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# The use of blocking software or Internet filters in southern New Jersey public libraries

Suzi I. Freedman
*Rowan University*

THE USE OF BLOCKING SOFTWARE OR

INTERNET FILTERS IN SOUTHERN

NEW JERSEY PUBLIC LIBRARIES

By
Suzi I. Freedman

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　　　　　　Professor

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# ABSTRACT

Suzi I. Freedman
THE USE OF BLOCKING SOFTWARE OR
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NEW JERSEY PUBLIC LIBRARIES
2003/04
Dr. Marilyn Shontz
Master of Arts in School and Public Librarianship

The purpose of this study was to determine if public libraries in southern New Jersey have installed blocking software or filters on their Internet computers and, specifically, to find out what types of filters or blocking software they were currently using in their libraries. The study wanted to see how satisfied librarians were with their filters or blocking software. The study also looked at whether or not public libraries in southern New Jersey have written Acceptable Use Policies which define access to the Internet for some or all of their patrons, including children under the age of eighteen. Finally, the study examined whether or not public librarians were aware of Federal regulations including the Children's Internet Protection Act. This applied research design employed mailed questionnaires to collect data from 67 public libraries in southern New Jersey. Analysis of the data revealed that many smaller public libraries have not installed filters or blocking software on their Internet computers. Approximately half the libraries surveyed were utilizing filters or blocking software on their Internet computers for either adults or children under the age of eighteen.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Internet is a worldwide computer network that connects millions of computer

systems and people. It offers the benefits of exchanging messages using electronic mail

(e-mail), searching a variety of online databases and World Wide Web pages,

downloading files, exchanging information using mailing lists, and logging into remote

systems (Meghabghab, 1997). Many online services are used by academics, consumers,

students, and office workers to send and receive text, photographs, sounds, and video

images. Many organizations in general, and public libraries in particular, have built

significant computer networks and have connected to the Internet (Bertot, McClure, &

Fletcher, 1997). With increased use of Web sites, libraries need to take on additional

responsibilities for providing access to the information on the Internet. One problem

currently facing public librarians is whether or not to install filters or blocking software

on some or all of their Internet computers.

Significance of the Problem

Some of the current issues facing public libraries are the issues of censorship and

First Amendment rights, privacy, and the rights of patrons, including children under the

age of eighteen. Carol Tenopir, a professor in the School of Library and Information

Science, the University of Tennessee at Knoxville stated that, "The American Library

Association (ALA) consistently opposes policies that restrict access to any library

materials or services, or that discriminate against any category of library user"

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(Tenopir, 1997, p. 33). The ALA has also taken the position that filtering of Internet sites by public libraries infringes upon First Amendment free speech rights and has chosen to establish policies in support of the First Amendment (American Library Association, 1997). However, public libraries are faced with the dilemma of recently proposed Federal legislation entitled the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) which threatens to discontinue Federal funds given to public libraries if libraries do not provide filters for their Internet computers for children.

## Purpose of the Study

The study looked at the issue of filters or blocking software for Internet computers in public libraries, and if public libraries had written policies which limited access to the Internet for some or all of its patrons, including children under the age of eighteen. In addition, the study examined the positions of public librarians as they relate to CIPA and their satisfaction with their current filters or blocking software.

## Research Questions

1. What are southern New Jersey public libraries currently doing about filters or blocking software on their Internet computers?

2. What types of filters or blocking software do southern New Jersey public libraries currently own?

3. What are the attitudes of southern New Jersey public librarians toward filters or blocking software?

4. Do southern New Jersey Public Libraries have written policies in place for computer use by patrons?

5. To what extent do southern New Jersey public librarians know about CIPA?

## Definition of Terms

Acceptable Use Policy (AUP): Written rules and responsibilities, usually published by a network operator, that establish the conditions under which users may access network services. Breaches of an AUP may result in the termination of user privileges. Schools often request that the students and their parents sign a form agreeing to the appropriate use of the Internet and to the imposition of penalties for the misuse of the Internet (McCain & Merrill, 2001, p. 1).

American Library Association (ALA): The national professional library association located in Chicago, Illinois. Founded in 1876, it is the oldest and largest national library association in the world. The membership represents state, academic, public, school, and special libraries (McCain & Merrill, 2001, p. 6). The acronym ALA is used throughout this paper.

Blocking software: Software that electronically screens out network-supplied material deemed offensive, indecent, or obscene. When such software is used, targeted material will not appear on the user's desktop computer. Some computer software prohibits access to certain Internet sites or prohibits searching Internet sites using specific keywords. The software is also known as filter or filter software. The American Library Association opposes the use of blocking software. Access to Electronic Information, Services, and Networks, one of the Association's interpretations of the Library Bill of Rights, states its position on access to electronic resources (McCain & Merrill, 2001, pp. 23-24).

Children: For purposes of this study children will be defined as library patrons under the age of eighteen.

Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA): For purposes of this study the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) will be defined as proposed Federal legislation that deals with Federal money for public libraries and the use of blocking software. Under CIPA, a public library may not receive federal assistance to provide Internet access unless it installs software to block images that constitute obscenity or child pornography, and to prevent minors from obtaining access to material that is harmful to them (American Library Association, CIPA, 2000). The acronym CIPA is used throughout this paper.

Computer: A programmable machine that processes data. Its components include the central processing unit (CPU); input devices such as a mouse or keyboard; storage devices such as a hard drive and secondary storage such as a floppy disk drive; and output devices such as a monitor and a printer (McCain & Merrill, 2001, p. 44).

Filters or filtering software: See definition for Blocking software.

Internet: A worldwide network of computer networks linked together. Electronic mail, listservs, file transfer, and newsgroups are examples of communication services accessed on the system (McCain & Merrill, 2001, p. 101).

Internet Computer: For purposes of this study an Internet computer is a computer that has access to the World Wide Web.

Likert Scale: For purposes of this study a Likert Scale is a type of ordinal scale which defines the relative position of objects or individuals with respect to a characteristic, with no implication as to a "rank order." (Powell, 1997, p. 43).

Patron: An individual who is a regular library user or library supporter (McCain & Merrill, 2001, p. 148).

Policies and procedures: Plans or guidelines that delineate acceptable practices and actions for a wide range of activities such as collection development, circulation, and inventory (McCain & Merrill, 2001, p. 153).

Public library: A publicly funded library that provides library services to all the people in a community (McCain & Merrill, 2001, p. 160).

South Jersey Regional Library Cooperative (SJRLC): The South Jersey Regional Library Cooperative (SJRLC) is a multi-type library cooperative serving 600 member libraries in Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, and Salem Counties. SJRLC is part of the New Jersey Library Network linking over 2500 libraries statewide. SJRLC services are funded from state tax funds appropriated by the New Jersey Legislature for the New Jersey Library Network (www.sjrlc.org). The acronym SJRLC is used throughout this paper.

World Wide Web (WWW or the Web): A hypermedia-based Internet information system with a global aggregation of data that can be accessed from a vast array of linked resources simply by choosing highlighted works or icons on the home page or root file of several types of browsers. A graphical user interface allows access to text, audio, pictures, or even motion video from all over the world (McCain & Merrill, 2001, p. 215).

### Assumptions and Limitations

An assumption of this study was that public libraries were currently following their written policies, if any, regarding filters or blocking software on their Internet computers. Another assumption was that public libraries were currently allowing access to Internet computers by all patrons, including children.

One limitation of this study was that the questionnaire would be sent to public libraries who were members of the SJRLC.

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CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The Internet can be a wonderful resource for adults and children to explore, examine, and retrieve an abundance of facts and information. With the growth of the Internet during the 1990s, the amount and content of information found on the Internet enlarged greatly. There is now unlimited information of all types available to anyone who has access to the Internet via a computer. The Internet also provides information considered by many to be offensive and inappropriate for viewing, especially by children. A library patron can begin at a website that contains legitimate information and follow link after link to a page that contains information of questionable value or misleading information. Web sites containing materials that are sexually explicit, lurid, or violent in nature can be easily found. What one individual considers objectionable may be perfectly acceptable to another (Meghabghab, 1997). Public libraries are now faced with the dilemma of whether or not to provide free, equal, and unrestricted access to the Internet for all of its patrons, including children under the age of eighteen, or restrict access by way of Internet filters or blocking software.

Historical Context

Libraries in the United States have been collectively battling against censorship since the ALA issued its first Library Bill of Rights in 1939, a document proclaiming the

ALA's basic policy on intellectual freedom (Bastian, 1997, p. 1). Librarians in the past have been effective in defending their print collections against censorship and in justifying their right to provide unrestricted access to information in library collections and equal and fair service to all patrons. Now librarians are faced with a new obstacle. Should they provide totally open Internet access supporting intellectual freedom principles and First Amendment rights or should they regulate access to the Internet by filtering out undesirable information?

The term filters or blocking software, used interchangeably in this study, is software that electronically screens out network-supplied material deemed offensive, indecent, or obscene (McCain & Merrill, 2001, pp. 23-24). It has been found that filters are not always effective. They may block out useful needed information or they may block out material considered to be inoffensive. The ALA has taken the stand that filtering of Internet sites by schools or public libraries violate free speech (American Library Association, 1997). These First Amendment rights extend to children as well as adults.

When the United States Supreme Court declared the Communications Decency Act unconstitutional on June 26, 1997, it stopped attempts to limit Internet access in the name of protecting citizens by declaring that . . ."the interest in encouraging freedom of expression in a democratic society outweighs any theoretical but unproven benefit of censorship" (Bastian, 1997, p. 2). Later on another act was passed by the United States Congress in 1998 entitled the Child Online Protection Act (COPA). COPA required web sites publishing "harmful to minors" material to restrict access to minors via a credit card

or other methods (Rogers & Oder, 2001, November, p. 1). However, a court challenge blocked enforcement of COPA, though one provision led to the establishment of the COPA Commission, which later advised against mandatory filters (Rogers & Oder, 2001, November, p. 1).

To ensure that federal funds administered through a variety of programs would be used properly by public and school libraries, another act was signed into law by President Clinton called the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) in December of 2000. This act stated that federal funds could be withheld from libraries if they failed to set certain safety policies or implement some type of Internet filtering (Roger & Oder, 2001, November, p. 1). As expected, the ALA and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed separate but similar lawsuits on March 20, 2001 challenging the constitutionality of the CIPA legislation. The ALA firmly stated that it was opposed to the use of any mandated blocking or filtering technology on computers used by children and adults in public libraries. It defined filtering as restricting access to "constitutionally protected information" (Rogers & Oder, 2001, May, p. 1). The ALA also stated that no filter could claim to block only the categories of prohibited material "harmful to minors" on children's terminals and obscenity and child pornography on all terminals in public libraries (Rogers & Oder, May, 2001, p. 1).

The lawsuit brought by the ALA and the ACLU opposing CIPA went before a three-judge federal panel in Philadelphia. In a 195-page decision handed down May 31, 2002, the panel of judges found that Internet filter software tended to block access to Web sites that contain protected speech and threw out portions of CIPA which required libraries receiving federal funds to use software that filtered out pornographic content.

Judith Krug, Director of the ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom, said that CIPA created a situation that forced economically disadvantaged libraries "to use their already scarce resources to install expensive and unreliable filtering software, or be stripped of important financial assistance that they need to provide online access to all users (Reid, 2002, p. 1). An appeal of this court decision went before the United States Supreme Court and a decision was announced on June 23, 2003.

The Supreme Court ruled in 2003, that "that the First Amendment does not prohibit Congress from forcing public libraries – as a condition of receiving federal funding – to use software filters to control what patrons access online via library computers" (Hilden, 2003, p. 1). Thus because the CIPA legislation was found to be constitutional and not against the First Amendment, public libraries needed to make decisions regarding the installation of filters or blocking software. Prior to the Supreme Court decision, a number of studies had been conducted about the use of filters in public libraries.

Internet Use in Public Libraries

Many schools in the United States already have in place some form of Internet Use Policy commonly referred to as an Acceptable Use Policy (AUP). These AUP documents explain a school district's Internet usage plan, instructional strategies, and rationale. The guidelines are written in language clear enough in order for students at all levels to understand what is and is not appropriate behavior when online. Most schools have the parents of each student sign an AUP which is then kept on file in the individual

school. However, in a public library it may not be feasible to have each patron sign an AUP. Some public libraries have chosen to develop some form of an AUP for its patrons' use of the Internet but not all public libraries have developed these policies.

The public library may be the only facility where some patrons are able to gain access to the Internet. By voluntarily filtering access to the Internet, some public libraries believe that they are providing safe environments for their patrons, but there are no guarantees that inappropriate material will not be viewed. The public libraries that have installed Internet filters are doing so partly because of fears that libraries may be viewed as providers of illegal material because of patrons who deliberately access and view pornography and other indecent materials. Libraries want to protect children who access their facilities. Every library across the United States has to decide if and when they will provide Internet filters on all or some of their Internet computers, regardless of the United States Supreme Court decision that was handed down on June 23, 2003 in reference to CIPA.

The pros for filtering involve providing for the user's needs; addressing the concerns parents may have about their children accessing indecent materials over the Internet; ensuring the safety of children; and providing policies to safeguard Internet use. The cons for filtering involve arguments from the ACLU and the ALA that public libraries should provide unfiltered access to the Internet in order to uphold and maintain individual First Amendment rights to seek and receive all types of information from all points of view and that public libraries should provide access to the Internet with the same constitutional protections that apply to books on library shelves (Burt, 1997, p. 46).

Research on Internet Filters for Public Libraries

Many public libraries have already installed Internet filters on their Internet

computers or are considering installing filters in light of the 2003 Supreme Court ruling

in the CIPA case. These filters would limit or block access to some material found on the

World Wide Web. To assist librarians in making informed decisions about filters, The

Internet Filtering Assessment Project (TIFAP) was developed and conducted under the

direction of library consultant Karen Schneider from April through September, 1997.

(Schneider, 1997, p.1). TIFAP was a volunteer library project that arose from questions

and concerns librarians had about the use of filters in libraries. The purpose of the

project was to take a look at Internet filters from a librarian's point of view. The project

provided useful information about what filtering is and how filtering works, discredited

any myths, and offered articles and links to other sites on filtering and censorship

(Schneider, 1997). TIFAP tested six different filters with blocking enabled, including

keyword blocking. The filters tested were Bess, Cyber Patrol, Cyber Snoop,

Cybersitter, Net Nanny, Netshepherd, and Surfwatch (Schneider, 1997, p. 2).

TIFAP offered evaluations on filtering but did not promote filtering or filtering

products. Questions were developed from issues and concerns librarians had about

filtering performance in libraries. The study found that when librarians were using filters

installed on their Internet computers they could find what they were searching for 78% of

the time, and when they could not, the filter was blocking the information. More than

35% of the time, filters blocked some type of information that was needed to answer a

reference question. Nursery rhymes and government archives were blocked because of

keywords such as "pussycat" and "XXX" (Schneider, 1997, p. 4). The filters also

blocked sites with information similar to what would be found in public libraries, such as

Web sites for hate groups, press releases on sex offenders, organizations for gay teens,

and so on (Schneider, 1997, p. 4). Overall, the conclusions of this study were that if

public librarians did not need filters, they should not waste their money – most filters did

not do the job they were intended to perform.

Another similar study was conducted by Christopher D. Hunter of the University

of Pennsylvania. He studied various kinds of filters and concluded that . . . "filters are

not a particularly effective technology for protecting children from objectionable Internet

content" (Hunter, 2000, p. 222).

The researcher also found a study entitled Public Libraries and the Internet 2000

that was conducted by two professors at Florida State University. This study was a

follow-up to previous studies for the National Commission on Libraries and Information

Science in Washington, D.C. The Public Libraries and the Internet 2000 study provided

date regarding the percentage of public libraries that are connected to the Internet, the

speed of access to the Internet, funding sources that support Internet connectivity, the use

of online database resources, blocking technologies and the extent and nature of public

access Internet use policies (Bertot & McClure, 2000, p. 1).

Summary

In the aftermath of the June 23, 2003 Supreme Court ruling on the CIPA

legislation, many public libraries had to make some difficult decisions. Should they filter

their Internet computers or risk losing Federal money if they refused to install filters or

blocking software? Also, if public libraries choose to purchase and install filters, what

kinds of filters should they buy and will they do the job that they were intended to do? These are only some of the questions that this study attempted to find answers to.

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# CHAPTER THREE

## METHODOLOGY

### Overall Design and Justification

This study examined the use of filters or blocking software for Internet computers in public libraries in southern New Jersey as well as the attitudes of public librarians toward filters or blocking software. In addition, this study investigated whether or not public libraries in southern New Jersey have written AUPs which limit access to the Internet for some or all of its patrons, including children under the age of eighteen. Lastly, the study looked at recent Federal regulations including the Children's Internet Protection Act and the level of awareness that public librarians in southern New Jersey have of CIPA.

The applied research design of this study entailed mailing a questionnaire (see Appendix A) and a cover letter (see Appendix B) to all public libraries in southern New Jersey. The design of the questionnaire was selected as a qualitative research technique to gather data to increase the researcher's familiarity with the use of filters or blocking software on Internet computers in southern New Jersey public libraries and the attitudes of librarians with regard to CIPA and filters.

Data were collected by mailed questionnaire which encouraged frank answers, provided anonymity, eliminated interview bias, and was relatively inexpensive to administer (Powell, 1997, pp. 90-91).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if public libraries in southern New Jersey have installed blocking software or filters on their Internet computers and, specifically, to find out what types of filters or blocking software they were currently using in their libraries. In addition, the study wanted to see how satisfied librarians were with their filters or blocking software. The study also looked at whether or not public libraries in southern New Jersey have written AUPs which limit access to the Internet for some or all of their patrons, including children under the age of eighteen. Finally, the study examined whether or not public librarians were aware of new Federal regulations including CIPA and how this legislation might affect their libraries.

Research Questions

1. What are southern New Jersey public libraries currently doing about filters or blocking software on their Internet computers?

2. What types of filters or blocking software do southern New Jersey public libraries currently own?

3. What are the attitudes of southern New Jersey public librarians toward filters or blocking software?

4. Do southern New Jersey public libraries have written policies in place for computer Internet use by patrons?

5. To what extent do southern New Jersey public librarians know about CIPA?

Population and Sample

The researcher was able to determine that there are approximately sixty-seven public libraries in southern New Jersey from the information obtained from the web site

of the South Jersey Regional Library Cooperative (see Appendix C). Since

questionnaires were mailed to all sixty-seven public libraries in southern New Jersey, the

population and the sample were the same.

Variables

This research study included several variables. A variable may be thought of as

"any property of a person, thing, event, setting, and so on that is not fixed" (Powell, 1997,

p. 30). The variables in this study were the number of Internet computers in public

libraries in southern New Jersey, the number of Internet computers with filters or

blocking software in public libraries in southern New Jersey, the number of public

libraries with a written AUP for their Internet computers, and the number of public

librarians with knowledge of CIPA.

Data Collection, Questionnaire Design and Reliability

The method of data collection for this study was a written questionnaire (see

Appendix B) designed by the researcher that was mailed to sixty-seven public libraries in

southern New Jersey. It consisted of ten questions plus a comment section that was

optional for the respondents. The first two questions asked for the number of Internet

computers currently in use for adults and children in the public library and how many of

these Internet computers had blocking software or filters installed on them. The third

question asked the respondent to check off the names of all blocking software or filters

that their library currently was using on their Internet computers. The fourth and fifth

questions utilized a Likert Scale (ranging from 1 being the lowest to 5 being the highest)

to ask the respondents' level of satisfaction with their current filters or blocking software.

Questions six and seven consisted of either a yes or no answer to the question of whether

or not their library currently had a written AUP for adults and children under the age of

eighteen. The eighth question asked if the respondents were knowledgeable about CIPA.

Questions nine and ten also consisted of either a yes or no answer to the question of the

need for filtering of Internet computers for adults or children. Question eleven was

simply space for the respondent to make any additional comments about the use of

blocking software or filters on Internet computers in their libraries.

The researcher designed the questionnaire and pretested it with two different

groups of people. The questionnaire was given to a number of librarians at the Evesham

Branch of the Burlington County Library System to answer and also to colleagues at

Rowan University. Reliability was established through this evaluation with colleagues

and librarians not included in the sample. After making changes to the questionnaire

based on the results of the pretest, the researcher mailed out the questionnaire (see

Appendix A) with a cover letter (see Appendix B) to the sixty-seven public libraries in

southern New Jersey (see Appendix C). A stamped, return envelope was provided in the

mailing to the libraries. In addition, on the back of the survey, the researcher put her

name and address so that respondents could request a copy of the research results. The

design of the questionnaire encouraged honest answers and guaranteed anonymity for the

respondent. The questionnaire was coded with a number prior to mailing. The researcher

used this number code for identifying non-respondents for a possible second mailing.

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# CHAPTER FOUR

## ANALYSIS OF DATA

### Response to Questionnaire

During the second week of March 2003, questionnaires (see Appendix B) were mailed to sixty-seven public libraries in southern New Jersey (see Appendix C). Telephone calls to librarians who did not respond to the first mailing were made during the last week of March 2003, followed by a second mailing to any librarian that requested an additional copy of the questionnaire. A total of fifty-one questionnaires were returned, for a response rate of seventy-six percent (76%). Of these fifty-one responses, one was discarded because the library did not have any Internet computers and could not therefore answer the questionnaire accurately. Data analysis was completed on 50 useable questionnaires.

### Statistical Analysis

Questionnaires were given a coded number before they were mailed. Upon receipt of each response, the coded number and all the information from the questionnaire were entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet with columns for questions, answers and comments. Results are presented using counts and percentages. Respondents' comments were entered into the spreadsheet verbatim.

Presentation of Results

Question 1 – How many Internet computers are currently in your library to be used by adults and children?

Every one of the 50 librarians who responded to the questionnaire had Internet computers for use by its patrons, either for adults or children.

Question 2 – How many Internet computers in your library currently have blocking software or filters for adults and children?

The total number of librarians using filters on adult Internet computers was 19 while 24 librarians responded that they did not use filters or blocking software on their adult Internet computers. Seven librarians responded that they used some filters or blocking software on some but not all of their adult Internet computers.

A total number of librarians using filters on children's Internet computers was 26 while 21 librarians reported that they did not use filters or blocking software on their children's Internet computers. Only one librarian reported that she/he used some filters or blocking software on some but not all of her/his children's Internet computers. Two librarians had no response as to the use of filters or blocking software on their children's Internet computers (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Number of Public Libraries Using Internet Filters or Blocking Software
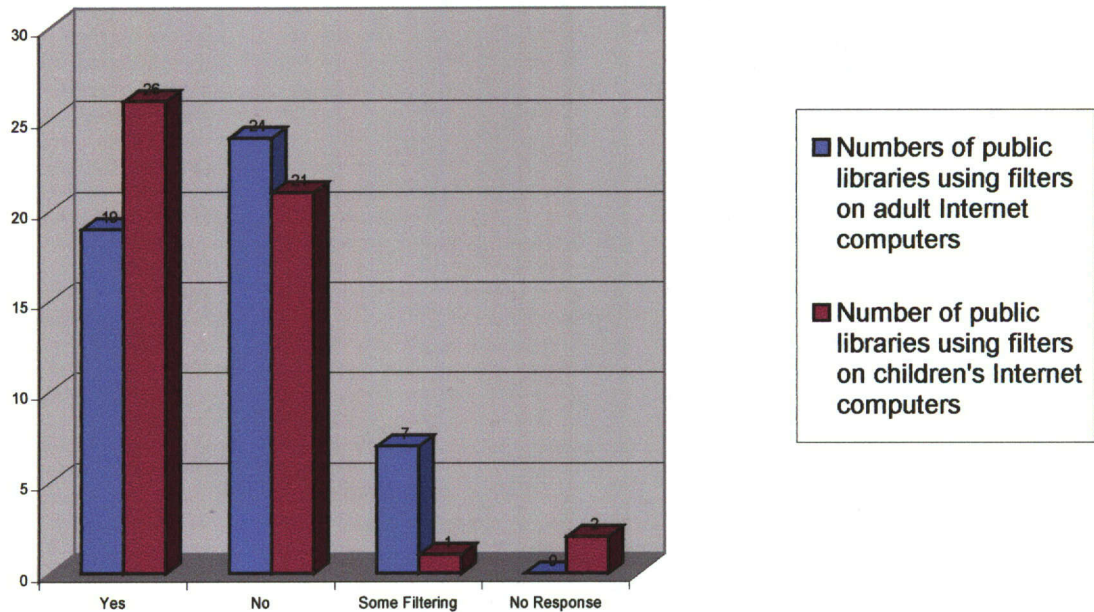


Question 3 – Please check the names of all blocking software that your library is currently using on your Internet computers.

The most popular kind of filters or blocking software was Symantec I-Gear. A total of 17 librarians who responded to the questionnaire stated that this was the filter or blocking software that they were currently using in their libraries. As the researcher did not list Symantec I-Gear as one of the choices, librarians who picked this filter had to write in the name of the filter they were using under the heading of Other. Cybersitter was the next most popular kind of filter with 6 librarians responding that they used this brand. Cyber Patrol received a total of 3 responses and GRC Net Filter received 1 response (again under the heading of Other). All other kinds of filters or blocking software received no responses.

However, the largest number of responses to this question was None. A total of 21 librarians responded that they did not currently use any filters or blocking software in their libraries. Also, 2 librarians responded that they were not sure what kind of filters or blocking software they were using in their library (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 – Names of Filters or Blocking Software Used by Public Libraries
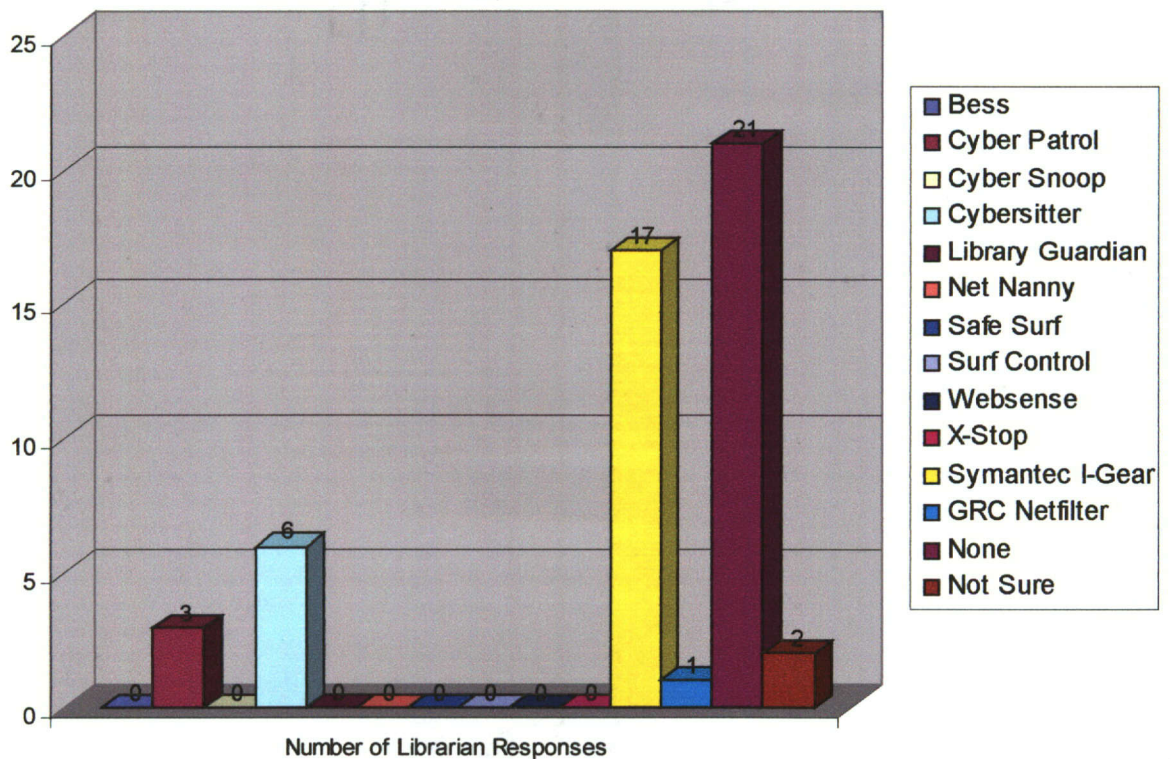


Question 4 – On a scale of 1-5 with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest, how satisfied are you that your blocking software or filters are blocking unwanted sites?

The researcher wanted to determine the attitudes of librarians who were currently using filters or blocking software on their Internet computers. Only respondents who had

filters or blocking software in their libraries were asked to complete this question. A total of 27 librarians responded to this question. A total of 9 librarians responded that they were Very Satisfied with their filters or blocking software, and 9 librarians responded that they were Satisfied with their filters. Six librarians were unable to decide what level of satisfaction to select so they are listed as having a Neutral response. Three librarians were Dissatisfied with their filters and no one selected Very Dissatisfied (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 – Librarian Level of Satisfaction with Filters or Blocking Software
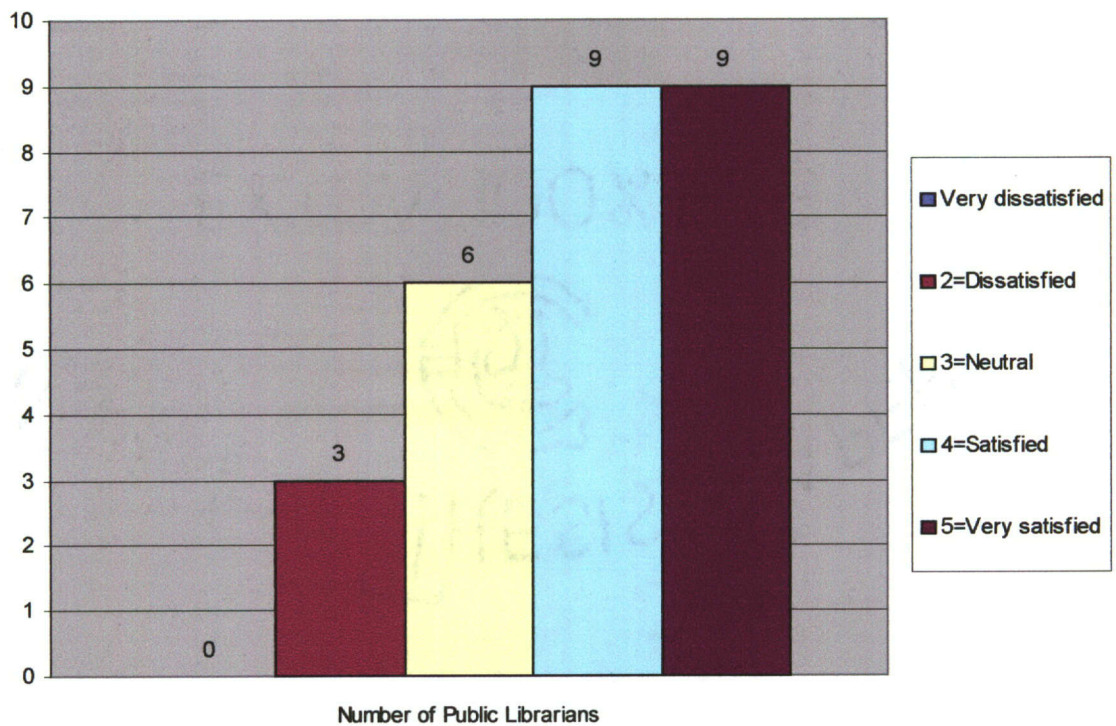


Number of Public Librarians

Question 5 – On a scale of 1-5 with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest, how satisfied are you that your blocking software or filters are blocking too many sites?

Once again only respondents who were currently using filters or blocking software in their libraries were asked to answer Question 5. A total of 26 librarians responded to this question. Seven librarians responded that they were Very Dissatisfied or Dissatisfied that their filters were blocking too many sites. Nine respondents were categorized as Neutral while 7 librarians were Satisfied with the level of filtering being done by their blocking software. Only 3 librarians responded that they were Very Satisfied with their software (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 – Librarian Level of Satisfaction with Filters or Blocking Software Blocking Too Many Sites



Number of Public Librarians
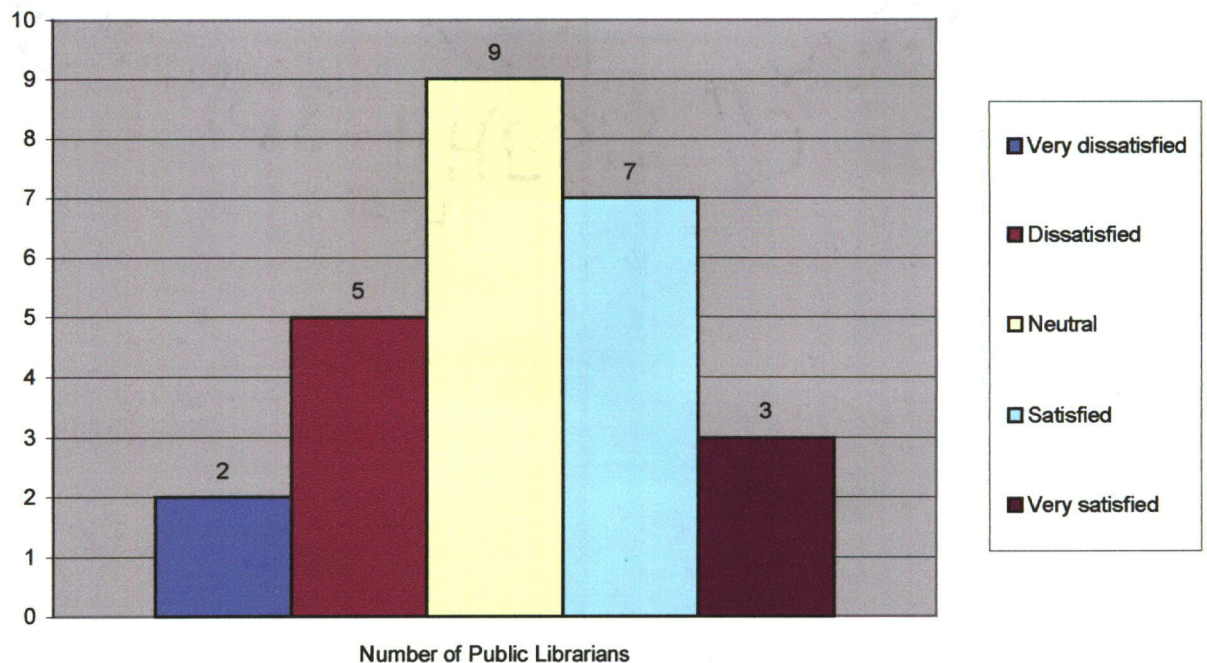
Question 6 – Does your library currently have a written Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) concerning Internet computer usage by adults?

Question 7 – Does your library currently have a written Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) concerning Internet computer usage by children under the age of eighteen?

All librarians surveyed were asked if they had a current written Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) concerning Internet usage by adults and children under the age of eighteen. A total of 42 librarians responded that they did have a written AUP for adults while 8 librarians responded that they did not maintain an AUP for adults. In addition, 37 librarians responded that they had a current written AUP for children under the age of eighteen while 11 librarians did not maintain an AUP. Surprisingly, 2 librarians stated that they did not have a policy for children under the age of eighteen concerning Internet computer usage (see Table 1).

Table 1        Number of Libraries with Written AUP for Internet Computer Usage

|          | Yes | No | No Response |
|----------|-----|-----|-------------|
| Adults   | 42  | 8   | 0           |
| Children | 37  | 11  | 2           |

Question 8 – Do you have knowledge of the current status of the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) legislation concerning the use of blocking software or filters for Internet computers in public libraries?

A total of 49 out of 50 respondents answered Question 8.  A total of 47 out of 50 respondents had some knowledge of CIPA.  Thirteen librarians stated that Yes, they followed the legislation closely, 15 stated Yes, but had not checked the legislation recently, 19 responded that Yes, they knew what the legislation was about, while 2 librarians were Not aware of the legislation (see Figure 5).

Figure 5 –Knowledge of the Children's Internet Protection Act



Number of Librarians' Responses

■ Yes, I followed the legislation closely

■ Yes, but I have not checked the legislation recently

□ Yes, I know what the legislation is about

□ No, I am not aware of the legislation
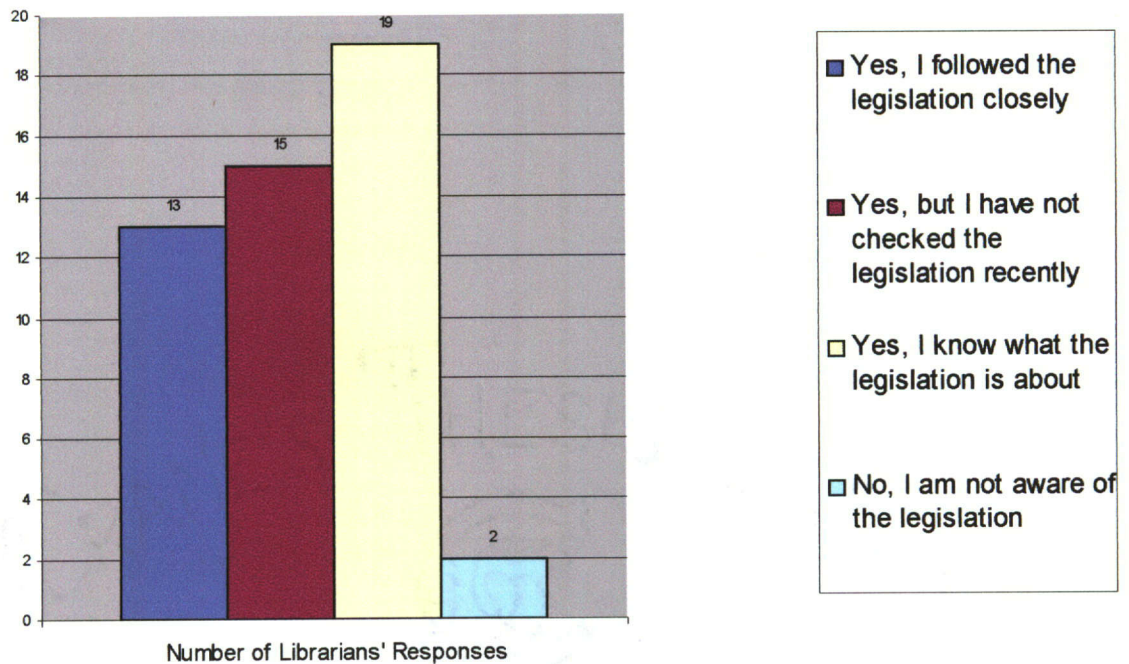
Question 9 – In your opinion, are blocking software or filters needed in your library for adults?

Question 10 – In your opinion, are blocking software or filters needed in your library for children under the age of eighteen?

All librarians were asked if some type of blocking software or filters were needed in their libraries for adults and children under the age of eighteen. A total of 21 librarians responded that blocking software or filters were needed in their libraries for adults while 29 librarians responded that they did not see a need for any type of blocking software or filters for adults. More librarians responded to the question of needing blocking software or filters for children who use Internet computers. A total of 34 librarians felt that some type of blocking software or filters were needed in their libraries for children who use their Internet computers. Only 16 librarians responded that they did not see a need for blocking software or filters for their Internet computers that were used by children (see Table 2).

Table 2                           Need for Blocking Software or Filters in Public Libraries

|          | Yes | No |
|----------|-----|----|
| Adults   | 21  | 29 |
| Children | 34  | 16 |

Question 11 – Please use the space below to make any comments about the use of blocking software or filters on Internet computers in your library.

On each questionnaire there was a space provided for additional comments about the use of blocking software or filters in their libraries. A total of 28 or 56% of the librarians surveyed included comments. The complete text of responses can be found in Appendix D.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

### Summary

With a response rate of 76%, conclusions made regarding the sample can be considered representative. A total of 50 usable questionnaires were completed and returned. All 50 librarians responded to Questions 1 and 2 by stating that each of their libraries maintained Internet computers for use by adults or children.

A total of 17 librarians reported using Symantec I-Gear as their current brand of blocking or filtering software with regard to Question 3. In researching this brand of filtering software, the researcher determined that Symantec I-Gear was designed for public libraries while some of the other brands listed in the questionnaire were for home or office use. If the researcher had known this before the questionnaire was mailed out to the 67 libraries in southern New Jersey, different brands of filters or blocking software would have been listed on the questionnaires.

The researcher found that the attitudes of most librarians who responded to Question 4 regarding their level of satisfaction with filters or blocking software, showed that only 18 respondents were Satisfied or Very Satisfied with their filters. This left 9 respondents who expressed either a Neutral or Dissatisfied attitude about the job their Internet filters were doing.

With regard to responses made to Question 5 about the level of satisfaction with

filters blocking too many Internet sites, only 10 librarians were Satisfied that their filters did not block too many sites. That left 16 respondents who felt Very Dissatisfied, Dissatisfied, or Neutral with regard to their filters. The researcher had to conclude therefore that many librarians were unhappy with the job that the filters or blocking software were performing.

In response to Questions 6 and 7 regarding AUPs in their libraries, a total of 8 librarians out of 50 stated that they did not have a written AUP for Internet computer use by adults or children. The researcher thought this finding was important because the ALA urges every librarian, "To uphold the First Amendment by establishing and implementing written guidelines and policies on Internet use in your library in keeping with your library's overall policies on access to library materials (American Library Association, 1997, p. 3). Before the questionnaires were returned, the researcher believed that almost all public libraries would have an AUP in place as part of their library policy manual.

The responses to Question 8 impressed the researcher because 47 out of 50 librarians had some knowledge of the CIPA legislation. Since this is one of the most important pieces of legislation that affects public libraries, the researcher found this statistic significant.

The responses to Questions 9 and 10 showed that more librarians, 34 out of 50, felt filters or blocking software were needed on their children's Internet computers while only 21 out of 50 librarians believed that filters were needed on adult Internet computers. A surprising result of this study was that 16 librarians responded that they did not believe that any filters were needed for their children's Internet computers. The researcher

believed that the number of librarians who felt that filters were needed for children's Internet computers would be significantly higher.

If you examine the optional comments made by some of the librarians in Question 11, you can see that about 5 respondents had the same attitude as this librarian when she/he stated, "When we have tried Internet Filters (Bess & Cyber Patrol), we found that needed sites were inappropriately blocked" (see Appendix D). Another respondent's comment stated, "Filters should be used only by those who choose to use them. Acceptable use policies are necessary, not filters!" (see Appendix D). One respondent commented that the "tap on the shoulder policy probably works better than any less-than-efficient filter" (see Apendix D).

The researcher also made note of an interesting comment that stated, "Atop each monitor is a 'Zero Tolerance' sign that informs patrons that the use of library equipment to display materials with graphic or sexual content, pictures or text, is PROHIBITED [sic]. If a person on the library staff does see an offender we have a cut-off switch to each computer in the directors [sic] office. . ." (see Appendix D).

The comments were pretty evenly divided among the librarians who favored filters and those who opposed filters. Many of the respondents liked the filters they were using in their public libraries and many others did not see a need for filtering software.

## Conclusions

The researcher found that larger, county libraries tended to have filters or blocking software already installed on their Internet computers at their libraries while smaller libraries either did not have filters or blocking software or saw no need to install them at the time the librarians answered the questionnaire. Some of the respondents were

considering the option of purchasing filters or some type of blocking software in the future (see Appendix D).

This study found that approximately 25% of the librarians who answered the questionnaire knew about the CIPA legislation and were following it closely. Overall, 47 librarians out of a total of 49 responses answered that they were aware of the CIPA legislation to some degree. The researcher took note of this fact because some of the librarians planned to wait and see what the Supreme Court decided about filters and the First Amendment before having to purchase and install them.

The researcher also noted that more libraries were using filters or blocking software on their children's Internet computers than on their adult Internet computers. Of the librarians who had filters on their Internet computers, 18 out of 27 respondents stated that they were satisfied with the job their filters were doing. So even if a number of librarians were opposed to filters, they seemed to be happy with the filtering software that had been installed on their computers.

Accordingly, the questionnaires were completed and returned to the researcher prior to the ruling by the United States Supreme Court. On June 23, 2003, the Court decided that in the case of *United States v. American Library Ass'n. Inc.*, No. 02-361, "that the First Amendment does not prohibit Congress from forcing public libraries - as a condition of receiving federal funding - to use software filters to control what patrons access online via library computers" (Hilden, 2003, p. 1). In light of this Court ruling, the researcher believes that any public library that receives any type of federal funding must purchase and install filters or blocking software on their Internet computers or risk losing their funding.

Recommendations for Further Study

A study needs to be conducted to see if public libraries in the State of New Jersey or nationwide have installed filters or blocking software as a result of the Supreme Court ruling on CIPA and federal funding.

A further study needs to be conducted to gauge patron reactions to the required use of filters or blocking software on all Internet computers in public libraries and to determine how they feel about restricted access to Internet computers versus protecting the rights of children from objectionable material on the Internet.

Further studies need to be done to examine the correlation between library budgets and how they have been affected by the outcome of the Supreme Court ruling.

A more comprehensive study comparing different kinds of filters or blocking software would be helpful to public librarians who will need to purchase or update their software in the future.

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# APPENDIX A

# Southern New Jersey Public Library Survey
# Filters on Internet Use Computers

This survey is designed to provide information about the use of blocking software or filters on Internet computers in public libraries in Southern New Jersey.  For some of the questions you are asked to check the answers.  For other questions you are asked to write in a name of a filter or blocking software.  All survey responses are strictly confidential.

1.  How many Internet computers are currently in your library to be used by:

    Adults _____                    Children _____

2.  How many Internet computers in your library currently have blocking software or filters for:

    Adults _____                    Children _____

3.  Please check the names of any blocking software or filters that your library currently is using on your Internet computers.

    Bess _____
    Cyber Patrol _____
    Cyber Snoop _____
    Cybersitter _____
    Library Guardian _____
    Net Nanny _____
    Safe Surf _____
    Surf Control _____
    Websense _____
    X-Stop _____
    None _____
    Other (please write in the name of your software or filter) _____

    If you answered **None** to Question #3 you may skip Questions #4 and #5 and continue with Question #6 on the back.

4.  On a scale of 1 – 5 with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest, how satisfied are you that the your software or filters are blocking unwanted sites?

    1 _____        2 _____        3 _____        4 _____        5 _____

5.  On a scale of 1 – 5 with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest, how satisfied are you that your software or filters are blocking too many sites?

    1 _____        2 _____        3 _____        4 _____        5 _____

6. Does your library currently have a written Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) concerning Internet computer usage by adults?

   Yes _____          No _____

7. Does your library currently have a written Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) concerning Internet computer usage by children under the age of eighteen?

   Yes _____          No _____

8. Do you have knowledge of the current status of the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) legislation concerning the use of blocking software or filters for Internet computers in public libraries? (**Please check one**)

   _____ Yes, I followed the legislation closely
   _____ Yes, but I have not checked the legislation recently
   _____ Yes, I know what the legislation is about
   _____ No, I am not aware of the legislation

9. In your opinion, are blocking software or filters needed in your library for adults?

   Yes _____          No _____

10. In your opinion, are blocking software or filters needed in your library for children under the age of eighteen?

    Yes _____          No _____

11. Please use the space below to make any comments about the use of blocking software or filters on Internet computers in your library.

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

Thank you for your assistance!

Please use enclosed envelope
to return survey to:
Suzi Freedman
102 Kains Court
Marlton, NJ 08053

# APPENDIX B

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Dear Library Branch Manager,

As a graduate student at Rowan University in the School and Public Librarianship Program, I am conducting a research project as part of my Master's thesis under the supervision of Dr. Marilyn Shontz. The purpose of my research is to determine to what degree public libraries in southern New Jersey are currently using, planning to use or not using blocking software or filters on their Internet use computers.

Surveys are being mailed out to all public libraries in southern New Jersey. Participation in this survey is strictly voluntary, and your responses will be kept anonymous and confidential. You need not respond to all questions in the survey, however your responses will help my research to reflect the current usage of blocking software or filters on Internet use computers in public libraries in southern New Jersey.

Please complete this survey and return it to me in the enclosed, stamped return envelope. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this survey, please contact me by e-mail at canadasuzi@aol.com. You can contact Dr. Marilyn Shontz at (856) 256-4500 Ext. 3858, or by e-mail at shontz@rowan.edu.

Thank you for taking the time to assist me with this research.

Sincerely,

Suzi I. Freedman

APPENDIX C

# List of Libraries

Absecon Public Library

Atlantic City Free Public Library

Atlantic County Library

Audubon Free Public Library

Bass River Community Library

Beth Israel Community Library

Beverly Free Library

Bridgeton Free Public Library

Burlington County Library, Headquarters

Burlington County Library, Bordentown Branch

Burlington County Library, Cinnaminson Branch

Burlington County Library, Maple Shade Branch

Burlington County Library, Pemberton Branch

Burlington County Library, Pinelands Branch

Camden County Library, Headquarters

Camden Free Public Library

Cape May City Public Library

Cape May County Library

Cherry Hill Free Public Library

Collingswood Free Public Library

Crosswicks Public Library

Cumberland County Library

Delanco Public Library

Deptford Public Library

East Greenwich Public Library

Elmer Public Library

Florence Township Library Association

Franklin Township Public Library

Free Public Library of Monroe Township

Gloucester City Library

Gloucester County Library, Headquarters

Gloucester County Library, Glassboro Branch

Gloucester County Library, Greenwich Branch

Gloucester County Library, Logan Branch

Haddonfield Public Library

Library Company of Burlington

Linwood Public Library

Margaret E. Heggan Free Public Library

Margate City Public Library

Marie Fleche Memorial Library

McCowan Memorial Library

Merchantville Reading Centre

Millville Public Library

Moorestown Library

Mt. Holly Library

Mount Laurel Library

Newfield Public Library

Oaklyn Memorial Library

Ocean City Free Public Library

Otto Bruyns Public Library of Northfield

Penns Grove-Carney's Point Public Library

Pennsauken Free Public Library

Pennsville Public Library

Riverside Public Library

Riverton Free Library Association

Runnemede Free Public Library

Salem Free Public Library

Sally Stretch Keen Memorial Library

Stratford Free Public Library

Swedesboro Public Library

Vineland Public Library

Waterford Township Public Library

Wenonah Free Public Library

West Deptford Free Public Library

Westville Public Library

Willingboro Public Library

Woodbury Public Library

APPENDIX D

"We are a community and school library so we have an AUP for the children to sign. Most of the children that come during public hours are from the school. I do not believe the person who is here during every [sic] public hours has non-school students sign an AUP."

"Filters are supplied and installed by the County Library. As I am the only employee of the library, I rely heavily on filtering. I do have a volunteer to supervise computers (& children) on 2 evenings, otherwise children younger than 16 years cannot use computer without they're [sic] own supervision. (Parent or old siblings etc.)."

"In a library the size of ours where all internet computers are located in same area, the 'tap on the shoulder' policy probably works better than any less-than-efficient filter."

"We, library professional staff, have selected very few categories to be blocked on adult computers. Although these blocked sites are ultimately chosen by someone else, I feel selecting the categories is an extension of materials selection. The hundred of sites available would make it impossible to evaluate each one. We depend on book reviewers to evaluate books, we don't read each one."

"I received conflicting reports from librarians at this branch. One supports the Library Bill of Rights & believes we should fight any censorship attempts. One of the YS librarians strongly feels that filters make children & their parents more comfortable. As a reference librarian, I feel that many informational sites are unnecessarily blocked, but I am glad that physically graphic sites are now blocked & no longer shown on public PC screens."

"By request, we can unblock a computer. I think this should be available at all libraries".

"An Acceptable Use Policy and strict enforcement is the most effective tool for controlling Internet use. Filtering is available on some units to satisfy demand for its availability. It is not very effective."

"Given the close proximity of our terminals to each other and the small number of our staff who cannot provide 'too much observation' we feel that for us – 'filtering' is an answer for us."

"We are going to a new automation system and are exploring filtering solutions in that context."

"Because six computers are in the Children's Area of the library, we filter the computers so the children are not exposed to questionable sites."

"It has been my experience that no filter or blocker stops those who are looking. Rather it blocks legitimate research. And the technology changes so quickly you need a full-time staff person to monitor which is not a good use of resources. Also, what's the point of being in the business of providing information if we must arbitrarily block it?"

"Filters should be used only by those who choose to use them. Acceptable use policies are necessary, not filters!"

"We will be switching to N2H2 Bess in the next month."

"Our Internet monitors are extremely visible, that's the only reason we need filters."

"Whenever I did not have filtering, children and adults accessed visual pornography in a matter of MINUTES [sic]! It is a serious, chronic problem, and I will not expose the children to those images. In my small library, all the screens are visible."

"Atop each monitor is a 'Zero Tolerance' sign that informs patrons that the use of library equipment to display materials with graphic or sexual content, pictures or text, is PROHIBITED [sic]. If a person on the library staff does see an offender we have a cut-off switch to each computer in the directors [sic] office. This gives us control over each computer without placing staff members in a position of immediate confrontation. Our opinion is that CIPA is interrelated with E-Rate. As we don't currently have E-Rate we have minimal concerns regarding legislature [sic]. We are in the process of attaining E-Rate status, and when we reach the stage that we have to prove we have filtering, we will revisit this entire issue. Until then, we closely follow legislation and court cases regarding this issue. Lastly, we have closely evaluated all available filtering products, and in our opinion not a SINGLE [sic] one is designed for, or appropriate for, a public library."

"Not at this time – we 'tap on patron shoulder', ask them to remove offensive material."

"Constitutional issue involved. Most individuals who have had privileges revoked were adults. But blocking software is problematic."

"My library board of trustees believes we'll be on a slippery slope if we filter on even one PC."

"We are a member of our county library system and receive internet access through that system. Filtering will be done through the county system in the near future. We will be able to disable the filter for adult use."

"We closely monitor computer usage in our small public library."

"The filters let through some unsuitable photographs (they seem more sensitive to words) and also block some sites and some functions, including some patron e-mail, that should not be blocked."

"Until the software was installed we were having many many problems – no longer."

"When we have tried Internet Filters (Bess & Cyber Patrol), we found that needed sites were inappropriately blocked."

"The computers used in our library have another type of protective software – one that resets the computer after rebooting to protect the next patron."

"Many workstations are available to adults and children. The reference department has non-filtered computer access in staff monitored areas."

"When we move to a new building next month, there will be a separate children's room with its own filtered internet terminals."

"I am in the process of gaining access to software to filter Internet for children. It is too time consuming to have staff monitor a childs [sic] use on the computer."