8. The quote was from "The Giver" by Lois Lowry. The participants were not told the title or author of the book. They were asked

"What would you do?" and were given the following choices: "Nothing, put back on the shelf, Label the book as young adult then put it back on the shelf, put the book on a restricted shelf, remove the book from the collection."

Over sixty two percent of the people who responded indicated that they would put the book back on the shelf and do nothing; almost nineteen percent said that they would remove the book from the collection. Over eleven percent responded that they would place the book on a restricted shelf. Seven and a half percent said that they would label the book as young adult then place it back on the shelf (Figure 15). Some of the thirty two comments were:

- "Read the entire book and then make a decision"

- "Principal would remove it if I didn't"

- "I feel this is more on the high school level"

- "This book is obviously not appropriate for children"

- "I would need to read more"

- "I would check the reviews on the book before I determined what to do with it"

- "I would never judge a book by one small paragraph."

- " I hope I wouldn't purchase it"

- "I need to know more about the contents"

- "Taken out of context makes it appear terrible".

Figure 15
Response to Quote from *The Giver* by Lois Lowry
n=82
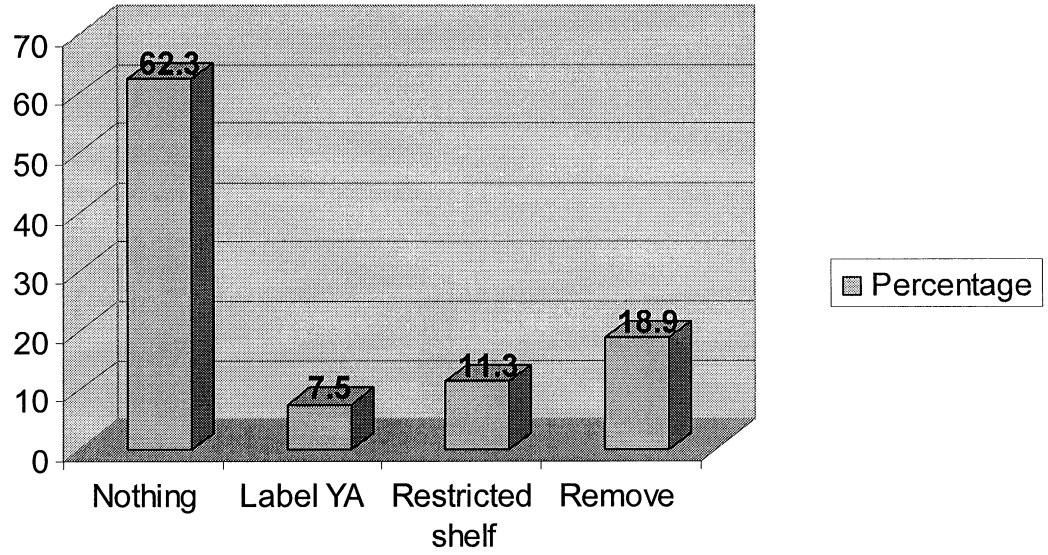
The participants were asked a similar question about the following quote in Table 3 in question three of part four.

Table 3
Quotation from *Deenie* by Judy Blume
"Usually I take a shower and get out as fast as I can, but I liked the feeling of relaxation and I rubbed my special spot with my wash cloth until I got that special feeling."

The book had a reading level of 8.0 and a recommended interest level was grades five to eight. They were asked what they would do after finding this passage. Almost sixty percent of the people said that they would do nothing and put the book back on the shelf; nineteen percent indicated that they would remove the book from the collection. Fifteen and a half percent mentioned that they would label the book as young adult then place it back on the shelf. Over eight percent said that they would place the book on a restricted shelf (Figure 16). They were not given the title or author of the quote. The quote was from *Deenie* by Judy Blume.

Figure 16
Response to Quote from *Deenie* by Judy Blume
n=82

60	56.9
50	
40	
30	Percentage
20	15.5 · · · · · 19
10	· · · · · 8.6
0	
	Nothing · Label YA · Restricted shelf · Remove
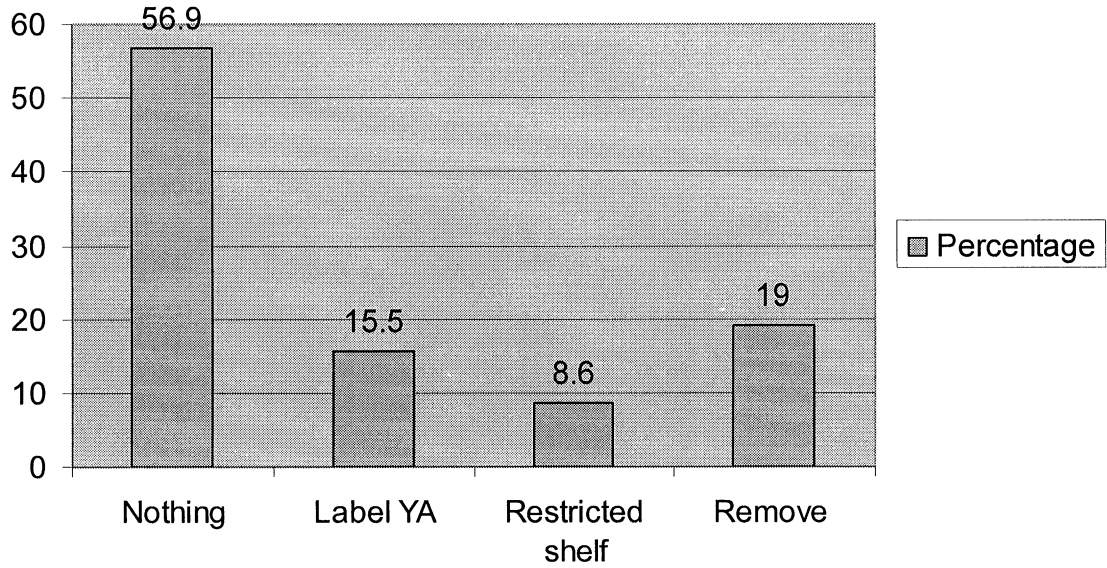
In question four of part four the survey participants were asked to imagine that a student or parent told then that they wanted a book removed from the library and showed you the following passage in Table 4.

Table 4
Quotation from Book in *Alice* series by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor
"..."I know what goes where," I told her. "But how does it feel when a man's penis goes inside you?" .... "It looks so easy in the movies. A man and woman climb in bed and make wild love and they both come at the same time and-" "What does that mean?" "An orgasm. A climax. A peak of excitement. If you've ever masturbated, you already know what it feels like." "So how is real life different from the movies?" I asked. ....."

They were told that the book had a reading level of 8.0 and recommended interest level was grades 5-8. They were asked what they would do after listening to the person's concerns about the book. Seventy three percent of the librarians indicated that they would follow a reconsideration of library materials procedure, nineteen percent would remove the book from the collection and eight percent would refer the book to an administrator to have him or her make a decision (Figure 17). Sixteen people left comments about this question. Some of the responses were:

- "I would read more of the book to determine if it should be in the collection. If I feel that it should, I would inform my principal and have the parent follow the reconsideration procedure"

- "This book should NOT be classified as being appropriate for grades 5-8. Shame on whoever made that decision!"

- "I would also ask the parent to read the entire book before complaining about one passage"

- "Probably remove the book; but would discuss with faculty and parents"

57

Figure 17
Response to Quote from *Alice Series* Book by
Phyllis Reynolds Naylor
n=82
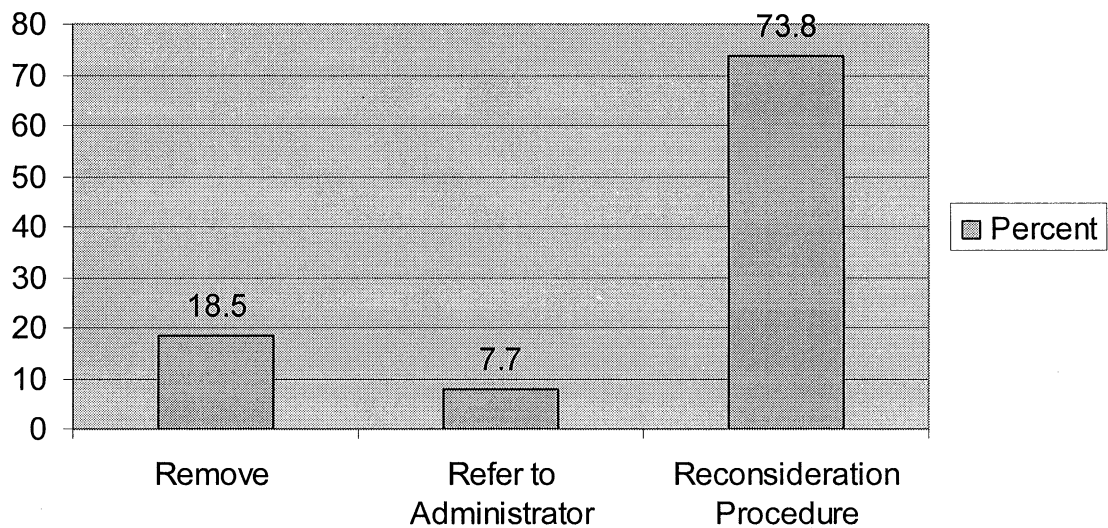
- "would not be in my library"

- "If a parent files a formal complaint, I would follow the district policy on censorship"

The librarians were asked to read a book review from *Publisher's Weekly* of a book which was a Horn Book Nonfiction Honor book in 1995 in question five of part four. The review read as follows in Table 5.

Table 5
Book Review of *It's Perfectly Normal: A Book About Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex and Sexual Health* by Robbie Harris
"In this intelligent, amiable and carefully researched book,(the author).. frankly explains the physical, psychological, emotional and social changes that occur during puberty--and the implications of these changes. Taking a conversational, relaxed tone, (the author) also discusses such subjects as sexual orientation, sexual reproduction, pregnancy, birth control, sexually transmitted diseases and sexual abuse. The author intentionally and effectively repeats certain crucial information, especially on the subject of the possible consequences of sexual intercourse. Alternately playful and realistic (and occasionally graphic), (the illustrator's) watercolor-and-pencil art reinforces (the author's) message that bodies come in all sizes, shapes and colors...Cartoon panels illustrate various complicated processes (e.g., menstruation, the fertilization of an egg, childbirth)...Ages 10-14."

They were told that the reading level was 6.3 and the recommended interest level was grades five to eight. They were asked if they would purchase the book for their library collection based on the review and information if they were looking for a book on this subject and were given an adequate budget. Sixty seven percent of the librarians said that they would purchase the book for their library. Almost thirty-three percent said they that would not purchase the book for their library (Figure 18). The book review was of *It's Perfectly Normal: A Book About Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex and Sexual Healh.*

Figure 18
Response to review of book in *Publisher's Weekly* of
It's Perfectly Normal: A Book About Changing Bodies,
***Growing Up, Sex and Sexual Health* by Robbie Harris**

Would you purchase?
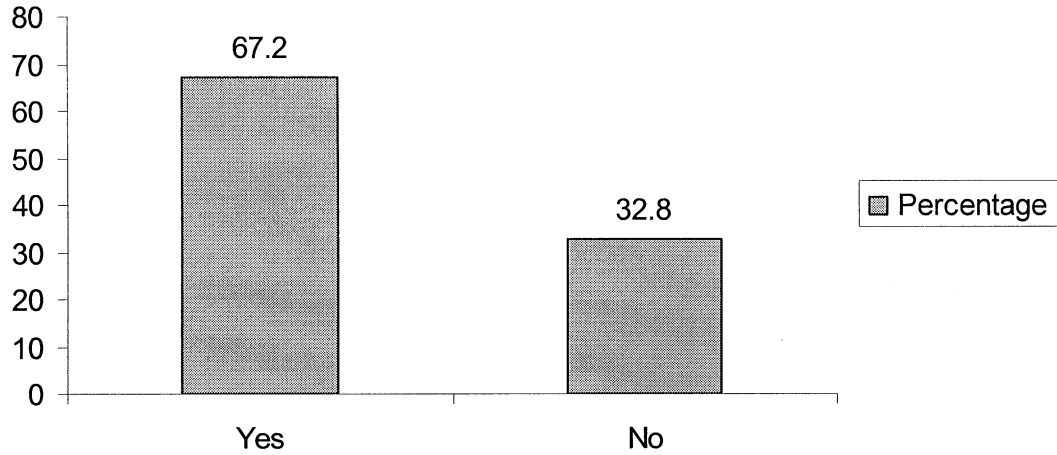
by Robbie Harris. The librarians were not given the title or the author. There were fourteen comments about this question. Some were:

- "It would be given to the health teacher"

- "Check reviews, purchase & read a copy of the book, perhaps ask health teacher & nurse"

- "I would have to discuss this with administration"

- "I would label it young adult"

- "place on the restricted shelf"

- "I would investigate other reviews before making a decision"

- "even though you would like to ignore budget the majority of books purchased must be acceptable for use by the majority of students"

- "I would have to compare it to other books written on the subject for this age/grade level"

Question one of part five, the final question of the survey, presented the participants with a scanned page from the book *It's Perfectly Normal: A Book About Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex and Sexual Health* by Robbie Harris. They were not told the title or author of the book. They were asked imagine that they purchased the book for their library based on its good reviews and need for a book on this topic in their collection. They were to decide what to do with the book after seeing the page (Figure 19). Over thirty-four percent of the librarians responded that they would put the book on

the library shelf. Almost thirty-three percent mentioned that they would put the book on

a restricted shelf for teachers,

Figure 19
Image from the book *It's Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex and Sexual Health* by Robbie Harris
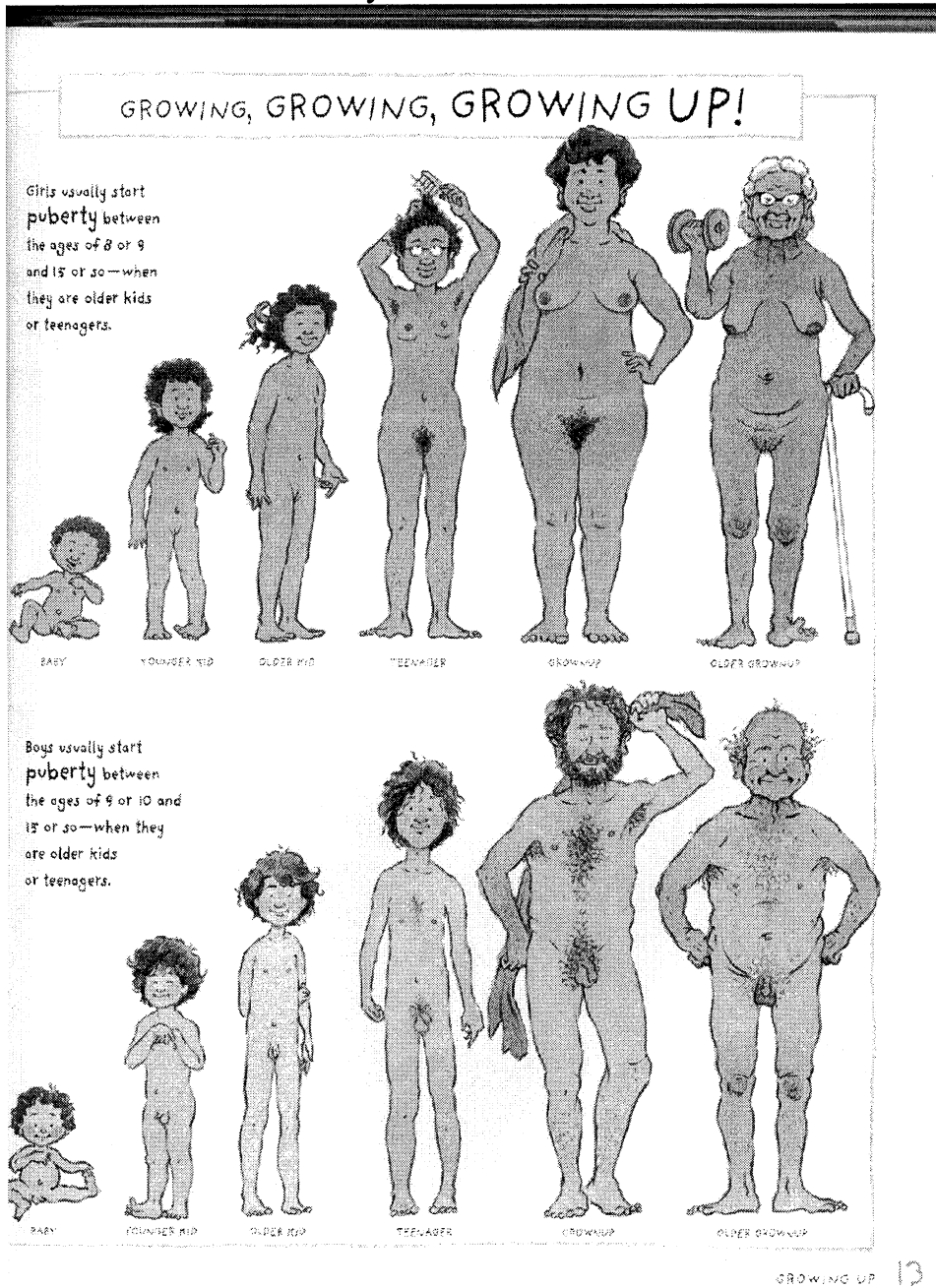
counselors, and parents. Seventeen percent would decide not to place the book in the library collection (Table 6). There were sixteen comments left about this question. Some of the responses included:

- "It would be given to the health teacher"

- "I tend to put controversial items on the shelf with little fanfare – I don't display them"

- "Discuss with an administrator"

- "The graphic nature of the book would have me at least use a YA sticker, possibly put it in the professional development area"

- "share the book at our next librarian's meeting"

- "place the book on a shelf in the library office – to be handed out if requested"

- "Send to the high school. Our kids would decorate it too much!"

- "???????!!!!!!!"

- "Most of these books don't get checked out by students but end up all over the library so I know they're being secretly looked at and giggled over, esp. since I find groups gathered around the book. Sometimes I just give them to the nurse to give students who have questions"

Table 6

Response to Image of Page From *It's Perfectly Normal: A Book About Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex and Sexual Health* by Robbie Harris.

Answer Choice	Percent
Place the book on the "New books in the library" display	7.8
Put the book on the shelf	34.4
Label the book "Young Adult then place on the shelf	7.8
Place the book on a restricted shelf for teachers, counselors and parents	32.8
Decide not to place the book in the library collection	17.2

At the end of the survey the librarians were invited to add comments about the questionnaire. There were twenty comments. Some of the comments were:

- "Most of the time I try to read any fiction that may be young adult and I try to preview any non-fiction before purchase"

- "The student population of district in which you work plays a major role in rather or not you can live up to the ideal you graduate with"

- "I would like to see more guidelines for grade ratings. I have purchased books that had wonderful reviews and recommendations and upon reading them, have removed them from the shelf"

- "I am trusting that this is confidential and will not be used to go after a list of banned books"

- "Selecting and purchasing books for middle school is a difficult task!"

- "Excellent choice for questions. They really made me think about what I would do"

- "Budget can never be ignored in today's schools. Every penny must be used in the best way to service the majority of students"

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study showed that librarians working in New Jersey middle schools struggle with self-censorship. The answers revealed that some of the librarians were dedicated to upholding intellectual freedom and the students' right to read and others were more conservative in their selection process of books for the middle school library. The majority of the respondents were somewhere in between the two views.

Selection of Books

Selection of books in the middle school library proved to be a difficult task for librarians. The students range in age and maturity levels and some of the survey participants tried to keep the more mature books from getting into their hands.

The answers and comments revealed that many librarians analyzed their students' background, maturity level, support of the administration, and dynamics of the community to help them make decisions about whether or not a book belonged in the collection. Some also judged the book and deemed it too depressing, not appropriate for school, unsuitable for the age group or mentioned that their budget was limited. Several of the librarians mentioned that they felt some of the books that were recommended for

the middle school age level by professional reviews should have be recommended for older students and were not suitable for middle school.

There was fine line between selection and censorship. The librarians in the middle of the group walked the line and seem to make choices about books depending on a variety of factors for each book. There were a number of librarians who were dedicated to upholding the students' right to read. They choose a book after reading the reviews, finding the reading and interest level, and then evaluating the collection. The idea of censoring books based on their own views or to avoid conflict did not come in mind when they were purchasing the book for the collection. On the opposite end, librarians gave reasons for being more careful. They were awaiting tenure, avoiding conflict, or judging material as not appropriate for schools or for the age levels. Some may have avoided any book that might controversial. These librarians were participated in self-censorship on a regular basis. The majority of respondents to this study found themselves in the middle.

Avoidance of Problems

On of the main reasons that librarians indicated that they choose not to include a certain book in their library collection was because they wanted to avoid challenges. The librarians have to deal with administrators who most likely would like to avoid conflict. Several of the participants mentioned that parents and teachers have brought books to their attention and wanted them removed from the library. Several of the librarians

mentioned that they would go to the administration instead of dealing with the issues themselves using their professional knowledge. Some stated they would rather avoid challenges to library materials by not choosing books with controversial content. Several of the librarians mentioned that they were not yet tenured and that for the time being they were making safe decisions.

<div align="center">Notes about Results</div>

It was interesting to note that almost ninety-nine percent of the librarians reported that the book *The Giver* by Lois Lowry was in their middle school library collection, but almost nineteen percent responded to a later question and said that they would remove the book from the collection after reading the short controversial quote from the book. They were not given the title or author of the book with the quote. Some of the comments after reading the excerpt from the book were: "This book is obviously not appropriate for children", "My principal would remove it if I didn't", and "I feel this is more on the high school level/"

The librarians were asked to read a review of the book *It's Perfectly Normal: A Book About Cchanging Bodies, Growing Up, Sex and Sexual Health* by Robbie Harris. They were not given the title or author. They were told that it was a *Horn Book Nonfiction Award* book in 1995, recommended for students in grades five to eight and had a reading level of 6.3. Almost thirty-three percent reported that they would not

purchase the book for their middle school library based on this information. When shown a scanned picture from the book on the next question over seventeen percent would choose not to put the book in the collection at all, and almost thirty-three percent would place the book on a restricted shelf for teachers, counselors and parents. Of the sixty seven percent of the librarians who said they would purchase the book forty-two percent would place the book in the "New Books in the Library" display or directly on the shelf. After viewing the scanned picture from the book the librarians who felt confident that they would purchase the book changed their minds about putting the book in the collection after viewing the illustration despite the positive review, book award and suggested reading and interest level from a professional journal.

Importance of Study

This study showed that middle school librarians struggle with self-censorship. Their philosophies of book selection, students' right to read, and censorship vary. Though the librarians were dedicated professionals all of them did not uphold the ideals of the American Library Association Office of Intellectual Freedom. There were various reasons why they participated in censorship of library materials for middle school students. They participated in censorship to avoid conflict and challenges from administration, teachers, and parents or because of their own judgment of the materials, or their view of the students' ability to handle the material in a mature way.

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During collection development today's school librarians need to use school board approved collection development policies,school curriculum, professional book reviews, students' interests, and when time permitted student and teacher input in making decisions. The quality of the material and its usefulness to the school community should drive the decision process not fear of censorship. Choosing books based on reviews from professional materials helps to determine the quality. The curriculum and students' interest help determine the usefulness.

A major goal of the school librarian is to promote reading and access to material not to keep students from information. Establishing a collection development policy is an important first step in encouraging intellectual freedom in the school library. The policy should include details on book selection procedures and a section on reconsideration of library materials to help deal with challenges. In addition to the necessary graduate education to become a school librarian, there is a need for librarians to continue to receive training about censorship and intellectual freedom throughout their career. The school library collection should provide a diverse selection of materials representing different points of view and subject matter. The collection needs to meet the academic and personal information needs of all the students.

Recommendations for Further Study

Further study of the self-censorship practice of middle school librarians would help bring to light and important issues in librarianship. Librarians in the middle school

level are faced with challenges in book selection because of the age group of the students they serve, and the involvement of the administration, teachers and parents. At the end of the middle school years the students clearly have an interest in young adult fiction. A further study of young adult books in the middle school library would be beneficial.

Further studies could measure the older middle school students' perception of the library collection in the middle school. They could be asked to evaluate the collection to determine if the books the librarian selects are ones they would prefer to read. They could be asked how the library's collection impacts their view of the library and their reading habits. The students could compare a public library collection to their school collection. Introduction of young adult books in the middle school library collection could be evaluated.

A study comparing the book selection process of a middle school librarians and public librarians who serve middle school level students could be compared. It would be interesting to note the differences due to the assumed less restrictive atmosphere of the public library as compared to the school. An additional study of the holdings of young adult books that have a reading level and interest level at the middle school level, yet reach into the high school interest level would be a useful addition to professional library literature.

The possibilities of further study into the self-censorship practices of middle school librarians are great. The body of literature for older middle school students changes on a regular basis. Meeting the needs of the middle school students should be taken seriously to encourage them to become life long readers.

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APPENDIX A

COVER LETTER FOR QUESTIONNAIRE

Cover Letter for Questionnaire
(sent via e-mail with a link to the study)

Dear middle school librarian,

As a graduate student in School and Public Librarianship at Rowan University, I am conducting a research project as part of my Master's thesis under supervision of Dr. Marilyn Shontz. The purpose of this study is to investigate censorship in the middle school library.

E-mails are being sent to middle school librarians throughout the state. All New Jersey middle school librarians are invited to participate in this study. Participation is strictly voluntary and the responses will be kept confidential and anonymous.

To participate in the study please click on the link below or go to http://www.surveymonkey.... The survey should only take approximately twenty minutes to complete. At the end of the survey you will have to opportunity to add additional comments that you feel are relevant to the study.

Please e-mail me at candijjj@comcast.net if you have any questions.

Thank you in advance for assisting me with this research

Sincerely,

Candace Johnson

APPENDIX B

LIST OF BOOKS USED FOR THE STUDY

List of Books Used for the Study

	Author	Title
1.	Lowry, Lois	The Giver
2.	Naylor, Phyllis Reynolds	Alice Series
3.	Rowling, J.K.	Harry Potter Series
4.	Lowry, Lois	Anastasia Again
5.	Babbit, Natalie	The Devil's Storybook
6.	Blume, Judy	Deenie
7.	Curtis, Christopher Paul	The Watson's go to Birmingham -1963
8.	Haddix, Margaret Peterson	Don't you Dare Read this, Mrs. Dunphrey
9.	Harris, Robbie	It's Perfectly Normal: A Book About Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex, and Sexual Health
10.	Harris, Robbie	It's So amazing! A Book About Eggs, Sperm, Birth, Babies and Family
11.	Patterson, Katherine	Bridge to Terabithia
12.	Taylor, Mildred	Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry
13.	Trueman, Terry	Stuck in Neutral
14.	Edited by Iona and Peter Opie	I Saw Esau: The Schoolchild's Pocket Book
15.	Schwartz, Alvin	More Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark
16.	Speare, Elizabeth George	Witch of Blackbird Pond

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Survey of Middle School Librarians, page 1 of 4

Thank you for choosing to participate in this study. Be assured that all of your responses will be confidential. Your candid answers and information about your experiences are appreciated.

Please complete this questionnaire on a computer with or near access to your library's OPAC since some of the questions require information about books in your collection.

There are nineteen questions in this survey which will take you about fifteen to twenty minutes to complete.

1. Are you a middle school librarian or are your responsible for purchasing and maintaing a middle school level library collection?

Please choose YES if your library serves students in grades 6, 7 or 8. If your library serves students in grades 6, 7, or 8 and other grades please still choose YES.

○ Yes

○ No

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2. Library Survey, page 2 of 4

Please focus your answers based on how you would deal with your sixth, seventh and eighth grade books/students.

Be assured that all of your responses will be confidential.
1. In which county is your library?

New Jersey Counties

[▼]

Please choose one: In which county is your library?   Please choose one: New Jersey Counties

2. What grades does your library serve?

○ Kindergarten - 8th

○ 6th - 8th

Other (please specify) [   ]

3. Does your library have a board approved collection development policy that deals with challenges to books?

○ Yes

○ Yes, but not board approved

○ No

Comment

4. Please search your library OPAC to determine holdings of the following books. For each of the following books please choose the appropriate response.

Is this book in your library collection?

	No	Yes	Yes, but on restricted shelf
Babbit, Natalie "The Devil's Storybook"			
Blume, Judy "Deenie"			
Curtis, Christopher P. "The Watsons go to Birmingham-1963"			
Haddix, Margaret Peterson "Don't you dare read this, Mrs. Dunphrey"			
Harris, Robbie H. "It's Perfectly Normal: A book about changing bodies, growing up, sex, and sexual health"			
Harris, Robbie H. "It's so Amazing! A book about eggs, sperm, birth, babies and family"			
"I saw Esau: The Schoolchild's Pocket Book" edited by Iona and Peter Opie			
Lowry, Lois "Anastasia Again"			
Lowry, Lois "The Giver"			
Naylor, Phyllis R. Any book in the "Alice" series			
Patterson, Katherine "Bridge to Terabithia"			
Rowling, J.K. Any book in the "Harry Potter" series			
Schwartz Alvin, Any book in the "Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark" series			
Speare, Elizabeth George "Witch of Blackbird Pond"			
Taylor, Mildred "Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry"			
Trueman, Terry "Stuck in Neutral"			

Be assured that all of your responses will be confidential. Your candid answers and information about your experiences are appreciated.

1. Has an administrator, teacher, or other person or group challenged book(s) in your library?

◯   No

◯   yes

If yes, please explain and provide the year of the

challenge.

2. Have you ever responded to a challenge by removing objectionable material without going through a formal reconsideration of materials process?

◯   No

◯   Yes

If yes, please explain:

3. Have you ever decided not to purchase a popular book because it might be challenged by administration, parents, teachers or pressure groups in the community?

◯   No

◯   Yes

If yes, please explain:

4. Have you ever removed a book from the library collection because it contained material that you felt was potentially controversial?

◯   No

◯   Yes

If yes, please explain:

5. Have you ever restricted a student's use of a library book for any reason?

○ No

○ Yes

If yes, please explain

6. Do you purchase Young Adult books for your middle school library?

○ Yes on a regular basis

○ Sometimes

○ Not at all

7. Do you label books that have more mature content? (Ex. Labeling Young Adult books with a YA sticker)

○ No

○ Yes

If yes, please explain

8. If you label the Young Adult books, do you restrict the checkout of those books to students of a certain age or grade?

○ The books are not labeled as Young Adult.

○ Yes, students need to be a certain grade or age to check out Young Adult books.

○ No, there is no grade or age restriction to checking out the Young Adult books.

Comment

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Be assured that all of your responses will be confidential. Your candid answers and information about your experiences are appreciated.

1. Please indicate the likeliness that you would purchase a book for your middle school library that contains the following content.

	Not likely to purchase	May purchase	Likely to purchase
Sexual content			
Rape			
Gangs			
Homosexual content			
Offensive language			
Political issues			
Racial issues			
Drug use / abuse			
Child abuse			

2. Imagine that when you were browsing a book in your library collection that you came across the following text:

"..(he) began very carefully to direct the needle into the top of the newchild's forehead, puncturing the place where the fragile skin pulsed. The newborn squirmed and wailed faintly.. He pushed the plunger very slowly, injecting the liquid into the scalp vein until the syringe was empty... the newchild, no longer crying, moved his arms and legs in a jerking motion. Then he went limp. His head fell to the side, his eyes half open. Then he was still. ...

"He killed it! My father killed it!" "

The book has a reading level of 6.0 and the recommended interest level is grades 5-8.

What would you do?

○ Imagine that when you were browsing a book in your library collection that you came across the following text: "..(he) began very carefully to direct the needle into the top of the newchild's forehead, puncturing the place where the fragile skin pulsed. The newborn squirmed and wailed faintly.. He pushed the plunger very slowly, injecting the liquid into the scalp vein until the syringe was empty... the newchild, no longer crying, moved his arms and legs in a jerking motion. Then he went limp. His head fell to the side, his eyes half open. Then he was still. ... "He killed it! My father killed it!" " The book has a reading level of 6.0 and the recommended interest level is grades 5-8. What would you do? Nothing, put the book back on the shelf.

○ Label the book as "Young Adult" then put it back on the shelf.

○ Put the book on a restricted shelf.

○ Remove the book from the collection. _____

Other (please specify)

3. Imagine that when you were browsing a book in your library collection that you came across the following text:

"Usually I take a shower and get out as fast as I can, but I liked the feeling of relaxation and I rubbed my special spot with my wash cloth until I got that special feeling."

The book has a reading level of 8.0 and recommended interest level is grades 5-8.

What would you do?

- Nothing, put the book back on the shelf.
- Label the book as "Young Adult" then put it back on the shelf.
- Put the book on a restricted shelf.
- Remove the book from the collection.

Other (please specify)

4. Imagine that a student or parent told you that they wanted a book removed from the library and showed you the following passage:

"..."I know what goes where," I told her. "But how does it feel when a man's penis goes inside you?" ....

"It looks so easy in the movies. A man and woman climb in bed and make wild love and they both come at the same time and-"

"What does that mean?"

"An orgasm. A climax. A peak of excitement. If you've ever masturbated, you already know what it feels like."

"So how is real life different from the movies?" I asked. ...."

The book has a reading level of 8.0 and recommended interest level is grades 5-8.

After listening to the person's concerns about the book what would you do?

- Remove the book from the library based on the request.
- Have an administrator deal with the issue.
- Follow a reconsideration of library materials procedure.

Other (please specify)

5. Please read the following book review from Publishers Weekly of a book which was a Horn Book Nonfiction Honor book in 1995:

"In this intelligent, amiable and carefully researched book,(the author).. frankly explains the physical, psychological, emotional and social changes that occur during puberty--and the implications of these changes. Taking a conversational, relaxed tone, (the author) also discusses such subjects as sexual orientation, sexual reproduction, pregnancy, birth control, sexually transmitted diseases and sexual abuse. The author intentionally and effectively repeats certain crucial information, especially on the subject of the possible consequences of sexual intercourse. Alternately playful and realistic (and occasionally graphic), (the illustrator's) watercolor-and-pencil art reinforces (the author's) message that bodies come in all sizes, shapes and colors...Cartoon panels illustrate various complicated processes (e.g., menstruation, the fertilization of an egg, childbirth)...Ages 10-14."

The book has a reading level of 6.3 and the recommended interest level is grades 5-8.

Based on the review and information, if you were looking for a book on this subject for your library and are given an adequate budget would you purchase this book for your middle school library?

⌐ Yes

⌐ No

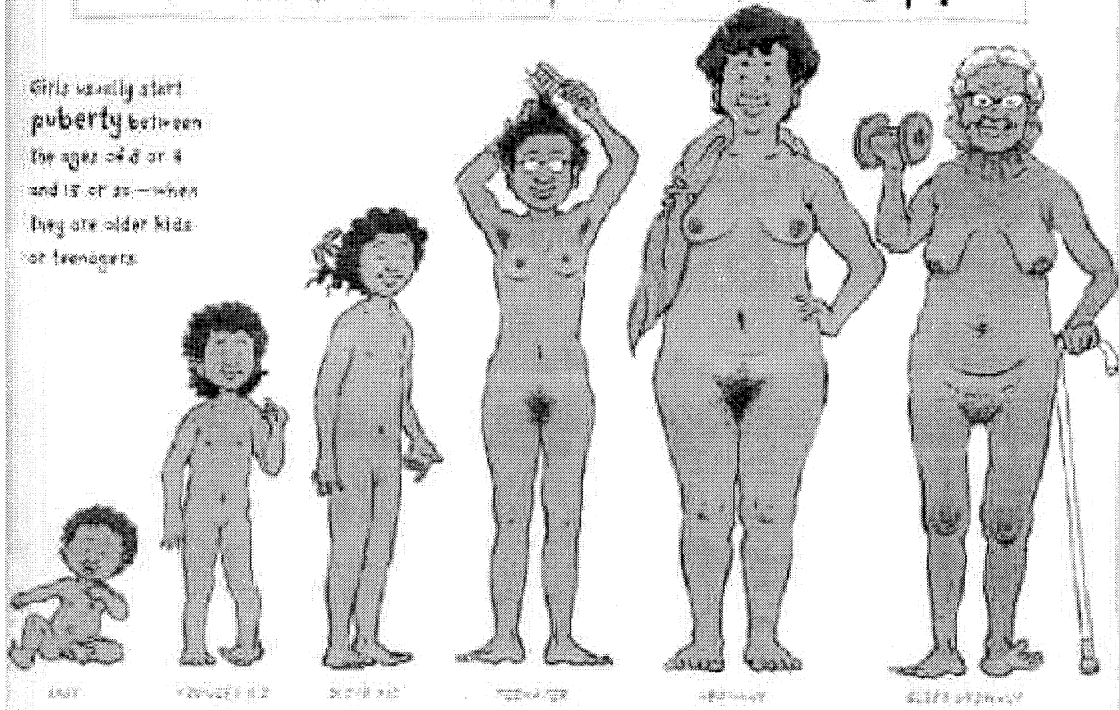Other (please specify)

Be assured that all of your responses will be confidential.

This is a page from "It's Perfectly Normal: A book about changing bodies, growing up, sex, and sexual health" by Robbie Harris.

GROWING, GROWING, GROWING UP!

Girls usually start **puberty** between the ages of 8 or 9 and 15 or so—when they are older kids or teenagers.

Boys usually start **puberty** between the ages of 9 or 10 and 15 or so—when they are older kids or teenagers.
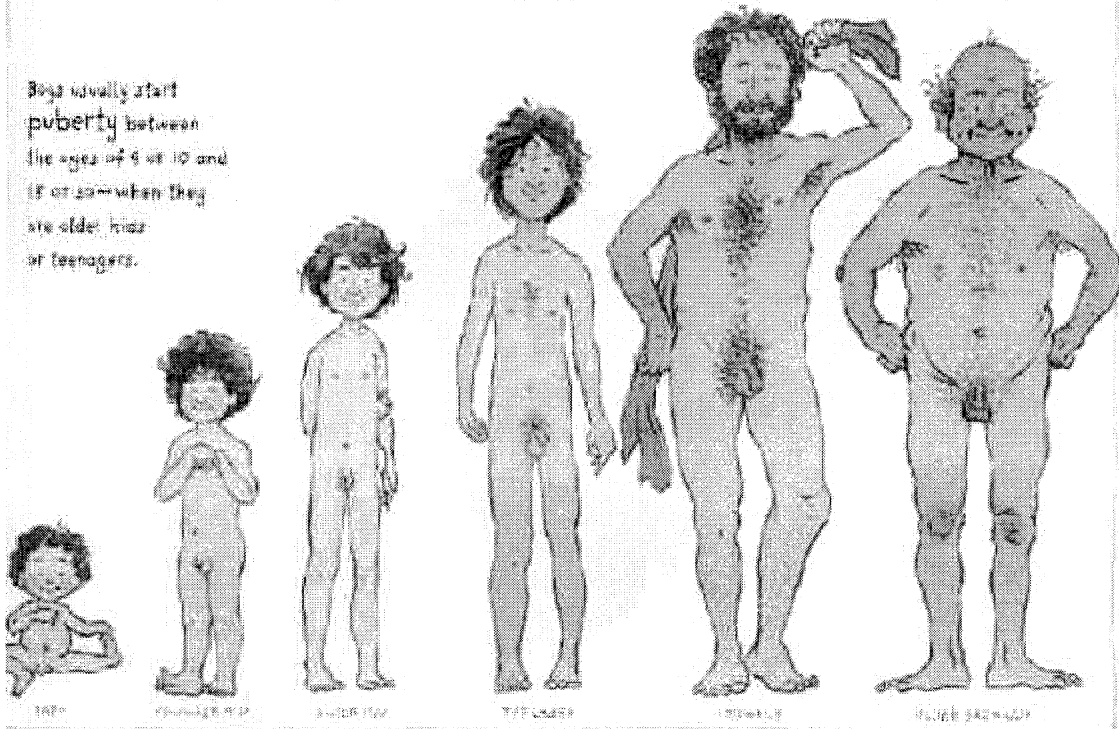
1. Imagine that you purchased this book for you library based on its good reviews and need for a book on this topic in your collection. After seeing this page what do you do?

○   Imagine that you purchased this book for you library based on its good reviews and need for a book on this topic in your collection. After seeing this page what do you do? Place the book on the "New Books in the Library" display.

○   Put the book on the shelf.

○   Label the book "Young Adult" then place on the shelf.

○   Place the book on a restricted shelf for teachers, counselors and parents.

○   Decide not to place the book in the library collection.

Other (please specify)

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Johnson - Survey of Middle School Librarians

8. Thank you

Thank you for your participation in this survey of middle school librarians. Your time and attention are appreciated.

Thank you,
Candace Johnson
Rowan University Graduate Student in School and Public Librarianship
Glassboro, NJ
candijjj@comcast.net

1. Please use the space below if you have any additional comments about this survey.

Please use the space below if you have any additional comments about this survey.