INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM AND THE POLITICS OF READING: LIBRARIES AS
SITES OF CONSERVATIVE ACTIVISM, 1990-2010

BY

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ABSTRACT

During the 1990s and 2000s, conservative activists not only appropriated libraries as battlegrounds for causes like antigay activism, but also incorporated libraries and librarianship into the issue base of the pro family movement. A collection of loosely linked, well-organized grassroots campaigns around issues like opposition to abortion and gay marriage, the pro family movement was a resurgence of conservative activism in the late 20th and early 21st centuries that brought libraries into the culture wars crossfire. Pro family library challenges went beyond objections to particular materials in order to target library policies of open access, collection diversity, and patron privacy. Pro family activists also mounted an explicit critique of the American Library Association (ALA), opposing the ALA’s defenses of intellectual freedom for all ages and all types of media. These activists described their own struggle as a quest to wrest libraries away from the ALA and restore them to parental and taxpayer control.

This dissertation explores why libraries and librarianship became issues in the pro family movement. Written at the intersection of media studies and library history, it places library challenges within a social movement context, illustrating the symbiotic relationship between grassroots campaigns and national pro family groups. It analyzes the writings of individuals and organizations that identify as “pro family” and that target libraries and/or youth reading, discussing media aimed at actual and potential activists. It reveals that conservative library challenges are driven by competing worldviews of reading, information access, and the role of libraries in the community, and explicates how those worldviews inform pro family library activism. Neither librarians’ professional literature nor LIS scholarship has fully recognized how pro family library activism altered the political
landscape of library challenges. This dissertation illustrates that the root quarrel in pro
family challenges is not simply an argument about whether or not certain materials belong in
libraries, but an argument about the purpose of the library and who shall have the right to
determine it.
For Toby
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION: LIBRARIANSHIP AND THE POLITICS OF READING

In February of 2000, conservative organization Focus on the Family’s Citizen Magazine parodied the cover of Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone, the first in a series of books that would soon rank among the most challenged books of the 21st century.¹ A violent image of the young wizard smashed against a pillar on the magazine’s cover was accompanied by a feature story, “The Trouble With Harry,” that catapulted religious objections to the popular title into a broader narrative about the uses and misuses of reading in library services for children.² Though there had been previous skirmishes over Harry Potter in communities throughout the United States, such a prominent discussion of the book in a publication best known for conservative politics revealed that libraries and youth reading had become key rallying points for conservative activists. These activists labeled themselves “pro family,” both because of their interest in and concern for the heterosexual family and because of the moniker’s broad-based, seemingly apolitical appeal.

The pro family movement was a collection of loosely linked, well-organized grassroots campaigns around issues like opposition to abortion and gay marriage that drew resources and inspiration from larger conservative organizations such as James Dobson’s Focus on the Family. The movement represented a resurgence of conservative activism during the 1990s and 2000s that brought not only library materials, but also libraries

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themselves into the cultural and political crossfire. The “trouble with Harry,” it would turn out, was not simply *Harry Potter*, but the librarians who promoted the series, along with a host of other “objectionable” materials under the auspices of the freedom to read. Those who had trouble with *Harry* also had trouble with gay and lesbian-themed children’s books in library collections, unfiltered Internet access in libraries frequented by youth, and librarianship’s commitment to intellectual freedom, in which they perceived a trampling of parental rights, religious freedoms, and community standards. At the heart of the pro-family quarrel with *Harry* lay a competing vision of the purpose of reading and libraries in children’s lives.

Why did libraries become sites of conservative, pro family activism? This dissertation will answer that question, analyzing how late 20th century pro family media texts (1990-2010) interpret reading, intellectual freedom, and the library’s role in youth development. Using discourse analysis, I illustrate how conservative activists employ metaphors, narratives, and tropes about youth reading, libraries, and librarianship in order to stimulate and support library challenges. My sources include print and digital resources authored by individuals and organizations who identify reading or libraries as issues, who self-apply the label “pro-family,” or who target potential library activists as their audience. These sources represent a range of concerns about libraries (gay and lesbian children’s literature, Internet pornography, “bad” books on recommended reading lists); both public and school library settings; a range of scopes (national, state, and local, grassroots organizations); and tones ranging from dogmatic to pragmatic. I analyze these sources in order to inform scholarly and professional understandings of library controversies as the

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politics of reading. Connecting debates over what children should read and how libraries best serve them to broader pro family movement politics, I argue that there is far more to the story of library challenges than the materials an individual parent or community member finds offensive. Rather, the politics of reading link local library battles to a national social movement that seeks to redefine “the public” in its own image.

Of course, “reading” does not simply refer to the act of processing print on the page, but also to “reading” as a cultural signifier. In other words, it demarcates the kinds of engagement with texts that communities recognize, value, and reward. Accordingly, the politics of reading are not simply battles over who controls the contents of libraries; rather, they encompass all power struggles, great and small, over what kinds of reading (and what kinds of libraries) the community shall value and support. My study of the politics of reading identifies libraries as sites of cultural battles over knowledge, authority, and power, battles that are articulated in terms of censorship and intellectual freedom. By revealing these terms as historically bound and politically contested ones, I situate and contextualize library activism within larger structures of power and knowledge that impact libraries, librarians, and young readers.

The Politics of Reading: Definitions and Methodology

This study investigates how the politics of reading link pro family media texts and conservative political activism. Using discourse analysis as my method, I place these texts within the context of the practices that structure pro family power and politics, including
book challenges, organizing citizen campaigns to challenge local library policy, and running pro family candidates for library board offices. Discourse analysis posits that meaning and metaphor do not take place in a vacuum; that rather, they are part of a larger cultural movement that proscribes power relationships between families, communities and libraries. My analysis describes and analyzes pro family media content in order to explain how this content is deployed in the service of a conservative social movement.

Those who wonder why *Harry* should cause so much “trouble” overlook how Americans have historically linked the fate of their polity with the reading behaviors of their youngest citizens. Such a link is likely the legacy of a fledgling republic, whose untried democratic experiment was thought to rely, at least in part, upon the quality of its citizens’ reading. Even twenty-first Americans assume that reading shapes character, and that character, in turn, shapes children into the kinds of future citizens they hope will govern well. Reading is thus implicitly tied to a host of other social “goods”—personal and academic achievement, a well-prepared labor market, an informed citizenry, and (for pro family activists) a morally robust nation.

The controversy over *Harry Potter* is an excellent example of how and why reading is a political issue; though the series’ magical subject matter didn’t endear it to its critics, it was ultimately the series’ treatment of power and authority that made it a target of censure. Those who disapprove of magic are caricatured mercilessly in the persons of the Dursleys, arguably among the least sympathetic of the series’ characters, “…parodies of thought-with-blinders-on, of the idea that there is one proper way to be, and that they know what it is.”

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The message is clear: tolerance and diversity are the core heroic elements, whereas prejudice and intolerance, whether against magic or “mudbloods,” is unacceptable. Pop culture scholar Amanda Cockrell asserts that this explicit embrace of multiple truths or ways of being, coupled with the mocking of the intolerant, makes for an uncomfortable and upsetting read for “…those whose religious faith rests on an unchanging world, where facts stay still.”

The reasons why _Harry Potter_ was controversial, then, had more to do with worldview than with witchcraft, and worldview—particularly notions about the proper power relations among and between family members and public institutions—is precisely what drives the politics of reading.

Competing models and frameworks for understanding reading abound, both among library practitioners and among their most vocal critics, the pro family activists. In order to understand these models and why they matter to the politics of reading, we need to understand “politics” as the creation and maintenance of power relationships in society. For example, youth are among the most powerless Americans; their activities, including reading, are contained, monitored and controlled by adults in authority. The reason their reading is monitored is, in part, because some adults believe the young are more vulnerable readers and will be irreparably harmed by “dangerous” media without adult intervention.

Such a model of reading stressing youth vulnerability might also serve as an effective mobilizing issue for activists by stimulating public anxieties about education into more organized attacks on public institutions such as libraries and schools in the name of “common sense.”

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6 Ibid.
Examining the politics of reading as power relations on either scale is well supported by my methodological approach, because discourse analysis allows me to make the ideology behind pro family views of reading and libraries more visible. Critical pedagogy scholar Peter McLaren defines ideology as “the production and representation of ideas, values, and beliefs and the manner in which they are expressed and lived out by both individuals and groups.”9 Ideology is often taken for granted; seldom recognized, let alone critiqued, a set of circumstances that “we tend to accept as natural and as commonsense.”10 Ideologies structure the relationships between youth and adults in the realm of reading. For example, children are supposed to need protection from harmful reading because proponents believe the realm of childhood (and its assumed innocence) will be corrupted by any contagion from the “real world.” Thus libraries, as institutions ostensibly protecting children and shepherding their reading, should guard the childhood sphere, making certain that nothing controversial or disturbing enters this sacred realm—or so pro family activists argue. This is one of the reasons why libraries are sites of pro family activism.

Another reason is that librarians have successfully associated their professional authority with guiding youth reading, and pro family activists seek to challenge that authority. In addition to bolstering adults’ power over children, pro family media reveals adults competing with other adults for power, or jurisdiction, over youth reading. For instance, using Andrew Abbot’s theory of professional development as the claiming and policing of particular jurisdictions, Christine Jenkins argued that youth services librarianship successfully claimed professional jurisdiction over youth recreational reading, in opposition

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10 Ibid.
and contrast to the pedagogical approach of teachers.\textsuperscript{11} While contemporary librarians struggle to define (and sometimes, defend) their professional jurisdiction in the area of youth reading, pro-family activists contest that jurisdiction, arguing that librarians are not worthy of its trust. My analysis of the pro family media reveals that pro family activists are competing with librarians for power, or jurisdiction, over youth reading.

Discourse analysis can serve as both a theory of how language constitutes these competitions and a method for studying them. It offers an effective lens and theoretical frame for understanding conservative library activism in a social movement context.

Education scholar James Gee argues that language does important work in the world; far from being a neutral medium for conveying ideas, it structures those ideas themselves by producing and participating in creating discourses. Discourses are ways of speaking and reading that do concrete “work” in the world, building material reality by framing particular beliefs about the nature of power and knowledge.\textsuperscript{12} As Gee asserts, “[w]e can use language to make certain sign systems and certain forms of knowledge and belief relevant or privileged, or not, in given situations, that is to build privilege or prestige for one sign system or knowledge claim over another.”\textsuperscript{13} Discourse analysis helps to make such claims, along with the cognitive frameworks that structure them, more visible.\textsuperscript{14} Gee also emphasizes the potential that discourse analysis has to contribute, in terms of understanding

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13 Ibid., 13.

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and intervention, to important issues and problems in an applied area. In this case, the problem or applied area is libraries and librarianship.

Discourse analysis also offers promising possibilities for investigating library conflicts because of its successful use in a related field. Discursive methods have allowed Education researchers to question and examine some of the “commonsense” truths that circulate in American culture about how children should be educated. Like Education, LIS is sometimes plagued by generalizations about youth and reading, and some terms—notably, “intellectual freedom”—are so often used that it can become difficult to ascertain what they mean in different contexts. As Education scholar Maggie MacLure describes it, “[a] discourse-based educational research would set itself the work of taking that which offers itself as commonsensical, obvious, natural, given or unquestionable, and trying to unravel it a bit—to open it up to further questioning.” MacLure and other researchers also focus on how language constructs binary oppositions—for example, teacher vs. student, author vs. reader—and challenge the ways in which those oppositions tend to inscribe particular power relations between actors in the classroom. Such an approach to language is a deconstructive one; that is, it approaches language acknowledging that meanings are multiple and arbitrary, prone to slipping away from intended targets.

My discourse analysis of the pro family media reveals that these texts create, affirm, and maintain systems of power, both within families and between families and public institutions. These discussions of libraries and reading assume that homogeneous communities and traditional hierarchies of knowledge and authority are not simply

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15 Gee, An Introduction to Discourse Analysis, 8.
16 See, for instance, the work of Michael Apple, especially Educating the “Right” Way.
18 Ibid., 73.
desirable, but indispensable to American democracy. Pro family media inscribe power relationships that are congenial to conservative social activism, asserting the “true” authority of the activist over the narrowly defined service function of the librarian. They combine populist appeals for community input into library policy with an almost talismanic belief in the authority and moral superiority of conservative parents—over their children, certainly, but also over liberal parents, professionals, and community members without children. They harness a range of community fears about children’s safety, difference, the federal government, and the future and deploy them in the service of conservative library activism. To analyze these dynamics—and to bring these competing worldviews about libraries and reading to the forefront of professional and scholarly discussions of intellectual freedom—is the project of this dissertation.

**Reader Response Theory: Theoretical Frames**

Catherine Sheldrick Ross’ analysis of turn-of-the-century library discourse on the “fiction question” reveals that there were two persistent metaphors used to describe reading: reading as eating, and reading as a ladder.19 The two metaphors helped librarians to establish their professional expertise as guiders and selectors of “healthy” reading, as well as to articulate a hierarchy or ladder of reading tastes. Sheldrick Ross’ study not only highlights a pivotal moment in the development of librarians’ emerging professional identity as reading experts, but also reveals that metaphors, far from being mere “stylistic flourishes,” are powerful ways of structuring our experience of the world as a way to “discover new

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19 Catherine Sheldrick Ross, “Metaphors of Reading,” *Journal of Library History* 22 (Spring 1987), 147.
meaning."\textsuperscript{20} Moreover, they have important policy implications; if some reading, for example, is more healthy than others, then such metaphors justify policy and practice that privileges certain kinds of reading, and has entailments in the realms, most directly, of collection development and readers’ advisory.

Sheldrick Ross’ study has two key insights that inform pro family models of reading. In the case of the “reading is eating” metaphor, particularly when it is combined with the ladder metaphor to establish a hierarchy of taste, it is far easier to tell a tale of passive readers than of active ones. And passive readers are more likely to need monitoring and guidance: if reading is eating, and eating can be nutritious, bad, or downright poisonous, then readers (particularly vulnerable and inexperienced ones) will need help to discern the good from the junk. It is easy to see why the “reading is eating” metaphor is so prominent in pro family discourse. The second insight from Sheldrick Ross’ study is how reading metaphors are used to dismiss and demean reading (and eating) for pleasure. Along this ladder of taste, the closer reading materials were to pleasure for its own sake, the lower they were on the ladder. A similar hierarchy structures how pro family critics understand youth reading as an overwhelmingly didactic exercise, either ignoring pleasure and aesthetics as part of the experience of reading, or viewing them with suspicion.

Louise Rosenblatt’s scholarship disrupts this casting of youth reading as a primarily instructive enterprise. Her transactional theory of reading not only undermines the notion that reading is an essentially passive activity for the reader, but also highlights the degree to which the reader’s motivations and purpose can structure her interpretation of a text. Rosenblatt describes reading as an interaction between the reader and text, arguing that the reader’s stance toward a text shapes the ways in which he interprets it. She describes the

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
possible stances toward a text as lying on a continuum between *efferent* reading (reading for information) and *aesthetic* reading (reading for pleasure). Using Rosenblatt’s framework, we must not only account for the active meaning-making activities of readers, but also recognize the highly personal and subjective experience of aesthetic reading, or reading for pleasure. As she writes of reader interpretation, “[n]o two readings, even by the same person, are identical. Still, someone else can read a text efferently and paraphrase it for us in such a way as to satisfy our efferent purpose. But no one else can read it aesthetically—that is, experience the evocation of—a literary work of art for us.”

Given this very different view of reading from the one promulgated by pro family activists, one might ask why different purposes for reading—particularly aesthetic ones—are either dismissed or not considered at all by pro family activists. Perhaps it is because instruction (moral and otherwise) is easier to defend than pleasure; in fact, pleasure for own sake is one of the most subversive elements of youth reading, and it is either ignored or condemned by pro-family activists and even some library professionals. Fun, it seems, is all well and good, as long as it keeps youth reading long enough to teach them something. By framing youth reading as a primarily efferent enterprise, pro family activists reinforce structures of power that position young readers as subordinate to texts and to the adults that recommend them. Such a process offers little possibility for interaction or exchange, either between reader and text, or between adults and children. Pro family models of reading that diminish or demean pleasure thus have political consequences in larger battles over education and citizenship.

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22 Ibid., 1068.
In “Reading is Not Eating,” an extension of her groundbreaking research in *Reading the Romance*, Radway analyzes the “reading is eating” metaphor in order to reveal its role in broader social and cultural critiques of mass media. The eating metaphor not only creates a hierarchy of taste—with the “nutritious” reading at the top and the “garbage” that is bad for one at the bottom—but also structures our understanding of media consumption in such a way that the only response to “bad” reading is censorship: if readers consume or are consumed by mass media, then the only way to save them from degradation is to stop destructive forms of media from being produced in the first place. The passivity that the eating metaphor suggests makes it more likely that critics of mass culture will focus on “objectionable materials” instead of “…actually looking at specific encounters between audiences and mass cultural products.”

Radway’s study of romance readers and her critique of the “reading is eating” metaphor have important connections to the politics of youth reading. As with female romance readers, the eating metaphor has been used to simultaneously dismiss the agency of young readers, make pleasure suspect, and cast the popular and mass media as the villain of the educational piece. In taking apart the eating metaphor as Radway did, we are better able to see how it not only structures power relations between young readers, mass media, and the various adults who wish to control that reading, but how it flattens the context of the reading act into a simple, unidirectional encounter between text and young reader, one in which pleasure and aesthetic experience are viewed with unease, if they are acknowledged at all. In pro family activist discourse, the reader’s purposes for reading go unacknowledged in order to argue that texts not only have negative effects, but that they have effects that can

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be predicted ahead of time, regardless of the experience or interpretive skill of the reader, and regardless of how the reader uses them.

Jane Tompkins’ essay, “The Reader in History,” argues that reader response theory, though it seems to be a radical departure from the close textual analysis of the New Critics, is actually another version of the same literary project: explicating what texts mean. To illustrate her argument, Tompkins contrasts modern literary theory of various critical stripes with classical theories of audience response; the ancient Greeks, she argues, were less concerned with what language meant than with what it did to people. Therefore, one studied language and literature in order to understand its power and thereby wield it more effectively. This focus on language’s effects led ancient theorists to be preoccupied not with meaning, but with action; thus, the primary debates of the time centered on “…matters of technique and debates over the morality of literary production.” Classical views of literature that understand it primarily in terms of what it does to people connect well with the models of reading that pro-family activists use to frame their critique of librarianship. For them, is not just that words have power, but also that this power resides in their ability to move readers to particular actions, in a decidedly direct and one dimensional fashion. This rather mechanistic view of literature works directly against the more contemporary literary understanding that art and literature have worth for their own sake. In ancient times, it was the literary critic’s job to parse out how such power was exerted, and to prevent it from being exerted in the wrong directions, or on the wrong people. In contemporary times, pro-family critics argue that the critic’s role has been abandoned by its traditional bearers, and

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25 Ibid., 204.
26 Ibid.
that community activists and parents must assert their authority in order to maintain some kind of control over the power of words on youth. Thus, it is a mistake to view pro family critics as dismissive or ignorant of reader response; rather, they understand response in terms of effects and action, rather than reader interpretation, and organize supporters accordingly. For conservative activists, like their classical counterparts, literature is inextricably bound up in politics: to control what children are reading is to have a great stake in civic life.

**Chapter Overview**

Chapter Two, “The Challenge of Challenges,” provides an overview and discussion of the relevant scholarship on library challenges and controversies, including handbooks and manuals for librarians in order to identify what we know about library conflicts, and what remains the task of this study. I will argue that both scholarly and practitioner literature pay insufficient attention to the social movement context of library challenges and underestimate the power of competing worldviews about reading and libraries. Chapter Three, “Is Your Library Family Friendly?” traces the history of pro family library activism, focusing on the rise of Family Friendly Libraries from grassroots campaign to national prominence. Family Friendly Libraries was historically significant because it shifted the focus of conservative activist challenges from materials to policy, and made critiques of the ALA a prominent feature of all future pro family activism. Chapter Four, “Pro Family Models of Reading and Intellectual Freedom” analyzes frameworks or models of youth and reading promulgated in the library and the pro family media, exploring the latter’s roots in Biblical literalism,
hierarchical models of parent/child relations, and banking models of education. It uses *Harry Potter* as a case study to further explore pro family models of reading, and concludes with an exploration of how librarians use reading research to bolster their defenses of intellectual freedom. Chapter Five, “Now You Know What Diversity Means,” investigates pro family challenges to sex-themed library materials in order to explore how competing views of sex and information are driven by protests against intellectual freedom policies of access and diversity. Using a case study, Parents Protecting the Minds of Children, it illustrates how challenges to “pornographic materials” are actually challenges to the ethics of librarianship. Chapter Six, “Excess Access,” examines the filtering debate between pro family organizations and the ALA, culminating in the upholding of CIPA by the Supreme Court, revealing how the pro family fight for filtering and against pornography was a critique of librarian professionalism and advanced a competing view of library practice and library spaces. Finally, the Conclusion discusses the implications of this research for scholarship and librarianship.
CHAPTER 2
THE CHALLENGE OF CHALLENGES: HOW LIBRARIANS UNDERSTAND PRO FAMILY ACTIVISM

Censorship is not a new problem for librarians; indeed, there have been objections mounted against library materials for as long as there have been libraries.27 Yet the pro family activist movement climate of the 1990s and 2000s impacted how “best practices” and strategies were promoted in advice literature for librarians. In this chapter, I review this practitioner literature in order to analyze the knowledge offered to librarians about censorship and pro family library activism. I consult a wide range of resources intended for librarians seeking advice and inspiration during a materials challenge, including professional statements like the Library Bill of Rights and its Interpretations; the Office for Intellectual Freedom’s Intellectual Freedom Manual (currently in its 8th ed.)28; histories of censorship and intellectual freedom by Evelyn Geller, Louise Robbins, and others29; books of “scenarios from the front lines” for brainstorming and study30; numerous handbooks and manuals for handling challenges such as James LaRue’s The New Inquisition31; and research guides on commonly targeted books, such as Herbert Foerstel’s Banned in the U.S.A.32.

Through a discourse analysis of librarians’ advice literature, I gauge how librarianship as a

profession has understood and responded to pro family library activism. Based on this discussion of practitioner literature, I argue that librarianship, while acknowledging the pro family movement’s influence on libraries, nevertheless failed to fully capture the movement’s power and complexity, and thus failed to fully engage with the worldviews that drove its library activism.

As the pro family movement became more visible and more openly critical of librarianship, the practitioner literature about censorship began to acknowledge these activists’ power. By the 2000s, most handbook authors recognized that pro family library challenges had a distinct character, referred to pro family organizations as “pressure groups,” and warned librarians of these groups’ threat to intellectual freedom and library practice. For example, from its 5th edition (1996) onward, the Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF)’s Intellectual Freedom Manual discussed organized conservative challenges to library materials, including articles detailing library activists’ motives and strategies. And until its 7th edition (2006), when the OIF began to shy away from labeling complainants as “censors,” all editions of the Manual featured an article entitled “Before the Censor Comes,” which offered suggestions for dealing with organized campaigns like the ones often mounted by pro family organizations. A further sign of librarianship’s recognition of pro family activism was the OIF’s inclusion of noted Christian Right critic Rob Boston in the Manual’s 6th edition (2002), wherein Boston directly addressed library censorship in the context of right wing movements.33 While Boston’s piece and others, such as John Simmons and Eliza Dresang’s handbook School Library Censorship in the 21st Century (2001), were highly critical of pro family challengers, later books like James LaRue’s New Inquisition

(2007) advised librarians to forge positive relationships with pro family individuals and organizations.

Despite these differences in tone and content, the practitioner literature nevertheless exhibits a marked homogeneity in its discussions of materials challenges. All of these resources identify what library materials tend to be challenged, explore the tactics and strategies used by the challengers, and posit theories about the motivations behind such activities. Each also assumes that it is librarians’ professional responsibility to uphold intellectual freedom and oppose censorship. Indeed, the Library Bill of Rights, the cornerstone document of the library profession, exhorts librarians to “challenge censorship” and to “cooperate with all persons and groups resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas.”

But how can librarians “challenge censorship” when those challenging the library identify not as censors, but rather as those are themselves censored by elite professionals? And what does it mean to uphold intellectual freedom in a context where the core values of the profession—access, diversity, and privacy—are contested? Advice literature for librarians tends to sidestep such questions in favor of arming practitioners with a solid foundation of policies and professional principles. The result is a practitioner literature that treats pro family activism as a problem without fully exploring the worldviews that drive the movement.

This is not to say that there is nothing useful in librarians’ professional literature; indeed, librarians’ handbooks successfully highlight common themes among which materials are challenged and why activists target these materials. Because the same books, authors, and subject matters tend to be challenged repeatedly by pro family activists, a broad framework of their political commitments and agendas emerges from the surveys provided in the

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literature. Moreover, the practitioner literature itself is a rich source for pro family discourse. Several of the banned books guides, including *Banned in the U.S.A.* and Doyle’s *Banned Books Guide*, contain direct quotes taken from pro family activist complainants, revealing how those who challenge books characterize young people and what they believe happens to children as they read. By examining the rhetoric of those who wish to limit children’s exposure to particular books and other materials, scholars can analyze how conservative activists understand reading and why they think eliminating access to particular books will achieve their political goals.

Yet as they respond to pro family discourse by focusing on policy creation and managing interpersonal conflicts, librarians’ handbooks and manuals avoid the complexity of pro family library activism in three key ways. First, they tend to uphold ALA authority in library policy creation without acknowledging that many pro family activists have an organized, coherent critique of this organization and its policies. Second, they advise librarians to counter challenges by relying upon the very ethics of diversity and access that pro family challengers often contest. Finally, they neglect to highlight the social movement context that structures relationships between individual challengers, grassroots campaigns, and national pro family organizations. Advice literature for librarians facing pro family activist challenges does not tackle the complex dynamics of the pro family movement, and thus misses an important opportunity to connect youth, libraries, and reading with the movement’s political goals.
Defining Censorship

Though few among the pro family movement would self-apply the term “censor,” the term censorship frames all handbook authors’ discussions of library challenges. Some use the term to describe any individual or organization’s attempt to limit others’ library access. For example, Nancy Kravitz, the author of a handbook for school librarians, characterizes censorship as “…no more complicated than someone saying, ‘don’t let anyone read this book, or buy that magazine, or view that film, because I object to it’!”\(^3^5\) Fellow handbook writer Henry Reichman concurs, positing in Censorship and Selection that, “[i]n the final analysis, censorship is simply a matter of someone saying: ‘No, you cannot read that magazine or book or see that film or videotape—because I don’t like it.”\(^3^6\) Yet such characterizations of library challenges belie the very enterprise Kravitz, Reichman, and their many colleagues undertake, for library challenges are, in fact, a quite complex phenomenon. Why parents, community members, and organizations object to certain library materials, and how librarians should respond, has been a troublesome yet fascinating problem tackled by practitioners, scholars, and the ALA’s Office for Intellectual Freedom alike.

For instance, one of the first objectives of librarians’ handbooks on intellectual freedom is to distinguish challenges from outright censorship. The OIF and librarians’ professional literature generally recognize a difference between censorship proper—that is, the actual removal or restriction of library materials—and the attempt to censor, also known

\(^3^5\) Nancy Kravitz, Censorship and the School Library Media Center (Westport, Conn.: Libraries Unlimited, 2002), 1.

as a library challenge. In fact, library director James LaRue asserts in *The New Inquisition* that patrons who challenge library materials are not themselves censoring, but rather petitioning the library or the school to censor on their behalf. He argues that censorship is essentially a government activity, and private individuals or organizations—while often persuasive and powerful—do not possess public libraries’ and schools’ ability or authority to censor.

Nevertheless, the practitioner literature finds challenges to be a significant threat to intellectual freedom, even while it defends the rights of individuals to object to library materials. Perhaps this is because research on self-censorship has illustrated that challenges can make some librarians more cautious about what they purchase; from Marjorie Fiske (1959) to Dianne McAfee Hopkins (1991), studies have demonstrated that some librarians consciously exclude materials that they believe may cause objections and controversy. In addition to their “chilling effect” on library practices of intellectual freedom, challenges also represent conflicts between libraries and the communities they serve, and thus, whether or not the materials in questions are removed or retained, the practitioner literature takes them very seriously. Indeed, since 1990, the OIF has kept track of all reported attempts to remove library materials, even those that do not technically result in censorship. For every reported challenge, the OIF estimates that there are four or five that go un-reported. Similarly, though not all of the enumerated titles in the ALA-published *Banned Books Guide* (2010) have been banned, it is the effort to ban that most concerns editor Robert Doyle: “Even

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38 LaRue, *The New Inquisition*, 3.
when the eventual outcome allows the book to stay on the library shelves, the censorship attempt is real. Someone has tried to limit another person’s ability to choose."\(^{41}\)

Another pressing task in the literature seems to be drawing a clear line between censorship and selection, thereby distinguishing censorship from the winnowing activities and professional judgment of librarians, rendering it easier to recognize. Lester Asheim’s oft-cited 1953 essay, “Not Censorship But Selection,” characterizes censorship as a practice born from exclusive (rather than inclusive) motives. Where librarians make positive provisions to add materials, rather than targeting items to subtract, Asheim argues that they do not, in fact, censor their collections.\(^{42}\) Reichman expands upon this distinction by touting librarianship’s commitment to diversity in collection development, as opposed to censorship, which “…responds to diversity with suppression.”\(^{43}\) He also distinguishes librarians’ professional judgments from individual, personal biases, emphasizing their roots in knowledge and experience: “In general, selection is carried out by trained professionals, familiar with the wide variety of available choices and guided by a clear grasp of the educational purposes to be fulfilled…By contrast, the censor’s judgment is that of the individual, and it is most frequently based on criteria that are inherently personal and often intolerant.”\(^{44}\) Asheim and Reichman both identify individuals acting from personal—rather than professional—convictions to exclude library materials as the most telling indicator of censorship.

Such convictions, at least officially, know no political stripe. Most handbook authors are quick to acknowledge that objections to library materials come from across the political

\(^{43}\) Reichman, *Censorship and Selection*, 7.
\(^{44}\) Ibid.
spectrum, from the Left as well as from the Right, though the issues motivating these challenges may differ significantly. For instance, Simmons and Dresang associate the issues of sex and sexuality, witchcraft and the occult, and secular humanism with the Right, while identifying challengers on the Left with concerns about racism and sexism in literature, particularly the ways in which female characters and characters of color are portrayed. However, other writers make few distinctions between the Left and the Right, arguing that all censorship is the same in its effects, regardless of complainants’ motives. As Kravitz argues, “[t]here is no such thing as acceptable or ‘good’ censorship or unacceptable or ‘bad’ censorship. There is not much difference between a conservative parent who objects to the ‘witchcraft’ in Harry Potter and a liberal parent who objects to the word ‘nigger’ in the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. They are still trying to deny access to the books.”

Indeed, challengers of all political stripes share similar fears about language and the potential damages that the “wrong words” may inflict upon an impressionable young reader.

Where they distinguish between the Right and Left, handbook writers usually refer to pro family organizations in the aggregate as “pressure groups” and recognize that they tend to be better organized than their liberal counterparts. For instance, Rob Boston claims that conservative activists are relatively more skilled at organizing fellow complainants into action, and better prepared by the resources of larger national organizations to launch such campaigns. Yet the complex interactions between individuals and organizations that characterize the pro family movement tend go unrecognized in the library literature. Boston goes on to separate the objections of sincerely concerned individuals from those instigated by an organization’s inflammatory materials on the basis of politics. He argues that, while

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45 Kravitz, Censorship and the School Library Media Center, 155.
challenges from the Left “...tend to be sporadic, and usually spring from individuals at the local level,” those from the Right are fueled by “well-orchestrated campaigns sponsored by large, national organizations.”

In contrast, Reichman does recognize some of the fluidity of pro family movement organization, describing how “an ad hoc censorship organization may be formed, or some previously organized censorship group will jump on the bandwagon,” but he has little to say about how these arrangements relate to individuals’ library challenges.

Reichman’s acknowledgment that such groups “…might also seek to influence school funding, administrative appointments, and the election of board members,” though crucial, fails to place such activities in the broader context of the pro family movement. These nods to the organizational strength of the pro family movement nevertheless discount the important role that individuals and grassroots campaigns play in stimulating pro family library activism.

Who is “The Censor?”

Far more important to handbook authors is the puzzle of what makes the individual complainant—commonly referred to as either a “censor” or a “would-be censor”—tick. Their writings tend to emphasize personality traits, or individual psychology, while minimizing the complex network of cultural and political factors that motivate some patrons to challenge library materials. Some writers, such as Robert Doyle, universalize censorship and find “the urge to censor...primordial,” claiming “almost everyone wants to censor

47 Ibid.
48 Reichman, Censorship and Selection, 98.
49 Ibid.
something at some point in time.” Others attempt to distinguish “the censor” from other, presumably more rational people. One common trait identified in the “would-be censor” is “a strong desire to control what others read, see, and think.” Other characteristics include a lack of self-awareness, a narrowness of vision, and self-righteousness. As Kravitz describes it, “[Censors] have a firm belief that only they have the right values and mores...They cannot imagine those whose tastes and ideas might be different from their own.”

Such a lack of imagination and empathy apparently results in the compulsion to shepherd community morality. In “The Censor: Motives and Tactics,” the authors assert that “… all would-be censors share one belief—that they can recognize ‘evil’ and that other people should be protected from it. Censors do not necessarily believe their own morals should be protected, but they do feel compelled to save their fellows.”

Teen librarian pioneer Dorothy Broderick described challengers as people with rigid moral sensibilities whose “oughts” and “shoulds” clash with mainstream society’s independence and freedom. They are not only fearful of this apparently hostile world and paranoid that everyone else is “out to get them” but are apparently jealous of them: “…[A]ny indication that other people are freer in their decision-making process arouses in them severe feelings of anxiety and resentment.” While such descriptions of censorious qualities are memorable and vivid ones—and may, indeed, accurately describe the individual characteristics of some who challenge library materials—they also shift the emphasis away from the social and political dynamics that harness the energies of those individuals that drive the pro family movement.

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51 Kravitz, Censorship and the School Library Media Center, 5.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
55 Quoted in Reichman, Censorship and Selection, 138.
To be fair, handbook authors rarely stop with portraits of the individual censor. Most also attempt to explore the reasons and motivations for why some people challenge library materials. Reichman argues that “[t]here are almost as many motivations to censor as there are would-be censors” and that “[a] school curriculum or library that does not arouse the ire of someone in our pluralistic society is probably not succeeding in its educational mission,” but nevertheless believes that censors are mostly interested in causing a commotion and getting attention.\(^{55}\) He doesn’t credit challengers with any substantive arguments or larger agendas; while grudgingly admitting that “[w]ould-be censors are often very effective at making a great deal of noise” he claims that “all the sound and fury truly signify nothing.”\(^{56}\) Whatever the specificities of the challenge may be, they are “less important than stirring up controversy and staging confrontations for their own sake, or for the sake of a much broader political or educational agenda.”\(^{57}\)

Other writers who argue that it isn’t really “about the book” grant more credence to the “broader agenda” that grounds pro family library activism. For handbook authors Ann Symons and Charles Harmon, conflicts over library materials are really contests between different kinds of social values, rather than quarrels about which books should be in the library. As Symons writes of a challenge over a gay-themed children’s book she managed in Juneau, Alaska, “[t]his case wasn’t about *Daddy’s Roommate*. It was over a clash in values: who determines what a child should read and who selects books for school libraries. It was about discrimination and about providing diverse collections, protecting the right of children

\(^{55}\) Ibid., 43.
\(^{56}\) Ibid., 23.
\(^{57}\) Ibid., 106.
to read, parental responsibility for one’s own children.”58 All of these issues drive pro
family library challenges, and will be explored further in the history of Family Friendly
Libraries covered in Chapter 3. Authors of For Sex Education, See Librarian Martha Cornog
and Timothy Perper also recognize that censorship attempts are rarely about the materials in
question alone; rather, they can serve as scapegoats for the ideas or social trends that the
challenger protests, presumably in an arena he or she is better able to control. As they argue,
“…library books are not the issue at all: books are merely convenient tokens of a far broader
process that they do not understand, sympathize with, or like—and that they wish to reverse
when they demand that this or that book be removed. The book represents the world itself:
remove the books and the evil in the world vanishes—it is healed and returned to what it
should be.”59 Book challenges thus stand in for larger conflicts over what is going on in the
world, and what some adults think the world should look like. The library then becomes a
reflection of society, a repository of the values that communities wish to validate and
celebrate.

Pluralism and diversity are often themselves cited as the impetus for library
challenges. Some writers believe parents’ efforts to control children’s reading materials
signal their desire to maintain order in a chaotic cultural landscape. Fear of cultural change
and the accompanying feelings of loss of control prompt challengers to target library
materials they believe represent the threats of an increasingly diverse and frank society. As
Kravitz (2002) suggests, “[w]e live in a very open and diverse society, and there are many

59 Martha Cornog and Timothy Perper, For Sex Education, See Librarian: A Guide to Issues and Resources
(Greenwood, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996), 144.
people who do not like the changes they see.” Similarly, Simmons and Dresang believe these cultural changes prompt some parents to become ever-more-protective in order to maintain control over their children’s reading: “[Parents] see their power and total control of children’s lives slipping away, and they are grasping desperately to hold on to it.” La Rue concurs, recognizing that “parents have just realized that the world is not controllable, that there are a wide range of influences in the world that are exactly contrary to the messages they want to send their children. Thus such parents’ first reaction is a kind of stunned anger.”

Other writers see in adults’ attempts to control children’s reading more sinister aims. While all of handbook authors acknowledge the ultimate authority of the parent to control their child’s—and only their child’s—reading, some are profoundly ambivalent about the exercise of parental control, believing it indicates a hostility to librarians’ and teachers’ authority. As Kravitz interprets it, “[s]ome parents believe they will lose control over their children if schools encourage them to think and make decisions on their own. These parents do not agree with teachers’ judgments, question their morality, and ignore their expertise.”

Overt challenges to librarians’ professionalism will be explored further in Chapter 6. Other writers believe challengers try to control children’s reading because it is an easier (and more socially acceptable) target than adult reading. Cornog and Perper argue that censoring adults’ reading has become politically untenable in contemporary society. They maintain that censorious types are not so much concerned with children’s well being as they are with exercising some degree of control over the library in children’s name. Moreover, children’s

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60 Kravitz, *Censorship and the School Library Media Center*, 19.
relative lack of power and their dependence upon adults serves the challenger’s need for control quite well: “Indeed, in a society where adults no longer heed the censor’s super moral tone, the only ones left are children—because they cannot talk back.” Handbook author Pat Scales goes one further, characterizing library challenges as essentially a means of controlling and regulating youth. She believes that free choice in reading threatens the “[c]ensors [who] want to control the minds of the young. They are fearful of the educational system because students who read learn and think. Thinkers learn to see. Those who see often question.” Such threats to adult knowledge and power are especially apparent in challenges dealing with sex and sexuality, as we shall explore further in Chapter 5. Cornog and Perper cite sexuality as not simply a volatile issue, but as symbolic of larger social conflicts about what children should know about sex and when they should know it. They believe that putting sex and sexuality materials in children’s hands threatens some adults because it “symbolize[s] the loss of adult moral values and therefore of adult moral superiority over children. Such parents and others genuinely fear that their children will be lost to them completely if the children slip away into the modern world of sexuality.”

While the individual traits and motivations of “would-be censors” are certainly not irrelevant to library challenges, it is their alternate, often competing vision of reading and what it does to people that drives challengers to attempt to curtail what library materials are available to children. Many handbook authors hint at this important factor. Although they do not trace censors’ strategies, such as citing “objectionable” language out of context, back to a competing model of reading, they do pinpoint some of the common hallmarks of how pro

64 Cornog and Perper, For Sex Education, See Librarian, 155.
66 Cornog and Perper, For Sex Education, See Librarian, 156.
family activists understand (and misunderstand) literature. For instance, Kravitz notes that “would-be censors” believe that books contain dangerous ideas that might lead young readers astray. Perhaps because of this orientation, “[m]any censors do not read the entire book—they take selected words or passages out of context…they cannot imagine those whose tastes and ideas might be different from their own. They believe it is their duty to protect young people who might not recognize dangerous messages hidden in books…”67 She also cites the fear that some challengers hold that young readers may imitate the behavior they read about in books, or espouse the beliefs they encounter in their reading. “Different groups object to many books for teenagers for various reasons. Parents are afraid that their children are too immature to understand some of the sexual activities described in some of the young adult novels and may imitate the behavior described in the story. Others claim that such books violate their religious beliefs.”68 However, the implications that such beliefs about reading have for librarians, beyond dealing with the substance of the challenge, are left unexamined.

Challenges and Competing Models of Reading

Education scholar Alice Phoebe Naylor is among the few writers to highlight a different model of reading as a factor pro family library challenges. She contrasts the belief that the “values and behaviors of children should be prescribed and inculcated by controlling the information as well as the models available to them” with the views of librarians and

67 Kravitz, Censorship in the School Library Media Center, 5-6.
68 Ibid., 79.
others who champion intellectual freedom. Of the latter, Naylor writes that they, in contrast to challengers, “…believe children should be encouraged to explore authentic experiences and a variety of beliefs. They [believe] they learn to think, to weigh, and to choose values by reading about other people and viewpoints, and by interacting with literary models.” While both groups believe reading has an impact upon the reader, and that reading broadens the reader’s horizons by exposing her to a variety of viewpoints, they disagree about whether or not such exposure is a good idea. For pro family activists, reading’s invitation to entertain diverse ideas can be dangerous to impressionable children, shaking their moral foundations by encouraging questioning and doubt. Yet for those who embrace intellectual freedom, such shaking of foundations is the whole point of reading; librarians and others believe reading should expand horizons and challenge what we believe to be true. For library challengers, however, such reading experiences are likely to be unpleasant and unwelcome. Challengers wish “neither to be disturbed by what they read nor to entertain ideas different from their own, and they choose their reading accordingly.”

Naylor also distinguishes children’s reading from adults’ reading by granting more interpretative power to the individual reader. Indirectly referencing Louise Rosenblatt’s theory of transactional reading, which we shall explore later in Chapter 3, she asserts that “[a] text may have one meaning to one reader, and a totally different meaning to another…” Those who challenge library materials, on the other hand, believe that their interpretations of a work are not only correct, but are applicable to other readers, especially young readers. In contrast, Cornog and Perper claim children as a group may actually read

70 Ibid.
71 Ibid., 122.
72 Ibid.
quite differently than their parents, their relative lack of experience and wealth of imagination leading them to divine meanings in texts that are not obvious or even at all apparent to adults. While “…grown-up authors and critics see one message in the text, while youngsters may find the opposite message…All debate about books in school libraries [must balance] adult symbols and meanings [with] what the book actually, if paradoxically, may say to young readers.”\textsuperscript{73} Cornog and Perper also have a very different view of readers, particularly young readers, as beings and minds in a constant state of fluctuation and movement: Unlike “…trees or foundation stones—immobile, solid, stolid, and unchanging—real people and real children tend toward flux and variation.”\textsuperscript{74}

LaRue also recognizes that pro family activists have particular views of reading that drive their challenges in libraries. It is not simply that they have identified offensive material, but how they believe it will do damage to young and vulnerable readers. As usual, LaRue is more conciliatory toward such views, searching for common ground in both challengers and librarians’ faith in the transformative power of reading, while acknowledging the challengers are more inclined to believe that books cause readers to do bad things: “Behind the challenges of many patrons is awe of the written word…Behind the belief in the power of the word is the belief that humans are notoriously weak-willed, susceptible to temptation, and easily led astray. This belief is, of course, correct. But perhaps ‘the book made me do it’ is too harsh. Rephrase this to: Books matter. Who will not agree?”\textsuperscript{75}

How librarians themselves see reading is generally not explicitly examined, though there are some hints throughout the literature, particularly when it comes to advising

\textsuperscript{73} Cornog and Perper, \textit{For Sex Education, See Librarian}, 158.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{75} LaRue, \textit{The New Inquisition}, 51.
librarians on how to deal with challenges. While practitioner resources do not generally offer individual rationales to support each commonly challenged title, many submit general arguments that could be used in the defense of a variety of book. Such arguments hint at the clash of reading models operating below the surface of any materials challenge. For example, in contrast to challengers, librarians are advised to make careful distinctions between reading and “the real world;” many writers contrast reality with its mere representation in literature. Accordingly, young readers are characterized as resilient and fully capable of “…distinguish[ing] between discussions about language and the indiscriminate use of certain words. They can understand that literature and life are not identical; that the representation of reality through fiction is not the same as reality itself.”

Some writers also submit that readers, particularly teen readers, are already quite familiar with the reality that this literature is attempting to describe, and thus are not likely to be exposed to anything they would not otherwise encounter “in real life.” As Kravitz argues of Judy Blume’s frank treatment of sexuality and first love in Forever, “…many teens are very knowledgeable about [sex] before they even read her books.” For Simmons and Dresang, it is the greater degree of explicitness that readers encounter in other media, particularly when it comes to sex, that limits the effects of reading on youth: “After all, outside the classroom students casually encounter Playboy, Playgirl, and Penthouse; X-rated films; sadomasochistic video games; and the Internet—all theirs for the asking.”

As for violence, Simmons and Dresang note that anything in commonly challenged books “…pales by comparison…[with] many late night televisions dramas and crime shows. These all

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76 Reichman, Censorship and Selection, 49.
77 Kravitz, Censorship in the School Library Media Center, 155.
78 Simmons and Dresang, School Censorship in the 21st Century, 66.
represent violence and brutality to a far greater degree than that in the aforementioned novels.”

Yet paradoxically, in order to convey real life in believable ways, literary texts must create scenes and characters that ring “true” and include some vestige of how sex, violence, and language are experienced in the “real world.” For instance, both Reichman and Kravitz defend the use of profanity in literature as a vehicle for more effectively achieving realism, characterizing its aims as descriptive rather than prescriptive. Profane language, Kravitz suggests, is intended to more accurately mirror reality, rather than to serve as a model of vocabulary: “Writers usually do not advocate the use of ‘bad language’ when they use it in their novels. They use such language to portray life as it really is—to have the characters speak the way they normally would in their everyday lives.” Reichman agrees, but also notes that this distinction “…is not always clear to those who protest.” Presumably, the quest for authenticity in literary expression is one that librarians and other proponents of intellectual freedom more readily recognize. Yet such respect for authenticity coincides with an odd didactic streak in the professional literature. The whole point of realism and authenticity, according to some writers, is that it prepares young readers for the trials and tribulations they may face in that scarier reality. As LaRue put it, “…there is no safer sex than just reading about it.” And for Kravitz, the relative safety of literature is an opportunity for young readers to learn something positive: “Hopefully students will learn from both fiction and nonfiction books many of life’s lessons.”

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79 Ibid., 71.
80 Kravitz, Censorship in the School Library Media Center, 82.
81 Reichman, Censorship and Selection, 49.
82 LaRue, The New Inquisition, x.
83 Kravitz, Censorship in the School Library Media Center, 155.
“[g]ood books don’t make you better, not all by themselves, any more than looking at an apple makes you healthier. A book has to be selected and digested. Its content must not just be read, but chosen. In fact, much of what we read or view has little effect on us at all. Reading requires conscious effort. Adding something to your belief system doesn’t happen automatically.”84 He later seems to contradict himself, however, citing literature as “vicarious living” and as a venue to “present choices, not role models…Maybe the people who read about such life choices won’t be doomed to repeat them. They’ll have a little better idea of the consequences.”85 Reading is also a form of inoculation against the troubles and trials of the real world. LaRue writes of child readers: “The stories they ask for are the stories that waken and name their own real fears. Parents do not do their children a service to protect them too fiercely, lest they never form imaginative antibodies to the many intellectual and emotional illnesses of existence.”86

Such recognitions of competing models of reading, however, do not seem to directly inform practitioner literature’s advice for librarians handling challenges. For it is not simply that pro family activists hold different beliefs about reading and what it does to people; rather, they have also mounted a critique of the profession and of librarian professionalism. Yet advice for librarians emphasizes precisely the hallmarks of professionalism that pro family activists critique: consistent policies informed by the Library Bill of Rights, techniques for calming irate patrons, and public relations campaigns to promote intellectual freedom that include the widely lampooned (by pro family activists) Banned Books Week. As we analyze how librarians are advised to handle challenges, we will explore how librarians’ handbooks and manuals ultimately fail to connect the rationale of pro family

84 LaRue, The New Inquisition, 36-7.
85 Ibid., 53-4.
86 Ibid., 54.
challenges—loss of control, the desire to protect children, the desire to make noise, and a
didactic model of reading—with the circumstance of the individual challenge in a social
movement context.

Advice for Librarians Handling Challenges

The advice literature for librarians on how to handle challenges is an interesting, and mixed bag. On the one hand, there’s a battle-weariness in the tone of some of the handbooks’ military imagery and rhetoric, a sense that those who have survived a challenge in the trenches and lived to tell about have, as Symons and Harmon describe it, “[gone] to hell and return[ed].”

Indeed, the military and war imagery employed by most practitioner literature on challenges is probably no accident; for if pro family activists see themselves in a battle for the library, librarians might certainly be forgiven for feeling as though they are under siege. As Pat Scales characterizes challenges, “[t]oday the battle is raging, and librarians are stumbling in their fight to win the war. The enemy is organized groups of people, from the right and left, who are determined to gain power over what students read and learn.”

Accordingly, librarians are urged to stand firm against such enemies of intellectual freedom. For instance, Cornog and Perper refer to challengers as “storm troopers” and urge librarians not to acquiesce to their demands for removing certain library materials. They also frame the contest as a fight, characterizing challenges as not so much about individual books, but as “about Winning This Round… PUTTING OUR BOOKS into

87 Symons and Harmon, Protecting the Right to Read, 102.
89 Cornog and Perper, For Sex Education, See Librarian, 139.
the library and KEEPING THEIRS OUT.” Such fights may seem daunting, but the library literature, while sometimes grim on the topic, nevertheless attempts to offer librarians aid and comfort. Ann K. Symons cheers librarians on while warning them (somewhat contradictorily) that “…pressure groups aren’t going away and don’t quit! You will survive the opposition—you just think you won’t.”

On the other hand, the library literature is divided on how best to survive a challenge. Symons and Harmon are also somewhat contradictory here, for while they counsels librarians not to compromise because “it just leads to more censorship incidents” they also argue that “finding ways to work with conservative parents and the groups they belong to is going to be more and more important as collections come under attack.” While Karen Hyman urges librarians not to “try to tailor your actions and your message to please the most extreme censorship advocates who will never support you anyway,” she also advises them to “[w]ork to find common ground. Follow the rules of dialogue—not debate… Ask questions and listen to answers. A win-lose mentality ensures that everybody loses.”

Even Reichman, who elsewhere in his handbook gave pro family critics little quarter, writes that “[t]he more that is known about the philosophies and beliefs held by potential censors, as well as their organizational goals and concerns, the better prepared schools will be to engage them in meaningful dialogue.” Why such discrepancies in the library literature? Should librarians stand firm, or engage their critics? How, specifically, can librarians enter into productive dialogue if the “other side” sees the conflict as war for the library itself?

90 Ibid., 7.
92 Symons and Harmon, Protecting the Right to Read, 56, 59.
94 Reichman, Censorship and Selection, 101.
James LaRue is one of the few handbook writers to take on pro family library activism directly, armed with specific advice. This approach is probably due both to the relatively late publication date of the *New Inquisition* in 2007 (well after the initial rise of pro family challenges) and LaRue’s own admission that his approach to pro family challenges errs on the side of the conciliatory, rather than the confrontational. He believes not simply in better understanding pro family activists’ motivations and tactics, but in reaching out to such groups so that they will see the library as an ally rather than an enemy. He also is proactive in adding pro family materials to the collection, citing his own decision to subscribe the library to *Citizen Magazine* and purchase the pro family literature it reviews and recommends, and urging other librarians to do the same. LaRue believes such specific positive actions, along with outreach to pro family organizations, are bound to be more productive than outright attacks and vague rhetoric about intellectual freedom. As he puts it, “If you hunker down behind the Freedom to Read Statement, you may earn the admiration of your peers, but you don’t change any minds in your community.”

Ironically, LaRue’s approach to “organizing” the opposition in many ways echoes the successful mobilizing strategies employed by pro family activists drumming up support for their library campaigns.

His approach is something of a departure, however, from most of the rest of the library literature, which invests a great deal of faith in managing challenges with written policies. Indeed, Judith Krug claimed in a 1995 interview that if the only thing she’d done in her career was to convince librarians to adopt policies, that she would be satisfied with her lifetime accomplishments. There are, of course, many benefits to written policies.

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95 LaRue, *The New Inquisition*, 36.
Librarians do not have to reinvent the wheel and spontaneously come up with a plan for dealing with each new library controversy, but can draw from professional guidelines when deciding how to respond to challenges. Board-approved policies make it more likely that librarians will treat each case fairly and consistently, and less likely that they will panic in the heat of the moment. They also give librarians a mechanism for explaining how materials are selected for the collection, and why, when the challenged item meets those criteria, it is being retained. There is little doubt that libraries without policies are ill prepared to meet library challenges, and may even be creating of themselves a target of opportunity. As James LaRue puts it, “[l]ibraries without such policies are jewelry stores that leave their doors open all night; they are going to get hit.”

However, the rationales for policy put forth in some of librarians’ manuals rely upon models that prioritize librarians’ professionalism, without recognizing that this very professionalism is being attacked in pro family circles. The Intellectual Freedom Manual asserts that “people respect what is in writing” and sees policies as a way to assure citizens that “…the library is running a business-like operation.” Yet those activists who contest these policies themselves will not be assuaged by their use in a challenge situation; indeed groups like Family Friendly Libraries cite reconsideration policies as evidence that librarians do not take conservative objections seriously. The Intellectual Freedom Manual states that policies “help disarm potential censors; unfounded accusations seldom prevail when the library’s operations are based on clear-cut and timely written procedures that reflect thorough research, sound judgment, and careful planning.” But again, the point of many of these accusations is the policies themselves, for pro family activists seldom agree that

97 LaRue, The New Inquisition, 19.
99 Ibid., 197-8.
open access, collection diversity, and patron privacy should be central tenets of library philosophy, as we shall see in Chapter 5. And they not only challenge the basis of such policies, but also often cite their presence as a stalling tactic, believing that filling out form is just another way the library dismisses their complaints. Though the Manual insists that reconsideration request forms make complainants “feel assured they are being properly heard and that their objections will be considered,” evidence from the pro family camp suggests quite the opposite.100

Another area of advice for dealing with challenges is the one-on-one interaction between librarian and challenger. For the most part, there is more sympathy for challengers in this realm, perhaps because such interactions are most often between individual patrons and librarians, rather than between organizations and the library. Librarians are urged to maintain “a courteous and calm approach” and to communicate that objections “will be given serious consideration and that interest in the library is welcome. Complainants should be listened to courteously and invited to file a complaint in writing, if the problem cannot be resolved through informal discussion.”101 Similarly, much of LaRue’s advice to librarians emphasizes politeness and empathy; he advises librarians faced with a complaint to first apologize, because the complainant has just been through an upsetting, even traumatic, experience: “Nonetheless, I believe a simple apology is both appropriate and polite. Say ‘I’m sorry!’ and mean it. You’re sorry they had so unpleasant an experience that it upset them. Before you is a human being who may be facing a difficult thing. Be kind.”102

Handbook authors also seem at pains to insist that patrons who initiate a challenge are exercising their intellectual freedom rights, and that their input must be part of the

100 Ibid.
102 LaRue, The New Inquisition, 75.
process whereby libraries continually examine and reevaluate their collections. Some of the reasons to listen to objections are pragmatic. As Kravitz maintains, “[i]t is just plain common sense to sit down and informally discuss a parent’s concern about school policy. This prevents a major confrontation from occurring later on. If a formal challenge occurs, ensure that the process is fair and open and remain calm and in control.”

Later, however, Kravitz is more idealistic, pointing out that those who challenge libraries are exercising “the same rights…that librarians seek to protect when they confront censorship. The rights of both sides must be protected, or neither will survive…Librarians should take care to ensure that their pro-intellectual freedom stance is understood to include the rights of conservative religious groups to express their opinions.”

Defending intellectual freedom, Kravitz suggests, involves tolerating the challenges of others, even those that do not believe in intellectual freedom. Simmons and Dresang put it more colorfully; they advise “…those who are committed to free access to grit their teeth and remember that it is not only the sought-after speech that needs to be protected by the First Amendment, but also the unreasonable and distasteful.”

Ultimately, they believe (perhaps overly optimistically) that censorship campaigns “…will die a natural death, killed by those who do not buy into their rhetoric.” This studied neutrality of librarians in the face of challenges is another element of librarian professionalism, and one that has increasingly come under fire in pro family circles, as we shall see in Chapter 6.

All in all, there is much that is useful in the professional literature of librarianship in dealing with library challenges. Sample policies, stories and anecdotes, and the exploration

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103 Kravitz, *Censorship in the School Library Media Center*, 118.
104 Ibid., 253.
106 Ibid.
of some of the ways challenge happen and why they happen are all useful elements for any practitioner facing a challenge situation. However, such elements are limited in the context of pro family activism, for they often depend upon maintaining policies and rationales that are themselves under attack, though not explicitly. And while they do recognize some of the different models of reading and education that bolster pro family library challenges, they often fail to connect them to their context as part of a vibrant and well-organized social movement. Thus the professional literature of librarianship answers many questions about pro family library activism, but still leaves many unresolved. As James LaRue puts it, the only way to truly understand the worldviews behind pro family challenges is to “read with the enemy.”

Conclusion: “Reading with the Enemy.”

While the scholarly and professional literature on censorship has limits for understanding pro family library activism, it does provide invaluable insights to this study. From the literature, we can divine that library challenges are far more complex and deeper than a quibble over which books should or should not be in the library. Objections to books merely scratch the surface of what are deeply entrenched conflicts about reading, youth, education, and libraries. My research aims to explore such conflicts in the context of pro family activism as a social movement. In other words, as I analyze the rhetoric of librarianship’s most vocal critics, I will be searching not simply for what they say about reading and libraries, but why they say it. Following the lead of both scholarship and
practitioner literature, I seek to go beyond descriptions of these challenges (and this movement) in order to better understand how and why they occur in libraries.

Although I cannot predict how and whether librarians will use this study, I believe that the relationship between scholarship and the professional literature offers great promise and opportunity—an opportunity that cuts both ways. In the same way that scholars’ research on challenges has informed the advice literature of librarianship, the advice literature can offer scholars useful models for tackling the problem of library challenges. While Cornog and Perper argue that challenges and censorship represent a “vandalism of the human spirit” that should never be permitted and that “all censorship efforts are antisocial,” I follow LaRue in believing that library challenges are fascinating instances of clashing values playing out in local community institutions. Because they are a sign of disjuncture between librarians and the patrons they serve, they must be taken seriously; they are also, however, an opportunity for librarians and LIS scholars to better understand the worldviews of those who also lay claim to libraries. It is these worldviews, and how libraries might respond to them, that are the subject of my dissertation.

My research also follows LaRue’s injunction to “read with the enemy,” attempting to better understand why pro family activists mount library challenges and perhaps find areas of common interest and belief. LaRue envisions the library as a kind of laboratory of democracy, exclaiming to pro family critics: “Welcome to the table! But your seat doesn’t entitle you to demand that everyone else leave or remain silent. The library will listen to your concerns. Will you listen to the concerns of others?” Whether or not pro family activists agree to listen as well as speak is a question beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Nevertheless, the way LaRue frames the challenge process as an exchange between more than one interested and invested party, an opportunity for conversation and greater understanding, is the framework from which this project approaches the study of pro family library activism.

LaRue is also useful for this study because he undertakes “reading with the enemy” to further the goals and improve the image of librarians’ professionalism. In the long run, he is most concerned about the credibility of the profession and the library as an institution—and because librarians’ professional authority is precisely what the pro family movement targets, LaRue’s words are particularly apt here: “The way an institution responds is not trivial. It has a profound effect on future interactions and outcomes…[Being discredited] could happen to libraries. It will happen unless librarians learn to talk—and more importantly, to listen—to their critics.”109 In other words, LaRue believes, in the process of demonizing our critics, librarians have damaged their standing as institutions of service in their communities. The best way to erase the damage is to “actually talk” to the other side, “[s]howing up at their meetings, providing information on topics of interest to them, listening to their concerns…a strategy that [leads] not to victory but to something rarer and more precious: mutual respect.”110 Ultimately, LaRue urges librarians to answer their critics not with disdain or ridicule, but with service—in other words, to answer critiques of professionalism with professionalism: “The best response to criticism of library practice is not the public humiliation of your accusers. It is the provision of service that both of you can be proud of.”111

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109 Ibid., 65.
110 Ibid., 44.
111 Ibid., 30.
In the chapters that follow, I will explore the writings of pro family activists, in order to listen more carefully and thus better understand the concerns that drive the pro family movements’ challenges to libraries. Beginning with the understandings of these challenges offered by this literature, I forge forward in Chapter 3 to examine the rise of pro family library activism from grassroots campaign to national prominence, using Family Friendly Libraries as a harbinger of this phenomenon. As we shall see in this chapter, FFL took pro family library activism to the next level by moving challenges from materials to policy, mounting an organized critique of the ALA, and serving as a vital link between local battles and the larger pro family war for the soul of the public library. If libraries are “one of the great bulwarks of democracy” and “living embodiments of the First Amendment because their collections include voices of dissent as well as assent” then scholars and practitioners alike can further the library’s aims by listening to those dissenters.112

CHAPTER 3

“IS YOUR LIBRARY FAMILY FRIENDLY?” FAMILY FRIENDLY LIBRARIES AND THE PRO FAMILY MOVEMENT

This chapter examines the history of Family Friendly Libraries (FFL) and explains how this organization moved from objections to specific library materials toward a broader critique of library policies and the American Library Association that subsequently altered the trajectory of pro family library activism. After an overview the history of the pro family movement writ large, I locate FFL as an active participant in this movement during the 1990s and early 2000s, tracing its history from community protest to national prominence. Through an analysis of FFL’s online and print publications (1995-2003), along with an examination of the organization’s reception in the library and pro family press during this period, I explain FFL’s significance for pro family activism, demonstrating how and why libraries became a favorite target of the pro family movement. Ultimately, FFL set the stage (and the standard) for pro family library activism by mobilizing individual grassroots campaigns, employing “family friendly” and “common sense” rather than overtly moralistic discourse, and focusing conservative activist energies on ALA policies rather than particular “objectionable” library materials.

In 1992, evangelical Christian and homemaker Karen Jo Gounaud walked into the Fairfax County Public Library (Virginia) and was alarmed to find the Washington Blade, a local gay and lesbian newspaper, available for the taking. Though her attempts to have the publication removed were initially rebuffed by the library administration and the library board, Gounaud proved not so easily dissuaded. After attending a Christian Coalition

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workshop sponsored by her church on anti-gay activism, Gounaud and her allies went on to spearhead a campaign to create a separate “adults only” section of the library for topics (including homosexuality) that children could not access without parental permission.\textsuperscript{114} Though this effort was ultimately not successful, the activists did convince the library to allow parents complete access to their minor children’s library records, and to acquire multiple copies of eleven “ex gay” titles for the library collection.

In 1995, with the help of influential activists and organizations like American Family Association, Gounaud founded Family Friendly Libraries (FFL), and her strategy shifted considerably. Still committed to protecting children from the perceived dangers of gay-themed materials, Gounaud now set her sights higher, targeting the role the American Library Association plays in promoting library policies that protect collection access and diversity.\textsuperscript{115} In particular, it was the Library Bill of Rights’ inclusion of “age” among the protected categories of user access that troubled Gounaud and her allies, who believed that such freedom for children’s reading and viewing opened the door to a host of “objectionable” materials.\textsuperscript{116} In protest, FFL created alternate policies curtailing children’s access and offering taxpayers greater influence in managing library collections. Gounaud fleshed out this alternate vision in the FFL Charter, which included five articles: collections emphasizing the “traditional family;” parental rights to control all aspects of their minor child’s library use; respect for community standards; respect for minors (meaning no sexually explicit or gay-themed displays); and taxpayer participation in library policy.


making. This vision and FFL’s subsequent activism helped bring public libraries into the culture wars crossfire of the 1990s. The remainder of this chapter explores the path of FFL from its grassroots beginnings to its prominent role in national campaigns targeting the ALA and library intellectual freedom policies.

The History of the Pro Family Movement

FFL’s quest to promote “traditional values” and protect children was typical of similar organizations linked in the loose yet powerful coalition of the pro family movement. A collective of community-based grassroots campaigns led and inspired by larger national organizations such as Focus on the Family, the pro family movement was a resurgence of conservative activism during the 1990s and 2000s that brought not only library materials, but also libraries themselves into the cultural and political crossfire. Pro family activists attempt to sway public opinion and stimulate conservative political activity, whether that be at the national level—by voting for particular presidential candidates—or at the local level, by electing school and library board members sympathetic to pro family causes such as abstinence only sex education, and raising community awareness of pro family issues, such as abortion and gay marriage. Such issues span a diverse range and incorporate the flavor of local venues such as community contests over sex education and/or creationism in the schools, but are fueled by larger movement campaigns to criminalize abortion, oppose gay rights, and challenge the secular bent of public education. No one organization or person speaks for the collective, though there are prominent groups: Focus on the Family, Concerned Women for America, the Family Research Council, and the American Family

Association are all highly influential amongst disparate groups of activists. Pro family activists are active almost exclusively within the Republican Party; indeed, they provided many of the key votes that helped reelect George W. Bush in 2004.

Such power, and indeed, the very notion of a religion-fueled political movement, would have been unimaginable—and, for many evangelicals, undesirable—prior to the 1960s. Evangelicals and mainline Protestants share a common lineage, but their ancestors parted ways in the early decades of the 20th century, as most denominations split into conservative and liberal factions. Alienated by modern life, and adamant about the authority of the Bible in all matters, including science, conservative Christians became known as Fundamentalists. They retreated from public life and cultivated separation from mainstream society, upholding the Bible as the source of law and the literal word of God. Fundamentalists’ most visible foray into politics, the 1925 Scopes Trial, struck a blow for creationism yet made many fear further national embarrassment lampooning their beliefs as backward and ignorant.

While some evangelical Christians did participate in the wave of anti-communist activism that shook the country in the 1950s, distributing literature and holding neighborhood meetings, their attention gradually shifted from enemies abroad to enemies at home who challenged the status quo: specifically, racial integrationists, feminists, secular humanists, and gays and lesbians. The social, cultural and political tumult of the 1960s,

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118 Ibid., 10.
including the civil rights movement, second wave feminism, and youth resistance to the Vietnam War, seemed to ignite religious conservatives’ discomfort with rapidly evaporating boundaries between men and women, whites and blacks, and parents and children. Such cultural changes, in combination with a number of Supreme Court decisions that more clearly separated church from state, inspired many evangelical Christians to believe they were morally obliged to get involved in politics. Accordingly, conservative Christian leaders mobilized their flocks by framing activism as the righteous response to an increasingly secular and permissive society. It was no longer enough to condemn abortion or “attacks” on religious liberties as a matter of personal belief; believers were urged to translate these beliefs into activism.

Conservative evangelicals expanded their influence throughout the 1960s and 1970s, coming to national prominence and power when their politicking helped to elect President Ronald Reagan in 1980. While in office, however, Reagan proved far less attentive to the issues that Christian conservatives cared about, focusing most of his energies on economic rather than social policy. Marginalized within the Republican Party, religious conservatives nevertheless made their impact felt at the grassroots level. While they continued to rally the usual evangelical constituents to turn out for Republicans in national elections, during the 1990s there was a discernable shift in strategy from voter turnout to movement building at the state and local level and community organizing. Aided by movement leaders skilled in using mass media to organize around single issues, as well as

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123 Luker, *When Sex Goes to School*, x.
126 Wilcox, *Onward Christian Soldiers*? 125.
127 Ibid., 137.
political leaders who saw potential in religious conservatives’ power as a voting bloc, evangelicals gradually became more influential in politics. Twenty-first century Republicans find that they ignore this constituency at their political peril while the “center” of political discourse moves increasingly toward the Right.

Accordingly, pro family activists have been able to engage the mainstream in their fight for more “family friendly” libraries and schools, often successfully identifying their causes as campaigns for “common sense” and “family values” rather than as partisan politics. Indeed, the presence of the word “family” in the titles of so many conservative organizations is not simply good public relations, but a kind of truth in advertising. For the “traditional” family—the heterosexual, two parent-headed family—is indeed what the pro-family activists are concerned about: specifically, the relationships both within the family (between husbands and wives, and parents and children) and between the family and public institutions, including libraries.

Conservative activists’ discourses about the family are telling indicators of a patriarchal Christian worldview, one steeped in tradition and authority. Sociologist Sara Diamond identifies this movement’s "focus on the family" as one that cuts straight to the core of power relationships—and thus, political life—in American society. She illustrates how appeals to the family actually constitute implicit arguments about the proper hierarchies of power between parents and children, men and women, and sinners and saints.\textsuperscript{128} Diamond sees “family friendly” rhetoric as a cloak for smuggling in a more reactionary agenda, including rolling back feminism’s gains for women who work, and promoting models of parenthood that emphasize training, authority, and control. Similarly, Eithne Johnson’s 1998 analysis of Focus on the Family’s James Dobson’s advice literature for

\textsuperscript{128} Diamond, \textit{Not by Politics Alone}, 7.
women reveals a reversion to strict gender and parent/child hierarchies, with “…the Dobson discourse… fundamentally devoted to framing gender identities and their proper relationships in a hierarchical pattern: God is to man as man is to woman as woman is to child.”129 “Family friendly” in a pro family activist context thus suggests a conservative social policy orientation enforcing traditional hierarchies of gender and moral absolutes.

The genius of the pro family movement, however, is that such political commitments are not readily apparent, particularly when the focus of activism is children. Pro family activists have proven extraordinarily skillful and successful at mobilizing public hopes and fears about children in the larger society for conservative social policy ends. Though often characterized as weak, vulnerable and in need of protection, children are nevertheless strong in symbolic value, representing adults’ greatest hopes and fears. To rally in the name of children is to arm oneself with a powerful rhetorical weapon, harnessing strong emotions for motives presumably above reproach. Moreover, children occupy the center of the pro family movement’s vision of the ideal society. The child is not just a powerful signifier in her own right, but functions as the glue that connects the politics of the family to the politics of the state.130

Pro family activists thus target schools and libraries in part because they believe these institutions have unrestricted access to children’s minds. In a 1990 manifesto titled *Children at Risk*, James Dobson and Gary Bauer called such contests over who would influence children “the second great civil war,” with children’s minds as the “prize” to be won by combatants. They asserted that “[t]hose who control what young people are taught and what

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they experience—what they see, hear, think, and believe—will determine the future course for the nation.” Children are, then, not just future citizens, but a symbolic battleground for the cultural clash of values. They are a focus both for activists’ fears about what they perceive to be an increasingly secular, permissive society, and their hopes for a more moral future.

Though campaigns to ban and restrict access to “objectionable” books have been a staple of conservative activism, it was the critique of the public sector’s relationship to children during the 1990s that brought libraries as institutions, along with the now suspect professional ethics of librarianship, under widespread public scrutiny. Though libraries could be (and were) sites of community conflict throughout the 20th century, they still managed to maintain an authority that insulated them from the kinds of attacks on libraries themselves that are now commonplace in pro family circles. In contrast to earlier controversies, contemporary pro family activists target public institutions themselves as the problem, depicting schools and libraries abusing their professional trust by attacking religion, promoting causes such as gay rights, and ultimately denying conservative parents their right to inculcate their religious and political beliefs in their offspring. Public and school libraries increasingly draw the scrutiny of pro family activists, who see them not simply as fair game for politics, but as places no longer safe for families, run by professionals no longer in touch with communities. Such scrutiny did not spring out of thin air, however. Family Friendly Libraries ignited pro family activism around library issues by bringing child protection, the critique of public institutions and fears about the decline of America, and parental and taxpayer frustrations around library policy into clearer relief.

The pro family movement has thrived because it addresses issues that speak to local communities—schools, families, libraries and children. In the face of great social upheaval, and increasing alienation from politics, pro family activists have been able to articulate a worldview that appeals to citizens who see their world in disarray. Their belief that family and community values are increasingly being eroded by a nation in liberal decline resonates with those who hold those values dear. It also validates evangelical Christian narratives that tie the fate of the family to the fate of the nation. Moreover, it speaks to and preserves existing power relations in our society, and does not seriously challenge the social order. As historian Lisa McGirr argues of Southern California conservatism, “[t]hese ideas resonated with many middle-class and lower-middle-class men and women not only because they were familiar but also because at their core they seemed to safeguard these people’s way of life and a set of power relations in American society they wished to preserve.”132 Family Friendly Libraries was among the organizations that would reinforce these beliefs in their narratives about the decline of the public library and its threat to children’s reading.

Is Your Library “Family Friendly?” FFL and the Pro Family Movement

A former music teacher and the author of *A Very Mice Joke Book* (Houghton Mifflin, 1981), Karen Jo Gounaud was a relative stranger to pro family activism before she took on removing the *Washington Blade* from her local public library. Her own children grown, Gounaud was nevertheless concerned about the *Blade*’s sexually explicit personals ads and advertisements. After mobilizing like-minded community members, joining a group of

several hundred Fairfax County activists, and attending a 1993 Christian Coalition-sponsored workshop designed to foster grassroots conservative activism, Gounaud was ready to take her quest to make the library “family friendly” to the next level. Because Gounaud had found her efforts to either remove the *Blade* or restrict its access in Fairfax libraries stymied by the policies of the American Library Association (ALA), particularly *The Library Bill of Rights* and its *Interpretations*, she began to concentrate her energies accordingly. Gounaud believed that, unless libraries changed their policies from ALA-based ones to “family friendly” ones, children would not be safe as library users and parents and taxpayers would have no control over library collections. The remainder of this section traces the trajectory of FFL as it grew from Gounaud’s challenge to national prominence.

Gounaud began to write and distribute literature promoting this vision, maintaining a list of the activists and supporters around the country who had contacted her for information. Her work soon caught the eye of Phil Burress, a public library trustee who wielded a great deal of influence in the pro family movement. Once a self-confessed porn addict, Burress put his skills as a former union negotiator to work in forming Citizens for Community Values (CCV), a Cincinnati-based group dedicated to passing local legislation to limit where pornography could be bought, sold, and broadcast. Burress’ CCV had also been designated one of Focus on the Family’s Family Policy Councils, state-level organizations with varied foci that nevertheless maintain a Focus affiliation. Burress, along with other pro family movement leaders, encouraged Gounaud to launch FFL as a national organization.

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133 Rozell and Wilcox, *Second Coming*, 197.
135 For a portrait of and interview with Burress, see Skip Tate, “Family Friendly Libraries,” *Cincinnati Magazine* (January 1996), 23-5.
In October of 1995, the first FFL Conference was held in Cincinnati and sponsored by Burress’ organization, though Gounaud was still the organization’s president and spokeswoman. In attendance were about fifty people, including representatives from the Christian Coalition and the American Family Association, as well as members of the library press.\textsuperscript{137} In her opening remarks, Gounaud introduced the fledgling FFL as an organization for librarians who were tired of the ALA and who wanted to “get on with the business of being good, library service people.”\textsuperscript{138} Both Gounaud and Burress characterized the ALA as an elite, left wing cabal bearing little regard for local communities. Gounaud maintained that the ALA’s stranglehold on libraries could only be broken by “family friendly” library policies that would protect children and create “more balanced” collections. She also argued that the ALA discouraged librarians from listening to concerned parents, effectively treating those parents as “censorship cases.”\textsuperscript{139} In addition, Phil Burress accused the ALA of taking the position that “what we see and read doesn’t affect behavior and [that’s where] we don’t agree.”\textsuperscript{140}

There had been no shortage of library challenges during the 1980s, but the FFL attack on ALA library policies, along with its “common-sense” rather than overtly moralistic approach to library practices, presented a new conundrum for librarianship. After attending the FFL Conference in 1995, \textit{Library Journal} editor John Berry argued for accommodation. In an editorial entitled “It Is Their Library, Too!” he wrote: “I have no reason to think FFL…is hostile to libraries and librarians. There is no doubt about their hostility to ALA. Still, on the local level I think we can learn from them and help them, just as we help other

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\item \textsuperscript{137} “Family Friendly Libraries Attacks ALA in Cincy Meeting,” \textit{Library Journal} 120 (1995), 12.
\item \textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{140} Ibid.
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interest groups.” In confining his analysis of the FFL to local campaigns, Berry neglected to explore the larger implications for librarianship stemming from FFL’s vision of the library. To the extent that he did acknowledge this vision, he seemed to understand it as primarily a clash between rational parental fears and an insufficiently responsive profession: “At ALA and at home, why don’t we listen to the likes of Karen Jo Gounaud and FFL? Why not try to help honestly concerned parents guide the reading and viewing of their children?”

Once Karen Jo Gounaud became a darling of the pro family press and media, including frequent radio appearances on both James Dobson’s *Family News in Focus* and Concerned Women for America’s *Beverly LaHaye Live*, the library press grew more defensive. Charles Harmon and Ann Symons saw in FFL’s attack on the ALA a larger threat to intellectual freedom, and thus approached the conflict as a problem beyond allaying the concerns of parents. In a 1996 *American Libraries* article entitled “But We’re Family Friendly Already,” the authors urged libraries targeted by the FFL to publicize how they already serve families through a multitude of programs and resources. Ultimately, the authors recognized that it would be necessary to “…[reclaim] the ‘family friendly library’ moniker from those who would seek to use it to restrict the flow of information and ideas.” The same year also saw the Public Library Association (PLA) invite Karen Jo Gounaud as a speaker for its annual conference on the pointedly titled panel “Family Friendly Libraries: Sense or Censorship?” along with John Clark, the leader of a Virginia anti-censorship organization. While the fact

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142 Ibid.
that the PLA invited Gounaud to share her views at a national librarian conference was significant, audience questions and comments directed at Gounaud were openly critical.\footnote{John Clark and Karen Jo Gounaud, \textit{Family Friendly Libraries: Sense or Censorship?} (Chicago: Public Library Association, 1996).}

In 1999, \textit{American Libraries} invited Karen Jo Gounaud to a dialogue with Carrie Gardiner, school librarian and member of the ALA’s Intellectual Freedom Committee. Provocatively titled “Children’s Access: Protection or Preparation?” the dialogue showcased the very different approaches with which each participant understood children’s reading and the respective roles of parents and librarians in guiding it. Such attention to the proper professional practice of librarianship would become a hallmark of later clashes between FFL and the ALA. For example, while Gounaud declared that librarians should honor local community standards, Gardiner emphasized pluralism and diversity, arguing that libraries serve the whole community, making it impossible to consult one set of standards for so many diverse members.\footnote{Ibid.} In addition, while Gounaud emphasized the need to protect children from sexually explicit materials like \textit{Playboy} magazine, Gardiner championed advocacy for children’s right to read, arguing that no research existed that proved such materials harmful. Where she did grant the need for protection, Gardiner placed this responsibility squarely on the shoulders of parents, claiming that librarians were in no position to make such decisions in a parent’s stead: “In most situations, librarians do not have the background information on every child who enters their library or their children’s room to make such a judgment…they are more apt to trust the child’s judgment and the
judgment of the child’s parents.”

According to Gardiner, any problems between parent and child in communication were flaws in the relationship, not flaws in library policy.

In response, Gounaud argued that it wasn’t fair to place the ultimate responsibility for children’s library use on parents if said parents couldn’t have access to their children’s borrowing records. She also believed that granting children access and privacy undermined the authority of parents and further damaged the parent/librarian relationship. Of a situation Gounaud cited in which a librarian had asked a child if it was OK to tell her father what she’d checked out on her card, Gounaud argued that this “…was a very bad experience because [the father] had to undo the impression the librarian made that somehow the parents did not have absolute authority over their children’s reading.”

When discussion turned to the Internet, Gounaud made an analogy between the prohibition of the sale of alcohol and tobacco to minors and filtering software in libraries. Gardiner protested the equation of information access with such substances, and posed the following question: “Wouldn’t the safest approach, the best net, the best tool to give our young people, be to educate them about the Internet and how to evaluate information found on it, so that no matter what terminal they’re at…[they] can deal with the information they find, and make reasonable judgments to keep them from harm’s way?” Undeterred, Gounaud continued to argue for parental authority and better librarian/parent relationships, citing the library board as the final word on policy, and urging librarians to “…maintain great attitudes, even about parents who may complain.”

147 Ibid.
148 Ibid., 61.
149 Ibid.
150 Ibid., 62.
The centrality of librarian professionalism to such debates only intensified when FFL made its shift from print collections to Internet access policies, as we will explore further in Chapter 5. However, once FFL targeted the Internet and sought mandatory filtering on public library terminals, the library press seemed to lose interest in any further discussion. Save a few articles citing FFL in the Intellectual Freedom Manual as likely complainants in library censorship controversies, the library profession had seemed to wash its hands of its upstart critics. This was probably due to the fact that reconciliation was increasingly unlikely, given the tenor of pro family rhetoric about the ALA, whom FFL began accusing of not only hobnobbing with pornographers, but of actively promoting children’s right to access pornography (even child pornography) in the library. Such accusations were ubiquitous at the second FFL conference, which took place in October 1999 outside of Cincinnati, and which I attended. While FFL had long been critical of the ALA and its policies, the specter of children viewing Internet pornography in the public library intensified the critique to a fever pitch. During a screening at the conference of an MSNBC debate between David Burt of Filtering Facts and Judith Krug of the Office for Intellectual Freedom, Krug and intellectual freedom itself were openly booed and jeered by the audience with exclamations like “pornography is not information!” and “pornography is not intellectual!”

Virtually no mention was made of youth librarianship, and there was no discussion of how librarians should serve youth and families, beyond mandating the use of filters on public library Internet terminals.

While FFL ultimately fell short of its goal to represent a popular alternative to the ALA, as the conference organizers hoped, its influence on pro family library activism cannot be

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denied. FFL’s campaign for mandatory filtering in public libraries was ultimately taken up by organizations like the American Family Association (AFA), who threw considerable resources and influence into pushing for and defending the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA) of 2000. For instance, in 1999 the AFA produced a video entitled *Excess Access: Pornography, Children, and the American Library Association*, sounding the alarm about porn in libraries, denigrating the ALA, and providing “how to” manual of sorts for library activism. The video, which features appearances by Gounaud and FFL stalwarts Phil Burress, David Burt, and Helen Biehle, caricatures librarians as dupes of the ALA. A dramatization of porn-fueled library child abuse portrays the librarian mindlessly following the *Library Bill of Rights*, helpless to protect children from sexual predators in the library.152 In contrast to their earlier emphases on the “traditional family,” FFL’s fear mongering about Internet porn in libraries, had mainstream appeal outside of the pro family movement. With the arrival of AFA on the library activist scene, organized, political critiques of library policy, sparked by one concerned parent in Virginia, had become a familiar part of the national political landscape.

FFL’s star seemed to fall after the Supreme Court upheld CIPA in 2003, despite efforts by the ALA to fight it; there is virtually no mention of the organization in either the library press or the news media between 2003 and 2006. The organization may have lost momentum because of the resolution of CIPA, the loss of Karen Jo Gounaud from the organization’s helm in 1999, or both. Yet all of the major pro family organizations continued to link to the FFL website, citing library activism among the causes they supported and promoted. Focus on the Family took note of local library battles, publicizing

them approvingly in their media organs, and featuring FFL activists as “hometown heroes.” National pro family groups continued to serve as hubs for distributing information about how to challenge library materials, how to put pressure on librarians and library boards, and how to raise awareness about the professional sins of the ALA. Pro family activists had taken on the FFL critique of the ALA and incorporated it into their larger critique of public institutions in contemporary society. Meanwhile, hey continued to emphasize the importance of the campaigning done by groups like FFL, prodding citizens toward activism in their local communities. As the FFL instructed would-be activists, “[s]hare what you’ve learned with other like-minded parents and citizens, with the goal of forming a core group willing to work together to improve your local library system...don’t forget that the ballot box is the ultimate opportunity for you to affect public policy—including public library policy—by selecting moral and ethical leaders and de-selecting those less honorable.”

This orientation toward community campaigns and organizing, along with their association with national pro family organizations, illustrates that FFL participated in the cross pollination between grassroots local campaigns and larger, well-organized groups like the AFA.

The biggest legacy of FFL, however, is their critique of the ALA. Channeling similar arguments about teachers’ unions common in pro family discourse—in combination with widespread distrust of public institutions like schools and libraries—FFL crafted an explicit and coherent attack on the ALA that would have far-reaching implications in pro family circles. Contemporary library challenges nearly always focus on policy in addition to (or instead of) library collections and materials, and challengers inquire whether existing

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policies are the work of the ALA. They also quite self-consciously see their mission as an anti-ALA one, reclaiming the library from what they perceive to be the ALA’s illegitimate power and authority. Shifting from general complaints about library practices to a well-organized and comprehensive campaign against the ALA, FFL brought anti-ALA sentiment and ultimately, activism, into the purview of pro family library conflicts. They were able to achieve this because their critique resonated with larger pro family discourses about public v. private authority, cultural hegemony, parental rights, and censorship.

The FFL Critique of the ALA

The FFL critique of the ALA, the largest and oldest organization of United States librarians (founded in 1876), is a multi-pronged one that depends upon several simultaneous claims of its illegitimate power. The first claim leverages a savvy awareness of ALA’s influence in the library world into charges of ALA hegemony that can border on conspiracy theory. FFL depicts the ALA as a malign force that has infiltrated every aspect of librarianship, controlling not just library policy, but also library funding, the hiring of librarians, children’s book awards, and library education. The second claim contrasts the legitimate public the library presumably serves with an image of the ALA as a distant, private organization not responsive to the public will, especially the concerns of parents. The third claim attacks library neutrality, charging the ALA with promoting radical politics at the expense of conservative families and communities. Finally, FFL contests the basic terms of ALA discourse about censorship and intellectual freedom, accusing the ALA not
simply of “free speech absolutism,” but of being itself the “biggest censor of them all” for not taking pro family parental and citizen objections seriously. All of these claims rely on general beliefs about children’s endangerment and the proper authority of parents and taxpayers.

FFL often cites the hegemony of the ALA as the reason why local community values cannot reign in the library. According to FFL, ALA influence reaches everywhere, infiltrating libraries at multiple levels, including professional training, the hiring of personnel, policies, even publishing. As Gounaud puts it, “[the ALA] controls the education of most librarians, an impressive part of the flow of public state moneys to local library systems affect sales…[and] the training of local library boards of trustees who are supposed to be representing the public.”

Award-winning books, which FFL believes should be vetted for appropriate content, “…[are] not necessarily a safe choice, either. The ALA controls most of the awards, too.” While the ALA’s presumed stranglehold over the profession seems to absolve individual librarians from any blame, it also denied them any professional agency. In his opening address at the 1995 FFL conference, Burress insisted that he wasn’t blaming librarians, but also revealed that he viewed them as automatons carrying out the will of the library board: “…[N] either the FFL leadership nor I believe librarians are the problem… Librarians simply follow the directions of their board of trustees who have adopted the liberal agenda of the ALA.”

FFL believed trustees, board members, and librarians ran scared from the ALA, too afraid to speak up and challenge its

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156 “Family Friendly” Library Conference.
power. At the same conference, Gounaud claimed that librarians were turning to FFL in increasing numbers because they were fed up with the ALA and wanted to “go about the business of being good librarians.” The business of being a good librarian, Gounaud suggests, does not involve decision-making at the policy level. This has implications for the pro family critique of librarians’ professional authority generally, as we shall see in Chapter 5.

In addition to the sheer reach of its authority, the ALA’s influence is denigrated because FFL views it as private and not public. The public is redefined as the local community, its values universalized into “traditional” standards that everyone agrees upon. The ALA, in contrast, is painted as illegitimate, even illegal authority, a private interest divorced and distant from the local, out of touch with what is happening on main street: “Though the ALA is currently a politically powerful national organization, it is still only a PRIVATE organization whose policies, including the infamous ‘Library Bill of Rights’ and other related documents, have no basis in law.” The battle for the public library thus rests on the assumption of entitlement and rights: activists are only reclaiming that what was rightfully theirs to begin with, but taken away from them by the ALA. The real citizens, according to pro family activists, are community-minded folks, generally parents, with serious concerns about their children’s safety in the library. It is time, they argue, for the citizens to take the library back from elite professionals, and for the patrons to make their local institutions public again.

In addition to being characterized as a distant, private organization out of touch with communities, the ALA was also caricatured as a hard Left organization that censored conservative viewpoints. In her satirical poem, “Ode to the ALA,” Gounaud accuses the ALA of First Amendment hypocrisy with the following lines:

“’Right Wing’ is the enemy
‘Left Wing’ is O.K.
That’s the First Amendment
As retold by ALA.”159

FFL lambasted the ALA for supporting various political issues such as nuclear disarmament and gay rights, interpreting such stances as further evidence of hostility toward conservatives. Indeed, Burress argued that the entire agenda of the ALA was hostile to the pro family movement, “…attacking the family, all issues facing the pro-family movement, our work to preserve pro-family values and our desire to protect children through parental rights policies.”160 The FFL found in the ALA’s liberal policy orientation “a hostile attitude toward conservative citizens”, and believed that ALA did not take FFL positions seriously or respectfully.161 FFL thus skewed libraries that subscribed to ALA policies for a lack of balance in their library collections. One of the suggestions in their written “Test” for determining a library’s “family friendly” quotient was to check for balance in the collection on hot button topics: “Most hot button issues of our times, like abortion, euthanasia, homosexuality, etc are heavily weighted on the liberal and left sides of the debates.

160 “Family Friendly” Library Conference.
Conservative materials, especially Christian conservative materials, with an opposite perspective on those issues are much harder to find if they are there at all.”\textsuperscript{162}

Despite this apparent commitment to viewpoint diversity, FFL nevertheless maintained that libraries should act as non-neutral institutions, promoting certain values over others. One of the values that they believed should be promoted was that of the traditional family, qualified as “mother and father married to one another raising children together.”\textsuperscript{163} FFL insisted that traditional families should be protected and supported by public institutions because they believed them to be the “proven best” way of raising children and because families are envisioned to be the building blocks of society.\textsuperscript{164} Upholding the traditional family also means giving less time and space to non-traditional families—notably, gay and lesbian ones. There is no question that one of the reasons FFL originally criticized the ALA was because it supported gay and lesbian rights, a stance they understood to be yet another way the organization denigrated the traditional family. FFL believed that their challenges and objections to gay and lesbian materials were not taken seriously, that they were, in fact, censored by the ALA, and that this censorship occurred for political reasons. Former cataloger Hal Schell, FFL member and speaker at the 1995 FFL conference, claimed that the closer a library was affiliated with the ALA, the more likely it was to promote gay rights: “Gay rights supporters with the ALA have succeed so well over the years in tying the politics with librarians’ general concerns about fighting censorship and

\textsuperscript{162} “Parent Alert: Beware the Public Libraries.”
\textsuperscript{163} “A Vision for Family Friendly Libraries.”
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid.
preserving intellectual freedom, any effort from within the profession to stem the biased tide of gay propaganda into public libraries is easily pushed aside.”

But according to FFL, opposing intellectual freedom did not mean that they embraced censorship. Rather, FFL defined censorship to be government censorship of information, and prior restraint on what could or could not be said, not the removal of “inappropriate” books from libraries. They claimed that censorship involved the suppression of political speech, not moral questions about what children should or should not be exposed to. The ALA, FFL argued, had radically (and perhaps willfully) misunderstood the meaning of censorship: “When a citizen objects to a store selling a certain book, or about a library holding a certain volume, this is not censorship. Rather, it is the exchange of ideas and opinions that, in fact, enhances the vibrancy of the American public square.” FFL took deep umbrage at being called “censors” or any suggestion that their positions were extreme. Rather, they believed that what they demanded was “responsible sponsorship,” comparing their objections to the routine decisions about collection development that librarians make everyday: “That the ALA confuses the censorship of political speech with the setting of moral standards for the purchase and access of materials is a zealotry which holds ideological orthodoxy more precious than the welfare of children.” Thus, standards of morality were not only agreed upon, but also effectively divorced from considerations of intellectual freedom. Commitments to access and diversity could not, FFL suggested, be considered elements of the community’s (and children’s) welfare.

165 “Family Friendly” Library Conference.
166 “Social Research Brief: Censorship.”
FFL believes that the ALA has done a particularly poor job of being responsive to parents, characterizing parental objections as “censorship” rather than legitimate involvement in their children’s lives. They argue that parents who object to certain library materials have been portrayed extremists, rather than as reasonable people concerned about their children’s welfare.

“The people asking the questions and raising the objections are not extremist folk screaming for Nazi-like censorship. They are loving guardians shocked and saddened by unexpected confrontations with librarians unwilling to set books like Madonna’s SEX away from children and youth. They are reasonable and responsible adults asking the library systems they pay for to give them a little help and encouragement in their efforts to keep the world’s gutter from pouring directly into the minds of their kids.” 168

FFL cites Banned Books Week as further evidence that the organization seeks to intimidate and ridicule concerned parents. They argue that it is not just a “negative” event, but also a campaign full of “…exaggerated and deceitful misrepresentations of involved parents [who are] simply trying to protect their children from age-inappropriate materials by suggesting more appropriate access and selection policies.” 169

Though one might expect that pro-family activists would contrast libraries unfavorably with religious institutions, the usual foil for libraries is local businesses, perhaps because they are more likely to have restrictive policies based on age. In addition, businesses are believed to be naturally more responsive to their communities because they don’t want to lose their patronage, and this profit-motive makes them more accountable.

Typically, local businesses are not distinguished from corporate chains that are quite unlikely to be in touch with local concerns or to be threatened by local scuffles over policy. The appeal to the business model is both a call for accountability and a call for libraries to make restrictive policies unapologetically. Libraries should emulate businesses as community-oriented, yet pragmatic, institutions, willing to create and enforce policies that regulate dangerous desires and protect children. They should not, in other words, be neutral institutions.

How FFL Changed Pro Family Library Activism

Family Friendly Libraries brought public library pro family activism and concerns about the ALA into the mainstream of the national pro family movement. It was successful in shifting pro family attention to libraries as a site of activism because it was able both to draw from the resources of the pro family media and to tailor those resources to the particular setting of public and school libraries. Through FFL’s rhetoric about “family friendly” and community-oriented libraries, its organizing strategies, and its shift in focus from materials to ALA policy, it exerted influence in the national pro family theater long after the organization itself fell into decline. Contemporary conservative challenges and conflicts in

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libraries are thus best understood as part of the legacy of FFL and its impact on pro family library activism.

Perhaps the most striking element of FFL’s influence was the way the organization imported the conservative trope of post-1960s society in decline into a library activist context. As discussed earlier in this chapter, many pro family activists perceived the upheavals of the 1960s as evidence of a culture ultimately disruptive to traditional morality and hostile to religion, viewing their activism as an intervention in a quest to salvage moral authority in the public theater. Key here is the link between the health of the family and the health of the nation. Conservative Christians believe that the state of the family is so closely linked to the state of the nation that, should one decline, it will bring the other with it. As they find evidence of the traditional family being destroyed by divorce, single parent households, alcoholism, pornography, and other social ills, pro family activists bemoan not just the state of the family, but also the decline of the nation as a whole. They also believe that, once the family is healed, that America will return to a former state of grace. While libraries have always served as a powerful arena for cultural conflicts, FFL forged a narrative of the public library itself as an institution in decline, thereby marshaling the force of what religious scholar Jason Bivins calls “the declension narrative” for library activism. For example, in “the Seduction of the American Public Library,” an essay eventually reprinted in Phyllis Schlafly’s Education Reporter, FFL activist Helen Biehle lamented the decline of a “once honorable profession” into the excesses of “free speech absolutism.” In contrast to library “founding fathers” such as John Cotton Dana’s vision of the library as a instrument of upholding moral authority, she cites the excesses of the 1960s and the ALA’s subsequent “takeover” by “sixties radicals” as evidence of how far the

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172 Bivins, Religion of Fear, 10.
library has fallen. Biehle claimed that post-1960s ALA emphasis on intellectual freedom and censorship trumped other, more pressing community concerns like child protection, signaling that libraries had lost their legitimacy as public institutions.

Though it might be tempting to characterize such critiques as “anti-library,” it is more accurate to say that pro-family organizations are instead advancing a competing claim about what libraries should be. Most pro-family rhetoric is positive, even effusive, about libraries themselves, particularly libraries of the past. There is, accordingly, a strong strain of nostalgia in pro-family rhetoric about libraries, particularly public libraries, that were once safe havens, but no longer. As Scott DeNicola writes, “What’s so troubling about ALA’s power is that it trades on parents’ image of the library as it once was—a treasure house of the best and a safe place for children. Today’s reality is quite the opposite.”173 This positive image of the library that the ALA “trades on” is, not incidentally, also the pro-family activists’ hope for the future. The library will be, above all else, a “safe” place, responsive to citizen input (indeed, under its direct control) and a “treasure house” of the best—canonical literature, certainly, but also of the best cultural values and ideals.174 In order to get to that future library, however, the “true” public, which is made up of community-oriented, civic-minded citizens, must organize to take back control of their libraries from the ALA. Thus, the pro-family focus on “family friendly libraries”, while certainly a galvanizing one for their constituencies, is given further rhetorical power with broader arguments about citizenship and the nature of the public.

In order to save the library, however, there must be a library worth saving. Here, the family friendly rhetoric operates in two distinct ways—first, it appeals to an idealized library of the past, a library of fond, usually childhood memory, that may be a haven of imagination and other qualities but is above all, safe and nurturing, part of the community. It then demonstrates the fallen nature of this library. Thus is it not an accident that pro family critic Helen Biehle titles her essay “the Seduction of the American Public Library” [emphasis added]. Family Friendly Libraries wants to demonstrate that this library of the past is no longer, and that the library of the present forms a threat that must be countered with pro family activism. There are several ways in which the present libraries have fallen away from the old order. First, they are no longer part of the community. Second, they are no longer safe places. Third, they have abdicated their roles as cultural authorities and preservers of quality materials. And finally, they have fallen away from their mission to the public that was part of the original intent of the founders, and have sold out their allegiance to the private organization of the ALA.

Significantly, FFL founder Karen Jo Gounaud writes at some length about her memories of the libraries of her childhood. The ways in which she juxtaposes the family friendly libraries of the past with the libraries of the present are fascinating, and worth quoting at length:

“Libraries in my life were always wonderfully imaginative and adventurous, but safe, child-friendly places. Librarians were ‘in loco parentis’ and partnered with parents in protecting the young... Children’s books made way ‘...for Ducklings,’ Mother Goose and Mister Rogers, but never the subjects of homosexuality and inner-city riots...The only ‘web’ known to kids was safe to browse in a book about a spider named ‘Charlotte’.”

Such memories of libraries past provide blueprints for their future counterparts;

Gounaud founded FFL, in part, to return libraries to their former ideal state where library materials never challenged “traditional values” and librarians monitored children’s reading in order to protect them from knowing too much and to preserve their innocence. Such narratives of decline and restoration found ample echoes in the pro family media writ large, and brought FFL’s quest to salvage public libraries into sharper, more compelling relief.

In mobilizing activists to restore these ideals, FFL also successfully articulated a discourse of community “ownership” over libraries. As pro family activists are exhorted to “take back” the nation from those who would pervert its principles, so did Gounaud and her allies goad conservative taxpayers and parents into reclaiming their libraries for conservative, pro family values. While the public library has long been a site of struggle for competing community ideals, the quest to claim the site itself for a social cause was an FFL innovation. Part of the appeal that FFL made to potential activists was that their public libraries belonged to them; that they had a right to influence policies and collection development, and that the professionals in charge of the institution were no longer worthy of respect or trust. Such a discourse of community ownership does double duty, both spurring citizens to action and further undermining the library as a hotbed of ALA influence. As Gounaud wrote and repeated in several essays, “…never lose sight of the fact that you are protecting your children, your community, your tax money, all rightfully yours to protect and defend. The library system ultimately answers to all of you—not to the American Library Association.”

The success of the “family friendly” moniker was not unique to the FFL’s library activism. As discussed earlier, the rhetoric of family, values, children, and community has

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lent a benign, secular appeal to pro family activism generally. However, FFL’s particular spin on “family friendly” helped it to participate in multiple activist discourses, including the antigay activism of the Christian Right. One of the prongs of the FFL charter included “traditional family emphasis,” meaning ostensibly that libraries should give more time, space, and energy to the “proven best” social mechanism for cultural stability. Gounaud was careful to define the “traditional family” as a heterosexual, married, monogamous one, “often with children,” thereby mobilizing conservative ideals about the proper structure of the family into the primary thrust of her activism. Another plank of the charter, “respect for minors,” was a subtle attempt to limit the visibility of gay and lesbian materials in collections and displays, while a third, “respect for laws and standards” attempted to draw any anti-sodomy laws still on the books into the purview of library activism against gay-positive library resources and services. By normalizing heterosexual monogamy and privileging parenthood as a platform to speak with moral authority, FFL drew from existing trends in pro family activist rhetoric to mobilize potential activists to make their local libraries more “family friendly” in terms of policy.

The way FFL plied the supposed legitimacy of the local, grassroots campaign was also typical of pro family social movement dynamics. Framing her own activism as the reluctant path of a woman pushed too far, Gounaud served as an effective “everywoman” for pro family library activism. In her opening remarks at the first FFL conference, Gounaud claimed that the only roles she had foreseen for herself were “…wife, mother, teacher, musician. Political activism was not in the plan. But circumstances have a way of making decisions for us”177 FFL lent its “plain folks” legitimacy to organizations like the American

Family Association as both example and encouragement for “regular” citizens to get involved in changing the policies of their local libraries. In 1996, the AFA even awarded Gounaud the “God and County Award” for “exceptional and devoted leadership to God and country.” In turn, FFL went on to urge other activists to take on library issues in their own local communities. Creating and publicizing a research instrument titled “the FFL Test,” FFL urged activists to examine their local public libraries for evidence of ALA-bias in personnel hiring, collection development, and library policy. Once issues are prioritized, FFL walks activists through the political process at the grassroots level: “If the system is not cooperative, and especially if it is hostile, share what you’re doing with other community groups—churches, civic organizations, etc. and include the press where appropriate…Finally, the ballot box is the ultimate voicing of your opinion on any part of your government.”\(^{178}\) (See Appendix A for the full text of the “Family Friendly Libraries Test.”)

In turning activist attentions toward public library board elections and appointments, FFL also deployed what Sara Diamond calls “bite sized battles” at the local level. When conservative activists shifted their attention from presidential elections and constitutional amendments to school and library board elections, they were better able to mobilize their supporters around issues that affected them on a day-to-day level. FFL was able to identify policies that affected and concerned many parents, particularly enforcing parental prerogative to view their children’s library records, along other intellectual freedom policies protecting the rights of minors. Not only did they organize supporters to complain, but they

also went after key members of library boards who did not agree with their positions on the issues. FFL proved to be very interested in the composition of library boards, encouraging activists to run or seek appointment as well as to support candidates who will shun ALA policies and support “family friendly” policies instead. Eventually, Gounaud and her allies hoped to oust key members of the library board and replace them with board members more congenial to their interests: “Before that trust is gone, those responsible for its serious erosion should be replaced.”

“*It Is Their Library, Too*”?

That one pro family movement battle was fought on a library front is not terribly surprising. As institutions with an undeniable ideological heft, libraries have long been sites of cultural struggle over values. As Louise Robbins writes of a community civil rights battle that resulted in one Oklahoma librarian’s firing in 1950, “[w]hen the cultural discourse is contested, the institutions charged with the transmission of culture become arenas in the contest.”179 However, FFL recognized and capitalized on library politics as politics, going beyond challenging individual library materials to challenge the very purpose and meaning of the library. By bringing libraries and librarianship to the fore of the pro family movement, FFL and other activists reemphasized the importance of public libraries’ service to communities—and in so doing, brought the nature of that service into question. Though FFL would ultimately fall short of its earlier ambition to serve as a widely represented

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alternative model to the ALA and its policies, its history and writings nevertheless demonstrate that significant contention persists over the role of the public library in American life. FFL and other pro family activists stepped into the fray not simply to determine the library’s role, but to declare their right to determine it.
This chapter analyzes print and electronic media targeting pro family library activists in order to illustrate how it characterizes young readers and reading. Using publications and websites from a range of pro family organizations such as Citizens for Literary Standards in Schools, Family Friendly Libraries, Parents Against Bad Books in Schools, and Safelibraries, I argue that these characterizations of youth reading not only ignore transactional and aesthetic models of literacy, but also challenge librarianship’s ethic of intellectual freedom. I first explore the roots of pro family models of reading in evangelical beliefs in biblical inerrancy and textual literalism, concluding with a discussion of how evangelical media informs these reading models. I then discuss the hallmarks of the pro family model of youth reading, including children as vulnerable readers and reading as a vehicle for content delivery, contrasting them with librarians’ understandings of intellectual freedom. I follow with the Harry Potter controversy as a case study of how pro family models of reading collide with those of librarianship, particularly with regard to genre and canonicity. Finally, I explore how librarians have drawn from reading research in order to make a stronger case for models of reading predicated on intellectual freedom.

One of the best examples of how pro family activists understand youth reading is exhibited in their book rating and evaluation systems. In 2006, the Heritage Foundation’s Rebecca Hagelin began to publicize and promote a new online children’s literature
review database called Facts on Fiction. Written by anonymous retired teachers, librarians, and home-schooling moms, Facts on Fiction reviewers rated popular, award-winning, and classic children’s and young adult literature on a number of sliding scales, including Profanity/Language, Sexual Content, Violence/Illegal Activity, and Disrespectful/Anti-Social Elements—this last was deemed especially valuable by Hagelin for “gauging the overall tone of the book.” Each scale was broken down into more specific categories, and the number of instances of each objectionable behavior, activity, swear word, or scene were then quantified into “brief” or “extended” incidents, “single” or “multiple” occurrences, including one rating for “entire theme of the book.” However, even for those satisfied by such an extremely thorough ratings system, Facts on Fiction’s reviews might raise more questions than they answer. Consider the category “Death”; the death of Charlotte in Charlotte’s Web, arguably among the pivotal scenes of the book, was tallied as a “single brief incident,” while the death of Jess in Bridge to Terabithia was counted as an “extended incident.” Arguably, death might be considered the “theme of the entire book” in both cases, but the reviewers only count (literally) death as an isolated event, brief or extended. Further, Bridge to Terabithia is a frequently challenged book, while Charlotte’s Web has generally remained unscathed, beloved by librarians and pro-family activists alike. Perhaps it was the “Use of Tobacco” and “Religious Exclamations” that did Bridge in. In any case, Hagelin writes that the review database’s purpose is to inform parents about potentially objectionable books that their children might be assigned for class or read on their own, giving parents “the tools they

181 Ibid.
need” to determine whether or not their child’s reading is appropriate: “Does the book in question contain mild obscenities, sexual references or scatological terms, and if so, how often? The reviews will tell you. And if you need more detail (including quotes and page numbers), the reviews will give you that as well.”183 The ultimate goal is to limit children’s access to library materials, “restrict[ing] the free flow of media images to children…[and] narrow[ing] the range of acceptable ideas and images in an attempt to bolster traditional lines of authority.”184

The sheer detail of the Facts on Fiction schema, as well as how the same scales apply to every book, signals a vigorous attention on the part of pro family activists to cataloging objectionable incidents and flattening literature into discrete scenes, words, and other isolated components. But what do such schemas reveal about how pro family activists understand children’s literature, child readers, and reading? How does this tactic, in combination with the rhetoric of pro-family activists, promote a particular view of young readers, reading, and education? And finally, how does this framework or model of reading relate to the broader social and political agenda of pro-family activism? I approach these questions with particular attention to the ideologies, or worldviews, that structure pro family models of reading. One of these is the authority of adults over children, both in fact and in fiction. By narrowing this range, pro family activists shrink the universe of ideas down into those that support their authority. Reading’s power thus lies in its ability to confer knowledge, and to directly inculcate values in youth, causing them to behave in ways that can be identified and predicted. The pleasurable and aesthetic experiences of reading are secondary to its ability to instruct, the mere

183 Hagelin, “Book Reviews that Parents Can Use.”
184 Diamond, Not by Politics Alone, 174-5.
sprinkling of sugar to help the moral medicine go down. While young readers are thought to be especially vulnerable to bad instruction, they also seem to welcome it: many pro-family activists view young readers with a jaundiced eye, impugning the reading of the young as always and ever prurient, as we shall see later in this chapter. This framework stands in stark contrast to the models of reading promoted by librarians who defend intellectual freedom, though both believe in the power of the word. Pro-family activists, however, locate that power in biblical authority and the word of God.

The Bible Tells Me So: Literalism and the Power of Shared Stories

The way that one reads the Bible has a profound effect upon the way that one reads the world. The fact that evangelical Christians read the Bible not only as the word of God revealed, but also as a conduct manual for modern life, suggests at least one reason why they link reading directly to behavior: the Bible is simultaneously holy book and handbook, a source of spiritual communion with the divine as well as an interpretive lens through which to read social and political events. A belief in an inerrant Bible whose correct meaning is accessible to all readers leaves little room for the vagaries of interpretation or reader subjectivity. Reading is thus bound up in absolute authority and utter certainty of interpretation; the Christian reader can perceive the author’s (God’s) intent, and read his Book accordingly, secure that there is one single, knowable meaning through the lens of the text. This way of reading and of seeing the world is known as literalism.
In an ethnographic study of two groups of literalists, fundamentalist Christians and law professors who practice a strict originalist interpretation of the Constitution, Vincent Crapazano (2000) characterized literalism as a narrow, convention-bound system of interpretation, a system that encourages certain outcomes, costs, and consequences. In the case of the fundamentalists, literalism functions as a way to distinguish between the damned and the saved, keeping the discomforts and challenges of linguistic ambiguity at bay in order to marshal further certainty for fundamentalism’s truth claims. As Crapazano asserts, “[t]he Fundamentalists’ commitment to literalism supports not only their particular understanding of the Bible but the certainty of their theology. Theirs is an assertive discourse: one does not debate them.”

Tellingly, fundamentalists associate figurative and imaginative aspects of language with human promiscuity and depravity because they are seen as distractions from right meanings. They are associated with man’s fallen condition, with promiscuous flights of the imagination, and with “man’s propensity to manipulate meaning for his own depraved purpose.” In spite of their respect for the power of the word and its role, for example, in conversion and coming to know God, fundamentalists also demonstrate a great deal of ambivalence and fear of the power of words, an ambivalence that seeps through in not just their book challenges, but in their rather circumscribed approaches to reading and interpreting texts. As Crapazano argues, “[d]espite contextualization, Fundamentalists tend to read Scripture as though it were an instruction manual, verse by verse, page by page, passage by passage, story by story, always in a very narrow manner, with little regard for context. They seem fearful not just of ambiguity, not just of figurative language, but of the power of narrative.

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186 Ibid., 16.
Control the meanings of an errant text, Crapazano seems to suggest, and one harnesses a kind of power over not simply readers, but over the creation of knowledge.

Literal and figurative readings are explored further in a study by Kathleen C. Boone (1989), which investigates how believers use the Bible to marshal authority for their speech in contemporary social life. Her discursive analysis of fundamentalist discourse about Bible reading reveals that literal meanings are characterized as “common sense” or plain meaning, as opposed to a hidden, deeper or figurative meaning. Accordingly, the “plain meaning” of the Bible is available to any reader who desires to read it honestly, while other kinds of interpretations are branded as inauthentic. Moreover, because the Bible is believed to be inerrant, failure to comprehend the true, literal or plain meaning of the text lies with the reader alone. Readers are thus fragile and fallible, if not armed with the proper relationship to the Word, which is the only legitimate source of authority. Intriguingly, Boone connects this belief in the literal truth of the “Good Book” to the fears fundamentalists often have about “bad books.” She writes, “[t]he care taken to shield fundamentalist laypersons from non-fundamentalist discourse reflects the strong belief that the wrong words, the wrong combination of words, can subvert faith—an attitude traceable to the centrality of the inerrant text, without which fundamentalists claim that faith itself can be destroyed.”

If the only task of reading is to divine a text’s true meaning, and all other interpretive functions are

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187 Ibid., 146.
denied, then fundamentalists might indeed be inclined to assume a protective or censorious stance toward readers deemed vulnerable.

Susan Harding’s *The Book of Jerry Falwell* (2000) examines literalism in the context of the evangelical subculture, exploring how the discourses of witnessing, preaching, and salvation structure authority between speaker and listener. In the central practice of conversion, or “witnessing,” words are presumed to have real world effects, to *do* things to people: “[t]he reality, or truth, constituted in witnessing is, in part, a linguistic one: the supernatural manifests itself as God’s voice and his spirit is communicated and experienced through words. Much collective ritual among orthodox Protestants is likewise centered on words, on the Word.”

Moreover, the template for the witnessing conversation—speaker or “saved” person testifying to unsaved listener—closely mirrors conservative activists’ framing of the relationship between writer and reader. Like the listener in a witnessing conversation, the reader is always a potential convert; therefore, it is particularly important that the testimony (or reading) be a righteous one. Harding’s study reveals the centrality of words to religious conservatives in daily community life, and emphasizes the active role language is seen to have in relation to behavior.

Other scholarship connects biblical literalism with particular contexts, such as the study of literature in the classroom. Ellen Brinkley’s “Faith in the Word: Examining Religious Right Attitudes Toward Texts” (1995) is one of the few works to link fundamentalist attitudes about sacred texts directly to conservative challenges to classroom materials and curricula. Brinkley argues that if teachers understand that

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concerned parents read their Bibles as the literal word of God, it will be easier for them to understand why these same parents sometimes confuse the pronouncements and beliefs of the protagonists with those of the author. Unfortunately, Brinkley underplays the social movement context of parental curriculum challenges, characterizing them as isolated incidents fueled by anger seeking an easy target in the public school system. However, her insight that a certainty about the interpretation of sacred texts affects why materials are challenged is one that is foundational to this study.

In a similar vein, Diane Ravitch’s *The Language Police*, a 2003 study of textbook censorship, also locates challenges from the right in beliefs about language; in this case, a belief that children imitate what they read. She writes, “[t]hey believe strongly in the power of the word, and they believe that children will model their behavior on whatever they read. If they read stories about disobedient children, they will be disobedient; if they read stories which conflict with their parents’ religious values, they might abandon their religion. Critics on the right urge that whatever children read should model appropriate moral behavior.” Ravitch also provides an overview of many of the reasons why textbooks are challenged, which turns out to have a great deal to do with the way that content is presented, rather than the content per se. For example, right wing challengers object to “situational” or context-dependent ethics, preferring instead a more clear-cut distinction between right and wrong. They also object to portrayals of disrespect or of dissent within the family, and urge publishers to make textbooks more patriotic; that is, to present the “positive” aspects of American history.

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What is also important about the Bible in fundamentalist discourse is the way that it serves as a source of shared narratives and stories. Biblical references can serve as a kind of common currency, linking people who share common religious (and sometimes, political) beliefs together, affirming their connections with one another. As Linda Kintz writes, “[l]iving inside this religious framework means living inside a world of textual quotations and references to biblical passages, interpretations, and reinterpretations among a community of believers who know all the same stories and all the same passages.”

Bible references cement identity and common purpose by drawing communities of believers together with the shared experience of a story (or even a verse) known in common. The content of these common stories gives religious conservatives a rich palette of references from which to describe and characterize the pro family movement.

Bible stories and references have been especially effective in drawing conservative activists together with narratives of shared oppression and martyrdom, as Elizabeth Castelli argues. In “Persecution Complexes,” her 2007 examination of the “war on Christians” rhetoric that pro family activists have increasingly employed post 9/11, Castelli analyzes how stories of Christian martyrdom in the Bible, in combination with the language of civil rights and identity politics, have been marshaled to give conservative activists a stronger sense of shared community oppression, an oppression that spurs their activism and gives it a greater moral authority. As she argues, the pro family movement “…has increasingly sought to recast democratic debates over social policy as acts of religious intolerance and persecution in themselves, with Christians

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emerging as an identifiable and homogenous group that has become the object of discrimination and victimization.” Castelli also highlights the degree to which the idiom of war meshes well with the sense of Christians as an oppressed minority embroiled in a larger cultural battle, one that has consequences for the nation as a whole. She writes: “[t]he ‘war on Christians’ rhetoric is more than mere rhetoric; rather, it is a critical element of a comprehensive theo-political framework that blends the sacred and the secular and that sees the story of America unfolding as a story of God’s covenantal promise to a chosen People.”

In a similar vein, Ann Burlein’s *Lift High the Cross* (2003), an analysis of the common connections between white supremacist rhetoric and more mainstream conservative activist discourse, found what they had in common was their reliance on biblically inflected counter-memories. According to Michel Foucault, counter-memories are stories that we tell about the past in order to inform the present, a way of “remembering” the past differently by constructing an alternative history. Religion, and particularly the Bible, can be a powerful source for constructing counter-memories. As Burlein describes the process, “[r]eligious symbols and rituals, texts and practices, institutions and moods help form identity and subjectivity…by shaping how people remember their histories, orient themselves within particular identities, and invest in their world.” However, in the case of the right, particularly the far right, religion and counter-memory has been put to decidedly more ambiguous ends as the Bible has been used as a way to “remember” the American past as an exclusively white, Christian one,

193 Elizabeth Castelli, “Persecution Complexes: Identity Politics and ‘the War on Christians,’” *Differences* 18 (2007), 164.
194 Ibid., 160.
and whites as God’s true “chosen people.” Interestingly, Burlein sees these counter-memories most effectively articulated through references to activists’ hopes and fears for their children, who act, she argues, as “affective magnets.”196 “By speaking in the name of children, we represent our exercise of power and our assertion of rights as legitimate, untouched by the uncertainty that characterizes intentionality and untainted by moral ambivalence.”197 Note how crucial is the presence of children to making counter-memories and the power of the Biblical story have its full impact and effect, making acting on behalf of children the basis of a powerful cultural claim to truth and power.

**Evangelical Pop Culture**

Another key to understanding pro family models of reading is evangelical pop culture, whose appropriation of mass cultural forms for religious and political purposes reveals how many conservative activists understand the role of entertainment in moral instruction. Though scholars are divided on evangelical pop culture’s relationship to conservative religious activism, they agree that it has significantly altered the landscape of both religious and mainstream media.198 While Christian publishing and broadcasting has been around since the 1930s, its explosion into the mainstream during the 1990s was

196 Ibid., 8.
197 Ibid., 15.
significant and had a great impact on the momentum of the pro family movement.\textsuperscript{199} Evangelical media is intended to serve both as an inoculation against the temptations of secular media, and an appropriation of said media’s power for delivering religious and political messages. This media encompasses a diverse range of materials, published and reviewed almost exclusively by evangelical publishers and presses that correspond to almost any imaginable secular counterpart. Materials range from the self-help publications of Focus on the Family such as James Dobson’s \textit{Bringing Up Boys}, Christian rock in an array of subgenres (including Christian death metal), haunted house-inspired Hell Houses, the God-friendly but non-preachy children’s DVD series \textit{Veggie Tales}, and the apocalyptic vision of the U.S. in sinful liberal decline of LaHaye and Jenkins’ \textit{Left Behind} series. While I will refer to evangelical pop media in the aggregate, readers should recognize that different genres vary greatly in the extent to which they emphasize religious themes.

Evangelical media demonstrates that pro family activists do not condemn the pleasures of mass culture outright; rather, they harness popular entertainments in the service of higher moral and educational aims. The roots of evangelical media lie in the Christian press and religious publishing, a phenomenon that dates back to the nation’s infancy. R. Laurence Moore argues that the lack of state religion or otherwise government-endorsed religious presence in the United States meant churches had to market themselves to potential flock members in order to compete with popular entertainments.\textsuperscript{200} According to Moore, in order to have any impact in the marketplace of print, religious writers and publishers learned they had to offer their readers something

\textsuperscript{199} Hendershot, \textit{Shaking the World for Jesus}.
more palatable and entertaining than unadorned doctrine. By claiming a higher purpose for amusement, religious leaders believed delight could coexist comfortably with moral instruction.\textsuperscript{201}

However, scholars do not agree upon how “instructive” contemporary popular evangelical entertainments can be. Sara Diamond argues that what she calls the evangelical subculture, including radio, periodical literature, and home schooling products, exists to provide moral support and community for conservative activists in the trenches.\textsuperscript{202} Diamond argues that entertainments and self-help media provide a context for pro family activism by articulating conservative politics in an engaging context, and by promoting a sense of shared culture and community. She maintains that products such as Christian parenting manuals are not ideologically neutral, but rather advance a tradition-bound, hierarchical worldview of authority of men over women, parents over children, and believers over nonbelievers.\textsuperscript{203} According to Diamond, evangelical media reinforces power relationships that religious conservatives deem right and desirable, and bolsters the pro-family movement by reassuring activists of the importance and urgency of their work.

In contrast, media studies scholar Heather Hendershot seeks to understand evangelical media as a cultural product in its own right, one that many of its consumers do not experience as ideological or political\textsuperscript{204} This view of evangelical media is consistent with the pro family movement’s recent tendency to soften moral pronouncements in favor of more mainstream and palatable appeals to family and

\textsuperscript{201} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{202} Diamond, \textit{Not by Politics Alone}, 9.
\textsuperscript{203} Ibid., 8.
\textsuperscript{204} Hendershot, \textit{Shaking the World for Jesus}, 3.
community values. Hendershot reads evangelical media as both accommodation to and critique of mass culture, borrowing popular forms in the hopes of both softening religious messages and serving the needs of Christian consumers. However, engaging with mainstream culture for any purpose, no matter how noble, makes evangelical media vulnerable to secular influence. Hendershot notes that many genres of evangelical pop culture, including children’s videos and Christian rock, have gradually become more secular, toning down their religious messages in order to broaden their market appeal. The decidedly ecumenical and vaguely God-oriented children’s series *Veggie Tales* is perhaps the best-known example of this phenomenon.

Meanwhile, Jason Bivins studies evangelical media that employ the conventions of horror to scare audiences toward conservative social policies. Citing the declension narrative of a country in decline since the 1960s, he argues that evangelical media such as Jack Chick tracts, Hell Houses, and the Left Behind series blame contemporary societal woes on a liberal social agenda and an increasingly permissive society. Describing religious conservatives’ view of the political landscape as a “religion of fear,” Bivins argues that pop entertainments essentially function as movement pedagogy, reinforcing a conservative social agenda through a horror of and fascination with evil. Bivins illustrates how political cultures are narrated and taught through pop entertainments, with Hell Houses and related entertainments providing a documentary realism to the demons of sin by offering readers and viewers a surrogate thrill of the violent, the evil, and the illicit. Borrowing the conventions of horror to scare people straight, evangelical

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205 Ibid., x.
206 Ibid., 45.
208 Ibid., 16.
entertainments help generate pro family activist investment in a politically conservative agenda. Understanding evangelical media as “bait” to deliver pleasure and thrills without objectionable content allows us to consider how pro family activists understand the relationship between entertainment and instruction. Format and genre are almost negligible if death metal can be appropriated as means to evangelical and socially conservative ends. Rather, texts of various stripes serve as containers for whatever message their creator wishes to impart. The most important aspect of reading and viewing, then, is “getting” this message; meanwhile, the texts pro family activists see as objectionable are those which carry messages young readers understand only too well.

Vulnerable Readers

Which readers are pro-family activists most worried about? Interestingly, pro family media tends to blur age- or education-based distinctions between younger readers, generally lumping young adults together with children and referring to them all as “the young”, “minors”, or simply, “children”. Because one of pro family activists’ concerns is maintaining parental authority over children’s reading, they tend to focus mainly on whether or not the reader is a minor; in other words, they don’t dwell over-much on the difference between seven and seventeen-year-olds. Tellingly, an article published on the Safelibraries website in 2007 accuses the ALA of creating the category of “young adult” as a way to market more and more explicit literature to teenagers, citing the age range for the Printz Award’s audience (12-18) as evidence that the ALA is abdicating its responsibilities by treating children exactly the same as adults. Website author Dan
Kleinman writes: “In Orwellian fashion, pre-teens have skipped over their teenage years and become adults.”\textsuperscript{209} PABBIS (Parents Against Bad Books in Schools) agrees—what is important about young readers is not their maturity, experience, educational level, or even their age, but the fact that they are all minors under the age of eighteen. According to this view, “[s]tudents, even high school students, are children and not adults.”\textsuperscript{210} For these organizations, whatever else young readers might be, they are first and foremost minors. And with any distinctions between the maturity levels of young readers set aside, pro-family activists are better able characterize all young readers as immature, impressionable and vulnerable.

The most striking characteristic of young readers in pro-family rhetoric is their vulnerability; their minds are portrayed as empty containers, ready to be filled up with whatever reading materials are available to them. If one believes that readers are vulnerable, it is easy to imagine that they then will imitate whatever they read; if one believes that they are prurient, it is then easy to imagine them tantalized by especially sexual, vulgar material. In any case, it becomes of the utmost importance that parents find out what is in the materials their children read, if such material is deposited into children’s minds in an unmediated fashion. The problem, according to pro-family activists, is that parents tend to assume that reading is a safe, wholesome activity, and thus never imagine, as Safelibraries does, that “when Susie is upstairs being a good little girl reading her book, her mind is being filled with rot.”\textsuperscript{211} Thus, the ALA is seen as a threat to parental influence, because it is able to gain purchase in children’s minds by awarding and recommending books, ensuring that certain ideas are rapidly and

\textsuperscript{211} Safelibraries.
pervasively deposited “into the minds of children.” The child, of course, offers nothing to this encounter with the text; in fact, if the reading material is powerful enough, it has the ability to influence the basic cognitive frameworks for how she understands the world. This is also, not coincidentally, the argument that pro-family activists rely upon to warn their constituents about the dangers of pornography, as illustrated by this Focus on the Family Citizen article: “Children can’t just put [porn] into their worldview because they don’t have one…Pornography becomes a building block in a child’s mental and emotional development.”

As highly vulnerable readers, children are in need of protection not only from objectionable texts, but also from their own tendencies to self-destruct. In the process of lambasting the classic liberal philosophy behind intellectual freedom in libraries, Family Friendly Libraries member Helen Biehle nevertheless notes “even John Stuart Mill believed that children needed protection against themselves.” Indeed, pro-family activists generally evince a very calloused view of young readers—left to their own devices, they suggest, children will only read out of prurient interest, to titillate themselves. Therefore, it is necessary to steer them in the direction of better, more edifying literature, in order to save them from their own (in some cases literally) self-destructive tendencies. A hypothetical “everychild” in a Safelibraries article about Printz winner Looking for Alaska reads this book and then, “like children everywhere, immediately figures out which pages to dog-ear.” Anticipating the argument that the work needs to be considered as a whole, the author counters that young readers won’t

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212 Ibid.
215 Safelibraries.
even remember the rest of the book; they’ll be too caught up in the naughty sections. Gateways to Better Education, an organization focused on bringing religion into the public schools, holds a similarly low opinion of young readers; in a how-to article on challenging a book in a school, Eric Buerher suggests asking whether the book in question really represents the “most noble and most inspiring” literature students can read because, left to their own devices, students will “probably spend most of their lives reading uninspiring materials (if they read much at all). Now is the chance to lift their sights a little higher.”

The real danger occurs when these passive and easily dazzled young readers take their prurient reading to the next level of imitation. Continuing their “everychild” narrative of the deadly progression of events set in motion by the ALA’s awarding of the Printz Medal to *Looking for Alaska*, Safelibraries author Dan Kleinman goes on to imagine the following dire consequences of reading the novel: “The child, now having learned about oral sex or whatever, is significantly more likely to try it out for his or herself. Having thus directly experienced oral sex, the child is now in significantly greater danger of contracting a serious sexual disease, possibly a deadly one, and transmitting it to others.” Further, the language of drug addiction as applied to young people’s reading, complete with temptation, indulgence that quickly leads to over-indulgence, and a resulting difficulty or even impossibility of “kicking the habit,” has further echoes in the anti-pornography discourse of pro-family activism, and critiques of objectionable literature often rest on their similarity to (or even, inability to be distinguished from) pornography.

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217 Safelibraries.
Models of Reading: A One-Way, Efferent Transaction

Returning to Rosenblatt’s “The Transactional Theory of Reading and Writing,” not only is the notion of reading as continuous exchange between text and reader granted little quarter in pro-family models of reading, but an efferent stance is assumed as the default stance that children take toward reading. Accordingly, the purpose of literature in curricula are starkly utilitarian, usually to teach some kind of lesson, and aesthetic reading experiences are either discounted completely or viewed with suspicion. Further, if books are understood to be containers for lessons, then children’s minds are likewise containers for whatever they happen to read; hence, the danger of exposing them to language and ideas of which their parents do not approve. Such a view of literacy directly challenges Rosenblatt’s transactional model of the fluid relationship between reader and text, and discounts the benefits of aesthetic reading completely. While Rosenblatt argued that “the teaching of reading and writing…should have as its first concern the creation of environments and activities in which students are motivated and encouraged to draw on their own resources,” pro-family models of literacy deny that children have any role in the meaning-making process at all—their pedagogical strategies for teaching reading, one suspects, would be quite different accordingly.  

If readers are relatively powerless in pro-family discourse, the case is quite different for books themselves—texts have a great deal of power, not only to either uplift

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or corrupt vulnerable readers, but also to affect their physical, mental, and spiritual health. It is here that various metaphors about reading come into stark relief; books are criminals that, according to Citizens for Literary Standards in Schools, “mentally assault our kids causing immeasurable mental and social harm, and they also steal the opportunity for that child to read a title of positive literary value.” They “promote messages” that can have a deleterious affect on a children’s development, if not caught in time. Books not only assault and steal, but also “infect” children like germs, making them ill, sometimes terminally. And finally, like food, the reader consumes books and the ideas contained within them; if they are good, the child grows up healthy, but if they are rotten or even poisonous, they can stunt the growth of the child, perhaps even kill her.

Such constructions of vulnerable readers and malevolent texts rely deeply on shared cultural metaphors for their power, including those sometimes used still used by librarians to describe their work with readers. Catherine Sheldrick Ross’ study of turn-of-the-last-century library literature reveals pervasive metaphors linking reading to eating, as well as metaphors for library work as a ladder leading readers away from “garbage” to more elevated literary tastes. Ross highlights the power of metaphor in how we talk about readers and reading; far from being a mere literary flourish on meaning, metaphor is at “the very center of concerns of meaning and epistemology…metaphor [is] something that permeates all discourse and structures our human conceptual systems, thereby altering the way that we experience the world…[it is] a means of discovering new meaning.” Therefore, how we talk about readers and reading betrays a great deal about our attitudes toward them, including how seriously we take them. However, as

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220 Ross, “Reading is Eating,” 147.
Ross argues, metaphors may be invisible to us because they usually encapsulate unexamined values and tacit assumptions—they are easier, Ross argues, to see from across the distance of time.

The “reading is eating” metaphor is alive and well in pro-family characterizations of reading, not just in the hierarchy between “good” and “bad” literature, but in the tendency to distill literature into the sum of its parts to be ingested; thus, the tendency to review a book and call for reviews that reveal what’s “in the book,” usually an enumeration of dirty words and sexual or violent scenes. As they call for “upfront informed parental consent” in assigned reading for children, PABBIS defines informed consent as documentation of “the type, frequency, vividness/graphicness, etc. of the potentially objectionable material… teachers proposing the use of a book will have to read it, if they haven’t already, and spend time documenting the material within.”221 As with the elaborate schema for reviews in Facts on Fiction, and PABBIS’ website with lengthy quotes taken out of context, there is an underlying assumption here that we can determine how books work by breaking them down into words, incidents, scenes of varying intensity, enumerating the number of times they occur. In much the same way that nutritionists might elaborate calories, vitamins, and fat content on a food product, pro-family activists may take apart literature in order determine how healthy or unhealthy it is for the growing, developing reader.

It is in this dissection that the connections between eating and reading become even clearer, as pro-family activist begin to point the finger at the irresponsible adults who are “feeding” this junk to their children. Citizens for Literary Standards in Schools, a group of parents who banded together and formed this organization to protest their

221 PABBIS.
children’s assigned reading, blast the “offensive novels that are being fed to our children in multiples” and counter the argument that critics consider this literature in context with an interesting parry—such words and scenes are more powerful in context because readers will be more likely to remember them, and ultimately develop an appetite for them: “Does it surprise anyone that feeding teens a steady diet of sexually-stimulating books awakens their appetite to read more of the same…[and] awaken[s] or accelerate[s] their appetite for sexual experimentation? Taken in context, the offensive material takes on an entirely new level of danger and influence.”222 Defending their technique excerpting offensive materials, the authors once again rely upon a dietary metaphor: “The excerpts are exactly what they are intended and defined to be—a small taste of the ingredients used to create the story.”223

The answer to such nasty ingredients is, naturally a wholesome, nutritious diet of literature, resting upon the assumption that the enterprise of reading and education ought to be a safe one. In fact, one of the things that irks pro-family activists most is that they assume award-winning and recommended reading is “safe;” this, in fact, was the reason that Facts on Fiction eschewed reviewing obvious offenders like the Gossip Girls series for “books that don’t seem threatening—the allegedly ‘safe’ award-winning titles found on school reading lists.”224 Similarly, PABBIS argues that school reading and assigned books “should not be a parental dilemma and a moral minefield…not giving parents an upfront indication that controversial, objectionable material might be encountered is

222 Citizens for Literary Standards in Schools.
223 Ibid.
224 Facts on Fiction.
tantamount to making our children play Russian roulette with our values in the schools.”

Certainly, there are assumptions at play here about the vulnerability of young readers and the need to protect them; what is also going on is a particular model of the role of literature in education. Literature is important only to the degree that it teaches something, and its inclusion in the curriculum must be defended accordingly; it is portrayed as didactic in is utility and predictable in its effects, accordingly. Thus, one of the primary pro-family critiques of objectionable literature is that it is not the only or the best way of delivering the same lesson. PABBIS urges parents challenging a book to ask teachers, “What are educational goals/objectives and does the book achieve them? Is book relevant to curriculum, standards of learning, program of instruction? Is this particular book necessary? Are other books without bad content equal or better in doing the job? Which ones were considered?”

Sometimes, pro-family activists critique the lesson itself, as in arguments that political correctness and multiculturalism have come to dominate curricula to the exclusion of morals and values. Overall, the call for quality is accompanied by an equally strong condemnation of any material remotely controversial, which PABBIS considers to be “very rarely necessary to achieve core curriculum, course objectives, or standards of learning in K-12.” Sometimes the very basis of the lesson to be taught is questioned, as in PABBIS’ example about using a book with violence in it to condemn violence, or a book about war to illustrate its horrors: “The school may say that controversial things are necessary to learn particular lessons. Such as the horrors of war or the cruelty of man or how one doesn’t have to be cruel, etc…Make sure that you

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225 PABBIS.  
226 Ibid.  
227 Ibid.
are comfortable with the schools teaching that particular lesson especially if it is related
to student behavior and attitudes or your values and beliefs.”

If young people read literature only to learn something, particularly a moral lesson, then controversial
materials are only unnecessary, but something to be viewed with suspicion—along with
the teachers and librarians who assign and recommend them.

**Inculcating Values and Parental Rights**

This cause/effect model of literature within education is only one piece of a larger
educational philosophy, one that discourages critical thinking to give top priority to the
inculcation of values. The 1990s era-Family Friendly Libraries website prominently
displayed a quote from Noah Webster that might represent the educational philosophy of
many pro-family activists: “For this reason, society requires that the education of youth
should be watched with the most scrupulous attention: Education is a great measurer,
forms the moral character of men and morals are the basis of government.”

As with the panic over children’s reading, what is important is not just the content of that education,
or the shape that a child’s morals are carved into, but who does the carving. Relying on
another Founding Fathers-era quote to describe their position, Focus on the Family makes
the preferred sculptor abundantly clear. “What sculpture is to a block of marble, said
Joseph Addison, education is to the soul. In the same way, at Focus on the Family we say
that education provides for the architecture of the soul, shaping a child’s character and his

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228 Ibid.
229 Family Friendly Libraries, accessed February 17, 2012,
or her view of the world. For this reason, we believe that the most important educator’s in a child’s life are his or her parents.”

Focus on the Family and other pro-family activists are not advocating home schooling for everyone—though they support home schoolers, and many of their resources are geared toward this population—but rather, the deep involvement of parents in their children’s education, particularly in public schools. Thus, required and recommended readings should be carefully scrutinized in order to determine whether they serve an educational purpose, one of which the child’s parents approve. A common tactic, as discussed above, is to see contemporary literature as a sign of inattention to the classics, and sometimes even to the basics of grammar and usage. Here the pro-family critique resonates deeply with the phonics side of the phonics vs. whole language debate. Schools are accused of abdicating their responsibilities to teach students to read and write by focusing instead on trendy, controversial literature. Indeed, this critique could aptly describe the entire project of Citizens for Literary Standards in Schools: “The English language itself provides plenty of challenges, and there are hundreds of excellent novels to use that do not include the education of new types of sex or the f-word. Are you satisfied with the way your child reads and writes? If not, one reason may be that your children are spending a tremendous amount of time discussing social issues versus what they are supposed to be studying—English.” As is common in many book challenges, the choice of a particular book is scrutinized in light of time and budgetary constraints; in this case, with so many classics and so little time, why waste any of it on popular, “politically correct” materials? “With time to read only a sliver of the available great

230 Ibid.
231 Citizens for Literary Standards in Schools.
literature, why wouldn’t we insist on the highest quality books reasonably available? We are currently far from the commonsense standard.”232

In an often-cited essay in pro-family circles, “Battle of the Bawdy Books,” Family Friendly Libraries founder Karen Jo Gounaud agrees. She accuses the schools’ decision to choose “contemporary crude materials over more decorous, time-tested literature” as one that demeans the education of the student. “With such a wide range and number of high quality literary works available to American’s education systems, why not select those with the most age-appropriate vocabulary and language?”233 Gounaud of course assumes that everyone will agree on which works of literature are high quality and classic, as well as that “age appropriate vocabulary and language” should be the final arbiter of what is assigned in schools. Finally, diversity and multiculturalism are attacked as merely an “excuse officials give for choosing some of the most offensive books. Legitimate minority racial and ethnic groups should be encouraged to help schools identify literature that truly represents their culture and history without resorting to lewd descriptions, vulgarities, and epithets.”234 Again, “pure” language without any objectionable stories or scenes is the central criterion for curricular choices, in an otherwise level playing field of classic literature of high literary quality. As Gounaud sums it up, “[g]ood education is not a matter of what’s popular or politically correct, but what is best.”235

232 Ibid.
234 Ibid.
235 Ibid.
This “inculcating values” model of education, with its attendant assumptions about the utilitarian role of literature in education and the passive nature of the student, have been quite effectively mobilized by pro-family activists. Their critique of teacher and librarian professionalism is accompanied by an assertion of parental authority and control over their children’s reading and education. For Gounaud and others at Family Friendly Libraries, the struggle for who will control children’s reading is literally a battleground in a larger cultural war. Schools and their assigned reading are an “educational territory” that it is “time to act effectively and decisively to reclaim.”

The territory has thus far been taken over by teachers and librarians who, pro family activists argue, either betray the parents’ trust by introducing children to dangerous books (and ideas) or who usurp their authority outright as part of a larger, anti-family agenda. By giving objectionable materials awards and recommending them to young readers, librarians make books kids’ parents wouldn’t approve of even more attractive, thereby giving young readers license to disdain their parents’ judgments. As the authors of Safelibraries write, “[w]e have no problem with parents giving children any book whatsoever. Librarians, however, are a different story…they allow them access to (and even recommend or award) the material that their own parents would not let their children read…they set up the game so that they win either way.”

This critique of their professionalism is bolstered by the suggestion (and sometimes outright assertion) that selecting books for children should be a relatively easy task. As Kleinman of Safelibraries puts it, “[s]election of books and other instructional material is not rocket science. Books can be selected with discretion, standards, and

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236 Ibid.
237 Safelibraries.
competency.”

Even more disturbing to them is the perception that teachers and librarians are “exempt[ing] themselves” from school rules and standards by assigning materials with language and behaviors that would not be permitted in “real life” on school grounds—most notably, the use of profanity. Finally, librarians and teachers betray parents’ trust by “cutting off the partnership”, causing them to lose faith in the educational institution or in the library. Central to Helen Biehle’s argument and other similar ones is that relations between libraries and parents (and schools and parents) were once idyllic, until the professionals began abdicating their responsibilities and working against the parents’ ultimate authority and wishes. “In the library’s case, we are confronted with the strange spectacle of established authority rejecting its own responsibility to children and their parents…[The ALA]…cut off the partnership between parents and librarians and caused what parents see as a betrayal of their trust.”

The answer invariably given to all these problems is pro-family activism itself—specifically, parents are urged to reclaim the lost territory of their public institutions, schools and libraries, taking their rightful places as the “true” citizens, no longer ousted by private organizations like teachers’ unions and the ALA. Because they believe that education is primarily about inculcating values, groups like Citizens for Literary Standards in Schools argue that it is absolutely essential that parents monitor the books their children read because otherwise they may be “intentionally left out of the loop in the current ‘education’ of their own children…Sadly, the books often promote ideas and values that are the opposite of the values taught in the child’s home.”

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238 Ibid.
239 Ibid.
240 Biehle, “The Seduction of the American Public Library.”
241 Citizens for Literary Standards in Schools.
websites are addressed to parents, and the tone is clear—you, as parent, have been robbed of your rights, and it’s time to reclaim them. PABBIS, in fact, uses a second person, direct address to parents to give their critique an added element of rhetorical power: “To you, the parent, it definitely seems like the school is corrupting your child and undermining your values and parental rights...[they] should not have the power to violate your God-given, natural, and constitutional rights as parents.” When intellectual freedom is addressed explicitly, it is usually only to be mocked or accused of being used as a smoke screen for the real issue—the corruption of children, and the wresting of authority away from parents in the matter of their education. As PABBIS goes on to argue, “[r]egardless of any ‘intellectual freedom’ discussion, each family has its own values and the schools should not be able to circumvent our parental and civil rights.”

Karen Jo Gounaud argues that parental authority is the foundation of a solid school system; one that “the parents’ ultimate authority is one in which students are more likely to thrive and progress.”

While “reading is eating” and “reading is a ladder” gave early librarians a way to talk about library policy and assert professional authority, the same metaphors in contemporary discourse give pro-family groups ammunition to discredit librarians’ and teachers’ professional authority. Educators are now, according to pro-family groups, neglecting the classics and instead feeding children “junk” in the form of objectionable, even pornographic literature. They have abdicated their professional responsibility, and broken the trust of parents. That the same metaphor could be used to such different purposes attests to its power, and highlights how compatible “reading is eating” is with

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242 PABBIS.
243 Ibid.
244 Gounaud, “Battle of the Bawdy Books.”
child protectionist rhetoric—the idea of nurturing a child with wholesome, nutritious food resonates strongly with providing them with quality reading, steering them away from unhealthy habits and choices. Further, as the pro-family activists often argue, some literature is so unhealthy as to be addictive, even dangerous and poisonous—it stimulates the appetites in excessive ways, creating addicts that only want more. Pleasure in reading, as in eating, is a morally ambivalent concept. And as we shall see with the *Harry Potter* controversy, a pleasure popular with children—themselves suspect consumers of culture—was more morally ambivalent yet.

**Harry Potter and the Politics of Reading**

*Harry Potter* stirred up a great deal of controversy by any measure, but particularly with regard to its impressive number of book challenges. According to statistics collected by the American Library Association’s Office of Intellectual Freedom, J.K. Rowling was the fourth most challenged author from 1990-2004 and the *Harry Potter* books were the 7th most challenged books of the 1990s. The reasons why these books were challenged span an astonishing range; with the notable exceptions of language and sexuality, the *Harry Potter* series has been the subject of every common reason for a challenge, including those typical of fantasy literature, like witchcraft, and those typical of more realistic fiction, such as violence and disrespect for authority.

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Fantasy-related objections cited in Robert Doyle’s *Banned Books 2004 Resource Guide* include “intense story line, the violence, the wizardry, and the sucking of animal blood” and that the book “encourages children to practice witchcraft.” *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* was burned outside Christ Community Church in Alamagordo, New Mexico in for being “a masterpiece of satanic deception”. *Harry Potter* also drew fire for portraying “good witches and good magic” in Cedarville AK and for “mak[ing] witchcraft and wizardry alluring to children” in New Haven, CT schools in 2003.

These objections occurred in combination with others typical of realistic fiction: Harry’s propensity for breaking the rules and disrespect for authority meant that the series drew as much fire for its anti-authoritarian tone as it did for subject matter. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* was challenged in South Carolina schools in 1999 for having “a serious tone of death, hate, lack of respect and sheer evil”; for “dark themes” (Salamanca, New York) and an “intense story line” (Zeeland, Michigan). Most troubling to many, however, was Harry’s contentious relationship with family and authority figures. The series was targeted in the Frankfort, Illinois school district because it “contains lying and smart aleck retorts to adults” and attacked in Bucktown, Pennsylvania in 2001 for “telling children over and over again that lying, cheating, and stealing are not only acceptable, but that they’re cool and cute.”

As the Focus on the Family Citizen cover and feature story suggest, however, these challenges to the *Harry Potter* series did not usually occur as isolated, local incidents, but as part of a more wide-ranging movement stimulated and supported by larger pro-family organizations. Pro family activists mobilized objections to the *Harry

248 Ibid., 93-4.
The *Harry Potter* series as a way to mobilize conservative constituencies around children’s reading, in order to mount a larger critique of public library and school policies and practices. As they promoted the image of a vulnerable child reader in need of protection, they relied upon themes that also struck at the heart of library professionalism: popular culture vs. literary quality or the literary canon, the uncertain boundaries between fantasy and realism, and what happens to youth when they read.

The very popularity of the *Harry Potter* series has been a factor in its condemnation by critics, resulting in their marshalling the fire of the literary canon to fuel critiques of public and school libraries. While children's librarians often use books popular with young readers as a way to generate enthusiasm about reading and as a potential bridge of other kinds of reading, pro family activists attacked this practice for granting undue attention to the popular media. Librarians, they argued, should lend their "educational authority" to the books that deserve it—the classics. As pro family activist Karen Jo Gounaud argued, “Rowling’s books are so popular and well-known, [they] needn’t add their authority to increase the likelihood of them being read by children. Popularity does not necessarily equate with educational value…Enticement to classic, time-tested children’s literature is where [she] should be putting her efforts, not simply joining the pop-culture crowd.”

The notion of the captive student is one that is ubiquitous in pro-family rhetoric, revealing a vision of education where young people are the passive receptacles for whatever librarians and other authorities wish to feed them. In supposedly pandering to what is likely to appeal to students already, pro-family activists argue that librarians not only neglect the classics, but also miss an important opportunity

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to push “better”, or at least, canonical, literature. The pro-family activist critique of popular literature relies on the belief that popular materials cannot coexist with, and in fact, cancel out their classic counterparts.

Some pro-family activists go several steps further, tying curricular and collection development decisions favoring *Harry Potter* to larger, quasi-conspiratorial aims. Berit Kjos, a prolific critic of what she perceives to be the dangerous influx of occult materials into the classroom, and frequent guest columnist for the *American Family Association Journal*, believes that the ubiquity of the *Harry Potter* books in public schools is part of a global education program that is hostile to traditional values and promoting an unthinking, politically correct consensus and an amoral ethic of neutrality and tolerance. Such a worldview makes the occult content of *Harry Potter*—combined with its popularity and use by librarians—more evidence of a larger conspiracy: “It’s not surprising that *Harry* has suddenly soared to the peak of popularity in schools across the country. His story fits right into the international program for multicultural education. The envisioned global community calls for a common set of values which excludes traditional beliefs as intolerant and narrow—just as the *Harry Potter* books show.”²⁵₀

Pro family activists ultimately evince a belief in literature as a moral, didactic tool for children. They argue that the depiction of certain behaviors in children's literature is equal to their promotion, and that children will "get ideas" for misbehavior from reading about it in books. Such an assumption reveals not only a lack of faith in children's ability to think critically about what they read, but also a marked lack of attention to literary context. In another attack on *Harry Potter*, which systematically "refutes" quotes from

the series with Bible verses, the Freedom Village USA ministry takes issue with advice given to Harry by the villain: "[T]here is no good or evil, only power and those too weak to seek it." The authors critique this advice as dangerously amoral without mentioning that it comes from an "evil" character, and that Harry ultimately rejects it to fight on the side of good.251

Harry’s rebellion does, in fact, lie at the root of many challenges to the series. What seems to gall pro-family critics most about Harry is that he often disobeys orders and rejects authority figures without being punished for it. The fact that Harry must sometimes break the rules in order to succeed does not sit well with pro-family organizations that view obedience to authority as one of the virtues children's literature should be teaching. As Focus on the Family’s John Murray writes, "Harry frequently — and unapologetically — lies, breaks rules and disobeys authority figures ... He specifically disregards a direct order from one of his teachers and flies off on a broom. Instead of being punished, Harry is honored for his riding skills."252 Critics of *Harry Potter* and similar books raise objections only partially in response to representations of violence, sex or the occult—the more serious problem, in their view, is representations of relationships between children and adults which challenge adult power. When adults are portrayed as having less moral authority (or, in the case of Harry's teacher, less information) than their younger protagonists, it threatens parental authority. Significantly, pro-family critics take issue with the fact that Harry's nearest blood relations are so cruel to him. As Family Friendly Libraries’ Karen Jo Gounaud argues, "...[t]he only biological family in Harry Potter's life is also the poorest model of family

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life ... They are mean, selfish, unloving, and in general, nasty to him. Harry is best loved and helped by occult characters rather than the human family to whom he's related.”

Because they view parental authority as the final arbiter of every facet of a child's life, pro-family activists are reluctant to consider the possibility that parents (or other blood relatives) may not always know best, or that children might bring their own experiences and interpretations to their reading.

This notion of young readers as empty receptacles to be filled with their reading is sometimes accompanied by a more volatile one—often, young people, especially teenagers, are portrayed as powder kegs, ready to explode if presented with the wrong kind of literature. Such representations of young people are not only tinged with the need to protect them, but a fear of them—much as the parody of *Harry Potter* on the cover of *Citizen* suggests. Youth must be protected from the evils of the world because they *embody* the evils of the word, and thus should be feared. As Karen Jo Gounaud writes, “[o]fficials must understand the full impact and implications of these [reading] choices when they ignore the potential effects of bawdy language and sexually and violently explicit descriptions on a room full of adolescents, including some with raging hormones and a zest for defying their parents.”

Deploying imagery and descriptions of vulnerable and passive (and sometimes volatile and dangerous) young readers, pro family organizations also bolster their critique of libraries and schools by arguing that they fail to effectively police the boundaries between realism and fantasy, underestimating the dangerous power of the latter.

Defenses of the *Harry Potter* series as merely fantasy or make believe are thus likely to

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254 Gounaud, ”The Battle of Bawdy Books.”
fall upon deaf ears in the pro family activist camp. It is not simply that those with religious objections to the series as less likely to dismiss its witchcraft as make believe, though this is certainly the case. Pro-family critics who believe *Harry Potter* threatens children attribute a power to fantasy that even fans of the genre are unlikely to dispute—its power to make the unreal real. Instead of viewing this as a strength, or a testament to the pleasures of the genre, however, critics find this “effect” if you will, a troubling phenomenon, and impute sinister aims to those who promote the books in the service of their own agendas. As Berit Kjos writes, “Popular fantasy, with its boundless thrills and stirring images, can manipulate feelings and perceptions far more effectively than ordinary reality…the captivating illusion hides subtle suggestions that take root in today’s ‘open’ minds with little conscious resistance.”

Pro-family critiques of the series thus reveal a mechanistic view of literature and young people’s reading as essentially an exercise in manipulation. Because the child or young adult is supposedly passive and open to everything they read, their reading is likely to make a mark on them—thus, the need to protect young readers not only from the damaging and immoral, but from genre elements that seem to excite them, creating a strong emotional response that ultimately turns their heads and confuses them further. In this case, fantasy (and, by extension, all fiction) is powerful precisely because it mimics actual experience so well that reality can be completely left behind. Similarly, critics also worry that, like drugs, one taste of fantasy will hook readers on the realm, spoiling them for the mundane activities and responsibilities of the real world. As Berit Kjos argues, “Rowling presents life in the supernatural realm as much fuller than life in the

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physical realm. Colors are brighter, people are more interesting, and life is more exciting
and surprising.” 256 The annexation of anti-drug rhetoric to critique Harry Potter’s fantasy
elements is not an accidental one—in the eyes of the critics, both drugs and fantasy
involve an indulgence (that will soon lead to an over-indulgence) and both have the
potential to prompt people to disengage from reality. Both have been seen as escapist;
both have greater powers on the vulnerable.

Realism-based critiques center on the Harry Potter books as models of bad
behavior, glorifying disobedience in a manner that may prompt imitation by the young.
At the heart of these objections are issues of power and authority; specifically, the
separation of power from the proper spiritual (and familial) holders of authority. As Kjos
writes, “[w]hile some argue that Harry Potter and his friends demonstrate friendship,
integrity and honesty, they actually model how to lie and steal and get away with it.
Their examples only add to the cultural relativism embraced by most children today who
are honest when it doesn’t cost anything, but who lie and cheat when it serves their
purpose.” 257 For Focus on the Family’s John Murray, the issue is authority and who
holds it—in this case, Christ, and by extension, the authority figures recognized by pro-
family activists—parents. It is not a worldview that has room for young people having
any kind of power: “Christ’s power flows from his authority. That’s the nature of all
legitimate power—it is granted and guided by authority. When we read Rowling’s series,
we find that she effectively divorces power from authority. There is no sovereign person
or principle governing the use of the supernatural…Rowling’s work invites children to a
world where witchcraft is ‘neutral’ and where authority is determined solely by one’s

256 Kjos, “Bewitched by Harry Potter.”
257 “Twelve Reasons Not to See the Harry Potter Movie,” American Family Association, accessed March
Finally, as Ed Vitalgliano of the American Family Association argues, the issue of entertainment itself is suspect when it muddies the truth enough to cause confusion about the proper channels of authority, and the proper relationships between family members. Here again, the argument ostensibly in favor of protecting children has undercurrent of fear—what will happen when these *Harry Potter* readers grow up to be teenagers without a moral compass, a center of truth to sustain them? “Rather than teach children discernment, it may instead teach them the very opposite. We are instructing kids to nod in agreement with the truth that witchcraft is an abomination, while simultaneously showing them how to suppress that truth—to overlook it, ignore it, and pay lip service to it—all in the pursuit of entertainment. When they become teenagers, our children may have difficulty holding on to absolute truth in a postmodern world. By the time they become adults, they may not be able to recognize truth at all.”

We have explored the models of reading promulgated by pro family activists at some length. How do these models of reading differ from those used by librarians? The short answer to this question is intellectual freedom. A longer answer lies in defenses of intellectual freedom that draw from contemporary research on reading motivation and child and adolescent development. It is to these defenses and this research that I now turn, in order to explore how (and why) pro family models of reading conflict so strongly with those of librarianship.

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Intellectual Freedom and Recreational Reading Research

Reading research helps to contextualize and support the rights discourse of intellectual freedom. It demonstrates how free choice, unfettered inquiry, and pleasure are key to reading’s role in identity formation, its aid in preparing youth for adult life, and its importance as an avenue to greater self-knowledge and understanding. Many of the findings in this research suggest not only that freedom in reading choice is important, but also why it is important, offering an excellent bolster to intellectual freedom’s role in library work with youth. Reading research encompasses a range of studies from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives, scattered widely across scholarly areas as divergent as Education, English Literature, Psychology, Sociology, and LIS. In Reading Matters, a 2006 survey of reading research relevant to LIS scholars and practitioners, Catherine Sheldrick Ross, Lynne McKechnie, and Paulette Rothbauer argue that the picture of youth reading emerging from the research depends greatly on the parameters of the study. Researchers don’t always agree on what “counts” as reading; some consider only engagement with print materials to be worthy of consideration, while others overlook more peripheral print formats such as manuals, comics, and magazines in favor of literary fiction. Studies in contexts where reading is assigned or compulsory, such as literature classes, or ones that only consider reading materials with high cultural status, such as literary fiction, often paint a deficient picture of youth literate behavior and would thus seem to justify further adult intervention. However, those studies that give serious consideration to young readers’ choices and consider a range of engagement with text to be reading, reveal a literary labyrinth of readers and writers, engaged in the
complex tasks of identity exploration and formation. As Paulette Rothbauer describes it, “[w]hen the research lens shines directly on the reading preferences and reading interests of young people, as stated by young people, a different picture of reading and the role of reading in their lives emerges.”

Reading research supports and contextualizes the various defenses of intellectual freedom that youth services librarians routinely employ.

Librarians’ defenses of intellectual freedom can be traced in four distinct categories, all of which are supported and expanded by reading research: intellectual freedom as developmentally appropriate, indeed, crucial to the task of identity formation; intellectual freedom as a necessary component in preparing the young for the “real world”; the importance of pleasure and choice in creating and motivating readers; and reading as a radically private aesthetic experience whose character cannot help but be “intellectually free. These categories align loosely with the summary of recreational reading research given by the authors of Reading Matters. Surveying research that attended to young readers’ choices in the context of recreation, the authors found that reading performs the following key functions: it allows young people to envision and create potential futures, to gather information about the wider world, to mediate competing truth claims, to escape from the pressures and responsibilities of daily life, and to transform lives.

By considering these and other findings in the context of arguments about the importance of the freedom to read for youth, I reveal the outlines of a broader argument about reading that is suggested by discourses of intellectual freedom in librarianship.

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261 Ibid., 116.
Librarians’ discourses of intellectual freedom rely heavily upon reader response theory, a literary theory that directly opposes conservative evangelicals’ enshrinement of words as the vehicles of unitary meaning and absolute truth. In contrast to reading models that see texts as entities of meaning awaiting discovery through reading, reader response theory posits that texts are not complete until a reader interprets them. Wolfgang Iser described the task of the reader as filling in the gaps that are endemic to every text\textsuperscript{262}, while later theorists went further; Michel de Certeau described reading as a selective process of meaning making, a kind of “literary poaching”\textsuperscript{263}, while Janice Radway termed this process of textual picking and choosing “narrative gleaning.”\textsuperscript{264} Intriguingly, some scholars have theorized reader interpretation as a way of disrupting reading itself; Judith Fetterly argued that women must necessarily read against the grain of male-authored texts if they are to refuse these texts’ covert sexism\textsuperscript{265}, while Stanley Fish argued that there is no such thing as a text in the first place, only meanings shared by interpretive communities of readers.\textsuperscript{266} While not every reader response theorist would go as far as Fish does, all would agree that textual meaning cannot be created without readers, and that these meanings will vary from reader to reader.

Much scholarly attention has been paid to reading’s relationship to child and adolescent development, and development-oriented research on reading suggests significant rationales for allowing young readers some free range in their reading choices.

\textsuperscript{263} Michel de Certeau, \textit{The Practice of Everyday Life} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
\textsuperscript{266} Stanley Fish, \textit{Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities} (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980).
David Moshman’s psycholegal study of education and the First Amendment argues that children’s development as rational beings, with ever-increasing abilities to reason and think critically, demands that their expression and right to receive information enjoy first amendment protection. Development-centered studies of teenagers and reading found that young adults are engaged in a complex process of identity formation that suggests the need for more freedom and less adult oversight for its most effective expression. J.A. Appleyard’s 1990 survey of reading research offers one of the strongest articulations of this argument, illustrating how readers read differently and for quite different reasons in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Whereas young children seek comfort and familiarity in their stories, and school-aged children read for the vicarious experience of heroes and heroines triumphing over adversity, teenaged readers are starting to perceive competing versions of the truth in the world, and beginning to make choices between them. Accordingly, several studies of teenaged readers report that they want material that both makes them think and reflects the complexities they see and experience in the world. In a similar vein, Roger J.R. Levesque draws from reading and media research to argue that adolescents need stronger societal support for their intellectual freedom and free speech rights in order to successfully navigate the intellectual and emotional landscape of adolescence.

Intellectual freedom may be especially important for older children and adolescent readers because of the key role reading can play in the task of identity

269 Ibid., 100.
formation and development. Psychologist Erik Erikson theorized that much of the process of articulating one’s identity in relationship to others occurs when people are in their teens, and isolated identity as the key problem or task of adolescence. Reading research reveals that recreational reading can be a powerful ally in navigating identities: it provides a broader range of “others” to relate to, assures readers that there are other people like them, and offers a relatively safe space to play with, explore, and try on different identities. Studies also reveals that the task of identity formation somewhat paradoxically depends on defining oneself in relation to community; it is at once both intensely private and extremely social. Whether teenaged readers are attempting to forge connections with others, distinguish themselves from others, or simply test and explore possible futures and ways of being, some freedom in reading is a key element of this reading context. In order for true exploration to happen, teenaged readers and some children arguably need the freedom to test the literary waters without excessive strictures or adult monitoring.

A second defense of intellectual freedom is that reading offers a relatively safe venue to prepare the young for the problems and responsibilities of adult life. Such an understanding of intellectual freedom justifies controversial or explicit content as necessary realism, both because this material demonstrates an authenticity that readers, especially teenaged readers, demand, and because such material allows young readers to rehearse and prepare for the challenges of adulthood. Ironically, the “intellectual freedom as preparation for the real world” argument often takes on protectionist, even didactic cast; the “dangers” of reading are sometimes justified as a kind of inoculation for the

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harsh realities the young will eventually face.\textsuperscript{272} However, recreational reading research that focuses on what these readers prefer suggests that the young encounter plenty of problems already; the “real life” that some librarians and educators want to prepare them for, whether through shelter or exposure, is one that they already experience now. Young readers, especially teenagers, are more interested in reading that reflects the reality of their problems and gives them some tools for solving them than in reading intended to be a rehearsal for future life.\textsuperscript{273}

A third argument defending intellectual freedom is that it helps to motivate readers to read more, and thus become better readers. Though intellectual freedom may seem more difficult to defend when the reader’s purpose is solely entertainment, reading research on the importance of choice in motivating readers suggests that pleasure is extremely important. Moreover, many studies indicate that having some choice in reading material is a primary motivator for young readers, especially so-called reluctant readers. Reading’s social benefits are often too long term for the young to recognize, and they need more immediate gratifications, like pleasure and escape, in order to attract them to reading and keep them reading. Stephen Krashen is perhaps the best-known proponent of the importance of FVR, or free voluntary reading, in motivating young readers. Krashen’s arguments and his review of the research on recreational reading have proven invaluable for librarians, both in defending recreational reading for its own sake and in making arguments for intellectual freedom. By making a variety of choices available, including “light reading” like graphic novels, comics, and magazines, librarians can help to motivate young readers to read further, which, in turn, will make them better.

\textsuperscript{272} Kravitz, Censorship in the School Library Media Center, x.
\textsuperscript{273} Appleyard, Becoming a Reader, x.
readers in the long run. Librarians have mobilized these arguments in validating a relatively “loose” approach to guiding youth reading, as well as embracing popular media as a motivational lever to get kids excited about reading. Krashen also argues that graphic novels and comics are art forms in their own right. Increasing recognition of how important comics and graphic novels are in motivating reading, combined with more critical respect granted to them as art forms, has helped librarians to incorporate popular media into their arguments about reading and intellectual freedom.

A final argument defending intellectual freedom is that it has a key role to play as an element of reader privacy in the aesthetic communion between reader and text. Reading’s power to remove young readers from the world around them, even when they are physically present in it, is a potentially threatening one for conservative activists because it creates a private “space” for readers to retreat from social, academic, and other obligations and sets in motion an imaginary landscape not accessible to those around the reader. In displaying immersion in the world of the text, the reader has in some way signaled to the world around her that she is, at least temporarily, not fully present within it. Along with fearing pleasurable reading, especially reading without discernable moral or educational purposes, pro-family critics worry about reading’s potential to serve as an escape from real world problems and responsibility. Yet reading research reveals that “escape” rather flattens the kinds of engagement that young readers have with texts. Certainly, reading entertains them, helps them pass the time, and provides a relief from problems and schoolwork. However, it seems that the act of recreational reading itself is somehow pleasurable regardless of its content; for example, the readers of Paulette

Rothbauer’s 2004 study found in pleasure reading a literal declaration of independence.

“You get to be alone by yourself at the same time—it’s like a little secret too, like you get to know this other world and it’s like your own little secret. You can’t explain it unless someone else reads it.”275 The pleasure of solitude and privacy are key to the overall experience of aesthetic communion between the reader and the text that has been sacred to librarians from the very beginning.276 Intellectual freedom can also serve as a powerful articulation of the inviolability of the reader’s privacy, away from observation and supervision.

Perhaps even more threatening than the “cordonning off” of reader and text is the fact that what is happening in that textual world is opaque. Even if they have read the book in question, surrounding adults can never be quite sure how individual child readers, including those they know very well, are responding to the text. The complex loop of narrative and response that occurs when a reader is engaged with a text is inaccessible to those around her. Behavior can be observed and controlled, but the workings of the reader’s imagination are largely invisible to parents, teachers, and librarians alike. This may be why pro family critics tend to make arguments about particular kinds of reading having predictable effects; they focus on the arena that they can observe, which is action and behavior, rather than reader interpretation. By asserting that texts are knowable outside of reader interpretation, adults inclined to worry about reading’s effects construct an easier “out”: by curtailing what kinds of materials are available to young readers, their placement on the proper moral path is supposedly secure. Models of reading that privilege the text over the reader, like those promulgated

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275 Cited in Sheldrick, McKechnie, and Rothbauer, Reading Matters, 113.
in the discourse of pro-family activists, not only mute the reader’s agency but seem to
tear the veil off this invisible communion, claiming that literature’s effects are both
knowable and predicable. In contrast, intellectual freedom here becomes less a
declaration of what ought to be protected than a description of what is; regardless of the
shackles the world attempts to put upon us, our minds will persistently go where they are
inclined to travel.

Responding to Pro Family Models of Reading

How can librarians respond to pro-family arguments about readers, reading and
literacy? It’s a complicated question. At the very least, a deeper understanding of the
rhetorical strategies of these organizations is necessary; the next step would be to respond
with literacy model that highlights the transactional nature of reading, as well as the
importance of aesthetic reading for young readers. Countering the pro-family model will
not completely solve the conflict, of course, because these organizations take great
umbrage at any suggestion that parents might be losing their authority to control their
children’s reading; in fact, they believe that such authority has been wrested away by
librarians, the ALA, teachers, teachers’ unions, and the public school system.

Nevertheless, librarians must be sensitive to any literacy frameworks that position young
readers passively because they represent a model education that is at odds with most
contemporary models of literacy and literary pedagogy, including the importance of
choice and motivation in reading achievement. The notion that the purpose of literature
is primarily didactic, and that “good” literature is literature that teachers readers a lesson, preferably a moral one, not only discounts the importance of aesthetic reading, but also assumes the effects of literature on readers can be predicted and controlled through the careful screening of what might be potentially objectionable.

Transactional models of reading and deconstructing metaphors of reading that position readers as passive vessels are helpful tools; it is also crucial that librarians be able to situate their views about readers and texts in the context of an explicit philosophy or theory about reading. Most of them are, at least in part, reader-response theorists, in that we value the interpretations of readers and locate the meaning of texts in their experiences. However, as Jane Tompkins argues, they are still interested in meaning, in what texts signify; pro-family activists have revived the classical view of literature, which understood texts primarily in terms of their effects on people, in interesting ways. Reader response critics are not so different from formalists of whatever stripe in that the issue of primary consequence is what a text means, how it is interpreted. But for both the ancients and contemporary pro-family activists, the most important thing about a text is understanding and predicting its effects, and in order to fashion the desired response. Literature produces certain results, it isn’t an end in itself, and the behavior of the audience or reader is what matters. “The reader, in antiquity, is seen as a citizen of the state, the author as a shaper of civic morality, and the critic as a guardian of the public interest; literature, its producers, and consumers are all seen in relation to the needs of the polity as a whole…A literary work is not so much an object, therefore, as a unit of force whose is exerted on the world in a particular direction.”

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277 Tompkins, “The Reader in History,” 204.
Librarians must also do all they can to highlight the importance of choice and bring the issue of reading motivation back into the debate. What tends to get lost in pro-family arguments are the children and young adults themselves, what they choose to read and why, and the importance of being allowed to make those choices. In “What We Know About Motivation to Read,” Linda Gambrell summarizes the research on reading motivation—we know that choice is a factor in motivation to read, and that motivation correlates positively with achievement. Moreover, motivation “often makes the difference between learning that is superficial and shallow and learning that is deep and internalized.”

Thus, it is in the best interests of educators and librarians to increase reading motivation, including providing access to materials (and the time to read them), offering opportunities for self-selection and choice, creating openings for social interaction around books, and promoting positive self-concept as a reader. The pro-family framework for understanding young readers and reading directly contradicts these findings; in a worldview where reading is a one-way transaction, useful only for teaching other lessons, the issue of motivation becomes irrelevant. Librarians have an opportunity to promote models of literacy that recognize readers who actively make meanings and bring their own experiences to texts, the importance of aesthetic reading, and the power of language. They could also be more critical of their own models of readers and reading and understand them in the context of their professional responsibility for guiding children’s reading. Moral panics over children’s reading are nothing new—in fact, youth services arguably arose during the Progressive Era because of an increased society-wide attention to and concern for what children read and who was responsible for guiding their

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278 Linda Gambrell, “What We Know About Motivation to Read,” in Reading Researchers in Search of Common Ground, Rona F. Flippo, ed. (Newark, Del.: International Reading Association, 2001), 129.
reading. Yet the current level of agitation about what children read, including the strategy of “exposing” objectionable literature’s naughty bits to the otherwise unsuspecting eyes of parents, is evidence of a competing model of literacy and education that librarians and other who value aesthetic reading must learn to recognize and counter.
CHAPTER 5

“NOW YOU KNOW WHAT DIVERSITY MEANS”: SEX AND INFORMATION ACCESS IN PRO FAMILY CHALLENGES

This chapter analyzes a 2005 Fayetteville library controversy over “pornographic” books in order to demonstrate how pro family arguments about sex-themed materials challenge library policies. I argue that library collection development and reconsideration policies, frequently used by librarians to arm themselves against materials challenges, are themselves under attack, and that “pornography” serves as effective shorthand for materials which pro family activists believe court the dangers of access to sexual information. My analysis of pro family media dealing with pornography, sex, and sex education, along with the campaign against “pornographic” books launched by parent Laurie Taylor in Fayetteville, reveals that conservative activists rejected not simply sexual content, but also library policies promoting access and diversity. These policies clashed with what sociologist Kristin Luker terms “sexually conservative” worldviews, particularly the belief that too much information (or “excess access”) is a danger to youth and, potentially, a license to indulge in dangerous (and sinful) behavior. While pro family challenges to sex-themed library materials are related to their content, their roots lie in deeper beliefs about human nature, the dangers of pleasure, and the malleability of children.

Since the 1980s, pro family challenges to library materials and school curricula have increasingly focused on sex and sexuality, particularly how homosexuality is portrayed. Many conservative critics read America’s increasing cultural acceptance of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people as part of a sinister “gay agenda” to undermine the
heterosexual family.279 When this so-called agenda appears to be seeping into schools and libraries, influencing and perhaps indoctrinating youth, pro family activists grow quite alarmed and “fight back” by attempting to eliminate certain library and curricular materials from the playing field. One of the reasons they attack gay-friendly (or even gay-neutral) books and curricula is because they believe their worldviews—as well as their children—are at risk.

According to the ALA’s Office for Intellectual Freedom, “sexually explicit” is the number one reason why books are challenged, with a total of 3,169 sex-related challenges reported since 1990. Other common reasons cited for challenges include “offensive language,” “unsuited to age group,” and homosexuality. While nonfiction sex education titles like Harris’ It’s Perfectly Normal have been routine targets, gay-friendly picture books and young adult literature’s often-frank treatment of teen development have also attracted censure. Peter Parnell and Justin Richardson’s picture book And Tango Makes Three, the true-life chronicle of two male penguins who adopt and hatch a baby chick, has landed in the ALA’s Top Ten most challenged books list every year since its publication in 2005. Linda de Haan and Stern Nijland’s King & King, featuring a prince who “doesn’t care much for princesses,” prompted Oklahoma state representative Sally Kern to draft legislation restricting youth access to gay-themed public library materials in 2007. Meanwhile, matter-of-fact and often gay-positive portrayals of adolescent sexuality have made YA fiction authors such as John Green, Alex Sanchez, and the ever-controversial Judy Blume the targets of library challengers, many of whom find their work to be “obscene” and “pornographic.”

Fighting pornography has long been a pet project of conservative activists, and continues to be a key rallying issue for most pro family organizations.\textsuperscript{280} However, though defining pornography is notoriously tricky, most activists do not get hung up on definitions. Regardless of their context, they tend to brand any sexual themes or graphic representations of sex as “pornography.” This term aids challengers both by rallying broader public support for the material’s removal, and by serving as effective shorthand for resources believed to arouse prurient interest and unhealthy curiosity. Any material that seems to stimulate children’s interest and fascination in sex outside what the challenger believes are the proper moral strictures risks being tarred by the brush of pornography. These materials become targets not simply because they are “pornography,” but because they represent competing understandings and worldviews about sex in American society. And there was clearly something about the combination of ALA’s defense of “access” to information and the purported “excess” of sex and pornography that added fuel to the pro family movement.

\textbf{“It’s Perfectly Normal”? Laurie Taylor and \textit{Parents Protecting the Minds of Children}}

In spring of 2005, Laurie Taylor, a Fayetteville native and mother of teenaged daughters, demanded that Robie Harris’ \textit{It’s Perfectly Normal} (1994) be removed from local elementary and middle school libraries, along with the \textit{Teenage Guy’s Survival Guide} by Jeremy Daldry, and \textit{It’s So Amazing}, also by Robie Harris. Though the books varied from early elementary to young adult in intended audience, all three discussed sex and sexuality, and their discussions of homosexuality ranged from neutral to positive. Taylor objected to

these books not only for their subject matter and their pictorial representations of human bodies and sex, but because she believed they fostered a permissive, pleasure-centered view of sexuality, giving kids a green light “to have sex whenever, however, and with whomever they want.”\textsuperscript{281} The school superintendent was sufficiently alarmed by Taylor’s objections to demand that all three books be moved to a restricted section. Meanwhile, a heated debate in the editorial pages of the \textit{Northwest Arkansas Times} brought Taylor support, but also criticism, with some skewering her efforts as narrow-minded censorship.

Robie Harris’ candid, non-judgmental discussions of homosexuality and masturbation, illustrated in friendly, approachable detail by Michael Emberly, had already made \textit{It’s Perfectly Normal} one of the most consistently challenged books of the 1990s.\textsuperscript{282} Widely lauded for its lack of squeamishness, gentle humor, and reassuring tone, the book’s depictions of the range of human physiology and sexual behavior were nevertheless deemed “pornographic” by critics who believed the book stirred up sexual desires and provoked experimentation. For example, a committee of parents, teachers, and administrators in Clover Park, Washington felt that the text “…was too graphic and could foster more questions than it answers,” while Joan Scalia of Chester County, Pennsylvania, called \textit{It’s Perfectly Normal} “a clear example of child pornography” and “an act of encouragement for children to begin desiring sexual gratification.”\textsuperscript{283} A 1997 challenge in Fargo, North Dakota objected to the book’s simplicity and directness, describing its contents as “too easily accessible to children.”\textsuperscript{284} Still others chafed at the book’s treatment of homosexuality, finding it either not sufficiently condemnatory or felt that it was emphasized

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{281} “Mothers Challenge Assignment of Bad Books,” \textit{Education Reporter} 253 (February 2007), 1.
\item \textsuperscript{282} Foerstel, \textit{Banned in the U.S.A.}, 204.
\item \textsuperscript{283} Ibid., 205.
\item \textsuperscript{284} Doyle, \textit{Banned Books}, 217.
\end{enumerate}
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at the expense of heterosexual marriage. In 2007, a Lewiston, Maine library patron apparently took issue with the book’s title as well as the book itself, refusing to return *It’s Perfectly Normal* because she was “sufficiently horrified by the illustrations and sexually graphic, amoral, abnormal contents [emphasis added].”285 Though the library threatened to prosecute the patron for theft, the book was never returned, and charges were never filed.

Taylor eventually expanded her initial challenge into a full-fledged campaign to allow a committee of parents to audit and rate all the library books purchased by the school district. She formed an organization called Parents Protecting the Minds of Children, whose website included excerpts from dozens more titles alongside Taylor’s original objections. The website featured illustrations from Harris’ *It’s Perfectly Normal* reassembled with provocative text designed to shock viewers into signing a petition demanding that “pornographic books” in the Fayetteville school libraries be removed. Waging war against pornography proved an effective way to garner the interest of the American Family Association and Focus on the Family, both of which featured stories in their publications lauding Taylor’s efforts and condemning the policies of the American Library Association, as we shall explore later in this chapter. Though the Fayetteville school board would eventually return the challenged materials to circulation and adopt a more robust collection development statement, Taylor had succeeded in adding momentum to the pro-family movement’s quest to influence library policies.

The Parents Protecting the Minds of Children website (at www.teachclean.com) features images and excerpts from the three books originally challenged by Taylor—*It’s Perfectly Normal, It’s So Amazing, and The Teenage Guy’s Survival Guide*—along with twenty, and then thirty-five more book and review excerpts, all with Taylor’s hope that

285 Ibid.
“…the pictures in the library books and vile excerpts…[concern] you as much as [they] did me.” The authors appropriate the conventions of Internet porn sites seemingly without irony, posting a conspicuous warning that the site “…should not be viewed by anyone under 18 years old” and tantalizing viewers seeking more offensive books with the promise: “More Like Them to Come Later.” Invitations to peek are always accompanied by explicit disapproval; indeed, the authors apologize for reproducing the images and text, but also insist “…it is the only way people will understand the nature of the books.” The nature of the books, however, proves a malleable one in the hands of PPMC, who re-assemblage of materials from the challenged books is a study in titillation.

Ostensibly shunning pornography, the site authors have themselves crafted a new, starkly prurient text by stripping the excerpts of their original affective and informative context. For instance, Harris’ discussion of sexual intercourse on page 56 of It’s Perfectly Normal is whittled down to a bullet point list of penis and vagina mechanics, with all Harris’ discussion of sex’s emotional and affective aspects (and the male and female participants themselves) removed. Another discussion of intercourse illustrated by with a smiling heterosexual couple engaged in the act, is misquoted as “they get very close to each other—so close that the man’s penis goes inside the woman’s vagina.” Harris’ original text reads “[t]hey want to be very close to each other in a sexual way, so close that male’s penis goes inside the female’s vagina [emphasis mine].” No doubt seeking maximum viewer outrage,

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287 Ibid.
288 Ibid.
289 Ibid.
the site authors effectively remove human actors and affective content from the excerpts, stripping them down to the only thing that matters in pornography: the sex act.

The site also imbues some images with a sexuality they did not have in Harris’ original text. Two figures featuring nudes that appear nearly fifteen pages apart—one of a young woman bending over with a mirror to examine her genitalia, the other of a young man before and after an erection—are displayed so that they look like one image, but for the row of stars separating them. Immediately below the images, under a bold heading “Masturbation,” Harris’ text is quoted nearly correctly: “Masturbation is touching or rubbing any of your body’s sex organs for pleasure—because it feels good. One everyday term is ‘playing with yourself.’” This pastiche of images and text suggests sexual overtones where none existed before; the illustrations, in addition to being pictured separately, had accompanied Harris’ discussions of female anatomy and male puberty, rather than sex. In fact, Emberly’s illustrations of actual intercourse do not expose every part of human body, and emphasize the closeness and happiness of the couple rather than their sex organs.

The textual excerpts that are featured on this site also reveal a distinct discomfort and even distaste for sex-positive attitudes and tolerance for homosexuality. Most of the quotes featured on the site focus on sexual pleasure or else mention it in passing; where something “feeling good” is merely noted, emphasis is added with italicized or bold font. Discussions of masturbation in both It’s Perfectly Normal and The Teenage Guy’s Survival Guide figure prominently, with the latter’s reassurances about the normalcy of looking at porn or fantasizing about a teacher highlighted by the site authors in bold red font. Daldry’s comforting take on same sex experimentation—“there is absolutely nothing wrong with

291 Ibid., 23.
292 Ibid., 37.
293 Parents Protecting the Minds of Children.
that”—is also rendered in bold text. However, the biggest and brightest excerpt on the site is Harris’ discussion of homosexuality; text about Ancient Greeks considering love between two men the highest form of love emphasizes “highest form of love” in all caps. In addition, Harris’ discussion of homophobia is quoted in italicized red font, featuring (and presumably condemning) Harris’ statement that those who disapprove of gays and lesbians have views that “…are often based on fears and misinformation, not facts.”

PPMC’s quest to alarm viewers continues with more provocative excerpts from additional “shocking” titles that include author commentary as well as added emphasis. The site authors claim that, though “[m]uch of the raw sex in the books can’t be printed here…[e]nough has been included to shock you and give you a picture of what is in the school library these days.” The excerpts are intended to serve as evidence that “…adults are enticing our children into lifestyles that in essence are slaughtering [them]” and comprise a veritable laundry list of “offensive” content, including “…sex, oral sex, anal sex, sadomasochism, multiple partners, three-way sex, gang rape, orgies, group sex, homosexual sex, lesbian sex, psychopathic sexual murders, and pedophilia in a titillating manner.” Viewer forewarned, passages from the books in question are reproduced with all their “naughty bits” strung together, flattening sex and sexuality to its crudest and most dehumanizing context. Variations on the word “fuck” are stripped of all but the barest accompaniment, creating a litany of f-bombs that, without their original context, evoke an angry tirade, a pornographic narrative, or both. For example, Alex Sanchez’s *Rainbow Boys* has “sorry for the 1000th fucking time” and “how the fuck should I know?” rendered with

294 Ibid.
295 Ibid.
296 Harris, *It’s Perfectly Normal*, 18.
297 Parents Protecting the Minds of Children.
298 Ibid.
“fuck” and “fucking” in bold blue.299 Perhaps most striking is how rape scenes from Sapphire’s *Push* and Alice Sebold’s *Lucky* are jumbled together with passages featuring consensual sex, suggesting that it is only the pure mechanics of intercourse that really matter to or register with young readers.

These excerpts and their commentary also reveal that the site authors have concerns beyond profanity and sex. The site implicitly condemns diversity and tolerance, in keeping with the argument in pro family circles that such terms are a way to smuggle the “gay agenda” into every aspect of American culture. Judy Carter’s *The Homo Handbook* uses the term “gay agenda” ironically, but it is bolded for emphasis here, along with this comment: “The gay agenda is mentioned several times in the book and call [sic] the straights the radical right.”300 A passage from Eric Jerome Dickey’s *Between Lovers* describing a perfume as redolent of “Black Panthers and revolution” bolds the phrase “Black Panthers and Revolution” in bright blue font.301 Reviewers’ praise for books that depict or encourage questioning or reevaluation of beliefs is bolded to indicate the site authors’ disapproval. Jean Ferris’ *Eight Seconds* is flagged as being “…a step in the right direction for teaching tolerance and breaking down stereotypes,” while the protagonist of Lauren Myracle’s *Kissing Kate* catches flak for being “brave enough to question everything she once took as truth.”302

While the commercial site amazon.com is recommended as a tool to “look up controversial books,” the Fayetteville School Library’s online catalog is used as further evidence that library is a hotbed of amoral sexually-themed materials. With palpable alarm,

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299 Ibid.
300 Ibid.
301 Ibid.
302 Ibid.
the site authors share the results of numerous subject searches, breaking down the 502 books about sex (as opposed to “only 152 books on drugs and 93 on smoking”) into the number of titles under a list of subject headings including “[S]ex [I]nstruction,” “[H]omosexuality,” and “[L]esbian fiction [sic].” These results are marshaled not simply to demonstrate the number of school library books about sex and sexuality, particularly homosexuality, but to illustrate the apparent lack of moral valence incorporated with such themes in the catalog’s records. For instance, the authors wonder why searches for “promiscuity, promiscuous, immorality, sexual addiction, sex addicts or STD’s [sic]” bore no fruit, complaining that “with 502 books on sex there [sh]ould be something associated with the problems of teenage sex.” Most tellingly, the authors compare the relatively generous offerings in gay-themed fiction with the scanty ones under outdated (or inaccurate) headings such as “Afro American fiction” and “Indian fiction” to suggest that “diversity” is really a plot to advance gay and lesbian themes and causes: “For those who didn’t already know, now you know what Diversity Means!!! The promotion of the homosexual agenda!!!”

The site authors’ dim view of the library’s holdings seeps over into a general critique of librarians’ professionalism. After citing promotional text from the back cover of Eric Jerome Dickey’s *Between Lovers*, including “…you’d better believe that the anger, jealousy, excitement, and passion of this triangle are going to run hot,” they remark “[s]o librarian [sic] should know what is in the book,” suggesting they were derelict in screening the book before purchasing it. *GLTBQ: A Guide for Queer and Questioning Teens*’ positive review in *School Library Journal* is cited as evidence “how liberal the professionals—the

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303 Ibid.
304 Ibid.
305 Ibid.
306 Ibid.
gatekeepers—are.”307 A review of Bart Yates’ Leave Myself Behind praising the novel for its originality among a slew of coming out stories, has “[w]e have seen so many coming-out novels published in the past few years that one could say it’s starting to be overdone” rendered in blue. The quote is accompanied by the commentary, “[t]his writer thinks Fayetteville School Library hasn’t missed a one.”308

The Laurie Taylor and the Parents Protecting the Minds of Children case study reveals a number of characteristics now typical of conservative library challenges. At pains to demonstrate the offensiveness quotient of the books in question, the site authors employ a “shock and awe” like technique, not simply in their excerpts, but in how they arrange these excerpts to suggest that the material in question is “pornographic.” At the same time, the authors take on the policies that presumably led to the acquisition of the library materials in the first place: “access” to information is always and ever prurient, and “diversity” a mere buzzword for the promotion of “the homosexual agenda.” The persistent linking of gay and lesbian content with the sexually explicit reinforces the notion that certain kinds of information (and certain kinds of stories) are not legitimate; indeed, they are framed as part of a plot to corrupt children’s innocence. Finally, the authors cast aspersions on librarians’ professionalism: their collections aren’t truly diverse, they don’t know “what’s in the books” and they blindly follow a liberal, gay-positive agenda. Wielding pornography like a club, pro family activists go after library policies and the ALA from a “common sense” position that nevertheless has deep roots in conservative worldviews about sex and information.

While the three original challenged books were retained in the Fayetteville schools and the school’s collection development policy was strengthened, the attack on the ALA and library

307 Ibid.
308 Ibid.
policy reverberated throughout the pro family media and added more grist to the pro family library activist mill.

**Sexual Conservatives, Pornography, and Information**

Sociologist Kristin Luker’s *When Sex Goes to School*, a 2006 study of sex education controversies in the United States, reveals that sex is controversial because it brings competing worldviews—and competing interpretations of the 1960s—to the fore. Using the terms “sexual liberal” and “sexual conservative” as shorthand for these different worldviews, Luker uncovers a startling landscape of warring ideologies about human nature, pleasure, and curiosity: for sexual conservatives, sex is sacred, and therefore must be carefully guarded and protected; whereas, for sexual liberals, sex is natural and youth should be free to explore and indulge their curiosity, within thoughtful and well-informed parameters. But for sexual conservatives, curiosity is never innocent and may have negative consequences. Accordingly, many sexual conservatives believe any sex that exists outside the responsibilities and duties of marriage can become a destructive force, both for individuals and for society as a whole. Within this category, they place premarital sex, adultery, child sexual abuse, and homosexuality.

Luker’s study reveals volumes for any analysis of pro family activism, not simply because these activists exhibit sexually conservative worldviews in their media, but because it pinpoints one likely cause of library and curricular challenges: a quarrel over the role of information in youth development. For sexual liberals, youth need more and better
information about sex in order to make good decisions, and sex—including sex that is
recreational—is simply a natural part of life. For sexual conservatives, however, more
information—“too much, too soon”—is likely to confuse young people and give them ideas
(and license) that they would not otherwise have had. As Luker relates, sexual conservatives
argue that “…the more children are exposed to information, the more confused those
children become. For them, children are tainted, not informed, by all the information
floating around them…Information just makes young people jaded, they think, and gives
them ideas that they would not otherwise have had…It’s like giving a kid a loaded gun.”309
Conflicts over sex are among the most heated library controversies in the United States,
because they encapsulate clashing worldviews about the proper role of information access in
youth education and development.

Thus, for sexual conservatives, too much information too soon will not only give
children ideas, but also arouse their curiosity outside the necessary parameters of obedience
and morality. Sexual conservatives believe that hierarchy, structure, and rules are the only
things keeping humanity from degenerating into moral chaos, and that information has the
power to break down those hierarchies. As Luker argues, “liberals and conservatives agree
that information is an arena of power and a power source as well. They also seem to agree
(although they do not know that they agree) that information breaks down barriers between
categories of people, that information is equalizing, that it levels the playing field. Where
they differ, as you might imagine, is over whether that leveling is a good thing.”310
Information may even lead children to question the beliefs they have been taught, thus
disrupting what sexual conservatives critics see as the natural order of hierarchy between

309 Luker, When Sex Goes to School, 194-5.
310 Ibid., 198-99.
parents and their children. It could also shift the locus of control from parents to teachers, thus potentially undermining parental authority.

Sexual conservatives thus find comprehensive sex education to be the ultimate “leveler,” putting topics like premarital sex, masturbation, and homosexuality, into secular, matter-of-fact terms, thereby stripping sexual information of the moral valences conservative parents might wish to reinforce.\(^{311}\) Significantly, many sexual conservatives object to pedagogical practices such as brainstorming scenarios precisely because they put sex and sexuality on the table as fodder for discussion. As scholar Janice Irvine finds in her study of sex education opponents, “[c]ontemporary critics condemn all classroom programs in which, they allege, a broad spectrum of words in a range of contexts rape, seduce, or molest in the moment of their utterance… it is not simply that teaching about sex may subsequently cause young people to engage in sex but the innocent children are hurt, indeed abused, simply by the act of speaking about sex.”\(^{312}\) Sexual conservatives also believe asking students to discuss sex blurs the lines between right and wrong, implicitly condoning experimentation by deflating parental and religious influences. It is not just that kids will interpret information about sex as a green light to experimentation, but that their faith in their parents’ authority will be shaken.

The pro family movement not only exhibits elements of the “sexually conservative” worldview quite distinctly, but leverages these beliefs (and fears) about sexuality in order to propel parents into conservative political action. Chapter 3 discussed how conservative activists have linked the state of the family to the state of the nation, effectively making the two-parent headed, heterosexual family with children not simply normative, but patriotic. In


\(^{312}\) Irvine, 64.
a similar vein, prominent pro family attacks on abortion rights, gay marriage, and sex education work to mobilize their constituents’ fear of sexual energy run amok in American society. For instance, in a 1990 manifesto titled *Children at Risk*, James Dobson and Gary Bauer fan the flames of parental anxiety into ammunition for an all-out culture war, calling sex “…the hydrogen bomb that permits the destruction of things as they are and a simultaneous reconstruction of the new order.”313 Sex and sexuality destroy the nation via the family by dangling consequence-free pleasure in front of it, then preying upon its health in a decidedly vampire-like way: “If this [sexual] energy within us is siphoned off in the pursuit of pleasure; if it is squandered in non-exclusive relationships; if it is perverted in same-sex activities, then the culture is deprived of the working, saving, sacrificing, caring, building, growing, reproducing units known as families.”314 Of course, this unchained sexuality is not a free-floating force, but one harnessed by the opponents of the pro family political platform in what Dobson and Bauer stop just short of labeling a conspiracy. Nevertheless, they find in the gay rights movement and sex education evidence of intent to “…destroy the family...by undermin[ing] the sexual exclusivity on which life-long marriage is based. And, as we have seen, if the family collapses, the heartland of the nation is wide open to cultural revolution.”315

Such attacks on the family are based on children’s and teenagers’ presumed vulnerability and susceptibility to media suggestion. Pro family activists focus on schools and libraries in part because they believe these are the institutions that have unrestricted access to children’s minds. They suspect that their political opponents are attempting to wage war upon their values by wresting control of youth education away from parents,

313 Dobson and Bauer, *Children at Risk*, 39.
314 Ibid., 59.
315 Ibid., 47.
thereby usurping their authority. Calling such a contest “the second great civil war,” Dobson and Bauer cite children as the “prize” to be won by combatants. They assert that “[t]hose who control what young people are taught and what they experience—what they see, hear, think, and believe—will determine the future course for the nation.”

Fifteen years after *Children at Risk*, Rebecca Hagelin, a prolific commentator for the conservative Heritage Foundation, mined similar territory in the evocatively titled *Home Invasion*. Labeling her opponents “cultural terrorists,” Hagelin charges enemies like the “liberal media” and public schools with preying upon children’s minds, which are “…blank canvasses awaiting the brushstrokes of their environment. They absorb any image that is put in front of them.”

As for teenagers, Hagelin dubs them “walking hormone combustion engines” whose “blood can run hot from the slightest encouragement.” Because of these presumed weakness, parents cannot stand idly by, but must participate in what amounts to “…a constant war for the minds and hearts of our children.” In a pointed jab at sex education curricula that inform youth about birth control and disease prevention, Hagelin emphasizes youth vulnerability by retorting that “…there is no condom for the brain or heart.”

With everything from children’s innocence to the future of the nation at stake, pro-family activists needed a target to harness parental fears. Pornography, with its unabashed coupling of sex, fantasy, and pleasure, serves as a convenient enemy for those who would translate their sexually conservative worldviews into political action. Notoriously difficult to define, despite the persistent popularity of former Supreme Court justice Potter Stewart’s

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316 Ibid., 38.
318 Ibid., 57.
319 Ibid., 144.
320 Ibid., 35-6.
quip that “I know it when I see it,” a nebulous specter haunting the United States is arguably more versatile (and terrifying) than one with solid contours. While fighting to strengthen obscenity laws and pass ordinances forbidding or limiting the sale of sexually explicit materials have long been a staple of conservative activists, more recent battles against gay rights, sex education, and unfiltered Internet access in libraries and schools have all depended upon porn’s cultural cache as a mobilizing issue. Sidestepping explicit definitions, activists stretch pornography’s boundaries to include the even more vague “pornographic” moniker, a charge ubiquitous in challenges to sex and sexuality-themed material in libraries, and frequently marshaled to rally support against gay-positive sex education. Once materials are tarred with the brush of pornography, pro family activists can make an even stronger case for the need to protect vulnerable children and teenagers. As in “Excess Access,” library policies that emphasize access and intellectual freedom are pitted against the desire to protect children from harm, and often fare poorly in the contest.

Taking advantage of the equally vague term “information,” pro family activists also skillfully (and often subtly) yoke pornography to information access. As Luker’s study suggests, a common thread in pro family media about sex education is the corruptive power of information. Dobson and Bauer believe there is no way that youth, once given “the most exciting information in the history of the world,” will be able to restrain themselves from using it. Information about sex, when presented “with no overriding moral principles,” is automatically assumed to grant license to sexual behavior. “The only question,” they assert, “is ‘Are you ready?’”

Because teenagers are viewed in the Hagelin-vein of creatures always on the verge of exploding, potential sources of temptation must be carefully

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321 Dobson and Bauer, *Children at Risk*, 53.
monitored and the doors of dangerous information, in a memorably vivid scene, kept
“locked and barred” by protective gatekeepers:

“[T]hink of today’s teenager as being compelled symbolically to walk alone down a long,
dark, corridor leading toward adulthood. On either side of this gloomy hall are many large
doors, each bearing identifying words at eye level. They are called Alcohol, Marijuana, Hard
Drugs, Pornography, Gambling, Homosexual Experimentation, Premarital Sex, on and
on…The susceptible adolescent must merely crack the door an inch or two and a monster
will run out and grab its wide-eyed victim. Some, but not all, will be held in its power for
the rest of their lives.”

Similarly, in a 2002 anti-porn text entitled *Protecting Your Child in an X-Rated World,*
Frank York and Jan LaRue find in sexually explicit words and imagery a sinister power akin
to demonic possession. Evoking an updated *tabula rasa* with computer metaphors, the
authors argue that “[b]y viewing pornography, we put bad pictures and bad thoughts into our
minds—and they will never go away. We can’t erase them or reformat them the way we can
a computer disk or hard drive.”

Combine anxieties about youth and porn with the presumably trustworthy
institutions of school and library, and you have a volatile political cocktail indeed. Not
simply “pornographic” materials, but the association of these materials with children’s and
teenagers’ education fuel pro family activists’ outrage. Bolstering Luker’s argument that sex
education controversies are rooted in a fundamental disagreement about the rapid cultural
shifts of the 1960s, Hagelin cites the decade as the beginning of “a steady removal of God
and His absolutes from the public square.” As a result, she asserts, public education became
a “vacuum…soon filled with the teaching of moral relativism [and] sexual anarchy…”

Public education is thus characterized as a minefield over which parents must keep

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322 Dobson and Bauer, *Children at Risk,* 7-8.
323 Frank York and Jan LaRue, *Protecting Your Child in an X-Rated World* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House,
2002), 123.
324 Hagelin, *Home Invasion,* 8.
“constant, prayerful vigilance…Otherwise, those kids are liable to be exposed to pornography of one or more kinds right there in the classroom.”

It is not simply that pornography has infiltrated education, but the threat that it represents to parental authority. Giving (or, in this case, denying) youth access to sexual information is asserted as a purely parental prerogative, one that liberals have used their connections in the public school realm to usurp. In *Against the Tide*, a 1994 how-to manual for raising virtuous children, Tim and Beverly LaHaye of Concerned Women for America caution parents that “…many [teachers] do not respect your rights as a parent to be the primary teacher of this subject to your children. These self-appointed ‘sex experts’ are literally evangelists of promiscuity.”

Hagelin also attempts to stimulate parental anxiety about the goings-on in public schools, urging parents to “insert and reinforce [their] own values into the teaching.” “If you simply hand your child over to someone else for seven hours a day,” she writes, “they will be shaped and influenced by those who do not share your values.”

Pro family activists also find libraries to be insufficiently attentive, even hostile, to parental authority. An essay entitled “Should Raunchy be the Fourth R?” in Phyllis Schlafly’s *Education Reporter* critiqued some library selections for “normaliz[ing] and even glamoriz[ing] sexual behavior that most educators and parents would like to prevent. Surely there are other ways to provide an education on topics touched by these books.”

Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, tried to raise parent awareness not only to the reality of “sexually explicit materials” available in public school

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328 Ibid., 118.
libraries, but also how libraries infringe on parental rights. “[E]ven in the heartland of America,” he wrote, “parents are denied much influence at all.”³³⁰ In addition to threatening parental rights, Mohler argued that the school library could be used “as an environment for indoctrinating children into the sexual revolution” and that the books purchased by librarians, particularly young adult novels, “are among some of the most explicit and pornographic to be found anywhere in literature.”³³¹

The root of these threats to parental rights and child safety are blamed on the ALA’s intellectual freedom policies. An article by Steve Crampton in the American Family Association’s AFA Journal defended book challengers from charges of censorship, characterizing parents as reasonable people merely protecting their rights from the intrusion of librarians’ intellectual freedom policies. “[Intellectual freedom] sounds very noble on the surface,” Crampton wrote, “but what it means in practice is that the librarians do everything possible to obscure the reading habits of students …Unless a parent actually finds her child reading an objectionable book, that parent has no way of discovering what the child has been reading.”³³² Hagelin accuses the ALA and the “educational establishment” of being “cozy bedfellows,” and argues “it is our children who will continue to suffer from their incestuous, putrid ideology…the associations of both fields mistakenly believe that they are smarter than parents, have more rights than parents, and are the final word in what goes on in the classroom.”³³³

One accusation lobbed at the ALA by pro family activists is that it fails to recognize pornography, categorizing porn as merely another type of information. “Thanks in large

³³¹ Ibid.
³³³ Hagelin, Home Invasion, 112.
measure to the efforts of the American Library Association (ALA),” York and LaRue goad parents, “local libraries are being converted into adult bookstores and peep show booths—and you’re footing the bill for it.”

Associating the ALA with porn was a common strategy even in the early days of Family Friendly Libraries. In “the Battle of the Bawdy Books,” Karen Jo Gounaud calls for the elimination of librarians and teachers who toe the information access party line. “ALA clones pushing pornographic literature onto our schools and libraries must be replaced with community minded professionals who truly understand the benefits of protecting kids from vulgar images and words.”

Ten years later, Hagelin concurred, arguing “trusting the American Library Association for guidance in age-appropriate materials for our children has become as dangerous as looking to Playboy and Penthouse for such advice.”

Anxiety about parental rights is often accompanied by the argument that librarians and the ALA don’t care about children, and in fact, want them to view sexual materials, or that “free speech” is somehow more important than children’s well-being and safety. As pro-family activist Dan Kleinman of Safelibraries writes, “[w]e just want kids to be safe, well-informed, and not looked upon as ‘little First Amendments.’” There are two tactics bolstering this argument: first, conflating of any materials having to do with sex or sexuality with pornography, and second, directly opposing “safety” and “child protection” to “freedom” and “First Amendment.” This opposition is also sometimes flattened into the differing sexual mores between the Right and the Left, with the Left being caricatured as a

334 York and LaRue, Protecting Your Child in an X-Rated World, 195.
336 Hagelin, Home Invasion, 112.
sex-obsessed, “anything goes” contingent, intent on corrupting children. Such a caricature
nevertheless exhibits how sexual conservatives see themselves as moral standard bearers,
holding the line against those who have different sexual worldviews.

In fact, some activists believe the ALA actually forces librarians to push sexual
information on children, regardless of what their parents might wish. They draw from the
library professional literature on the importance of making information about sex available
to children and teenagers, and flatten it thusly: first, all sexual information is pornography or
otherwise inappropriate for kids, and second, this is the only, or at the very least, most
important information that librarians want children to receive. As Kleinman writes:

“In the height of absolute gall, blatant in-your-face promotion of inappropriate materials for
children, ALA librarians are guided by ALA policy to ensure children have unfettered
access to one and only one specific kind of information, namely, ‘sexually-oriented
materials!’ Imagine, librarians no less, whose goal is to ‘assume a leadership role’ in
ensuring your children get the very material you yourself would not give them! No, not
mathematics, not citizenship, not even self-esteem, but ‘sexual-related materials’ is signaled
out by ALA policy for direct delivery to children.”

Thus pro family challenges over the past two decades have increasingly shifted from
specific materials in the collection to governing policies—especially policies that protect
youth access to information and that charge libraries with populating their collections with
diverse viewpoints. Pro family activists find intellectual freedom statements like the Library
Bill of Rights to be the ALA’s attempt to foist its liberal agenda on unsuspecting local
communities. The Bill’s inclusion of “age” as a protected category of user access
particularly galls the ALA’s critics, who believe that the organization encourages librarians
to neglect their responsibility to protect children. Librarians are routinely critiqued by pro
family activists for failing to distinguish between different moral valences surrounding
information, thereby opening the door to prurience, unrestrained pleasure, and pornography.

338 Ibid.
The pro family movement’s campaign against Internet pornography in libraries was one of its most effective gambits, but the arguments at its core had held firm for decades of sex-themed library controversies, and persisted even after the Supreme Court upheld the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA) in 2003. What lies at the root of such controversies is, I have argued, a basic conflict between “sexual conservatives” and librarianship over the role of information, curiosity, and pleasure in human life. If warring attitudes about sexuality stem from, as Luker suggests, “…the role of information in human life, and why the lack of it is either a good and protective thing or a bad thing that confuses and blights young minds,” then pro family library challenges are best understood as cultural struggles over worldview, as much as they are struggles over sex. If sexual pleasure is only safely corralled by heterosexual marriage, then textual pleasure must also be corralled by the proper moral (and ultimately, political) frameworks. Sexual content outside these strictures not only risks the presumed moral relativism of tolerance, but courts the realms of fascination and curiosity.

Conclusion

During the 1970s, the ALA and librarians attempted to grapple with the issue of pornography in libraries. In Sex and the Undecided Librarian research revealed that some librarians remained squeamish about sexually themed materials, despite the tenets of intellectual freedom governing the field. In a 1990 collection of essays entitled Libraries, Pornography, and Erotica, various scholars and practitioners attempted to engaged the

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339 Luker, When Sex Goes to School, 135.
pornography debate by placing it in the context of professional judgments about collection
development and intellectual freedom. Perhaps not surprisingly, a 1996 collection, *For Sex
Education, See Librarian* moved the debate into the realm of educational sexual expression,
avoiding the thorny problem of pleasure while speaking to the need for accurate sexual
information for patrons young and old. While various practitioners have written articles
addressing the issue of pornography and its challenge to providing library services to youth,
the field’s intellectual freedom arguments remain overwhelmingly focused on access to
information, with no mention of pornography or other sexual expression. Aided by
Americans’ continued ambivalence about pleasure and sexuality, pro family critics have
capitalized on this omission in order to marshal support in an atmosphere of morality and
fear. Though pro family critics do object to particular content—and specifically, to sexual
content—what is at the root of their objections is a model of reading that demands pleasure
and curiosity be carefully monitored and controlled. In this sense, conservative activists
frame sex in much the same light as they do reading, as a source of pleasure and distraction
that can, without moral strictures and clear educational utility, easily lead vulnerable young
people astray.

It is no wonder that a profession defined by its commitment to “information access”
should come under fire from critics who fear information’s presumed power to corrupt and
entice. Yet while librarians fight library materials challenges with appeals to diversity,
access, and tolerance for multiple viewpoints, pro family activists target these ethics
themselves, politicizing library policy in an effort to fight the ALA, and to promote a
different worldview about sex and information. Thus pro family activists argue that the
function of reading, even recreational reading, should not be one that is strictly about the
satisfaction of individual desire, but about the formation of the young reader into an obedient family member, and ultimately, an obedient citizen.
CHAPTER 6
“EXCESS ACCESS”: CIPA AND THE PRO FAMILY CRITIQUE OF LIBRARIAN PROFESSIONALISM

This chapter explores how pro family activists portrayed librarians and critiqued librarianship during the height of the movement to pass and uphold the Children’s Internet Protection Act (2000), legislation that compelled all public and school libraries accepting federal funds to use software to filter their Internet access. Examining key pro family movement media such as David Burt’s *Dangerous Access* (2000), a survey of porn-related incidents in public libraries, I analyze the competing vision of librarianship advanced by pro family activists. As they argued that librarians needed to protect patrons by filtering their Internet access, pro family library activists ultimately advocated for a narrowly defined service role for librarianship. After exploring the history of the Children’s Internet Protection Act and the ALA’s positions on filtering, I analyze how the pro family movement attempted to discredit the American Library Association in order to promote its own vision of librarians as the servers of a homogenous community. I explore the portrayals of librarians and librarianship in the pro family media, especially the way they maintain (or fail to maintain) collections and spaces. Finally, I discuss the implications of the CIPA battle for the larger war over librarian’s professionalism. Pro family activists urged librarians not simply to filter Internet access, but to passively reflect community standards and anticipate the wishes of conservative, protectionist parents.

In 1999, the American Family Association produced and promoted a videocassette entitled *Excess Access: Pornography, Children, and the American Library Association*. Part dramatization of a family’s clash with their local public library, part exposé of the ALA, and
part call to arms for library activists, Excess Access marked the apex of the critique of librarian professionalism popularized by Family Friendly Libraries. Most concerned with targeting “offensive” library materials during the early- to mid-1990s, at the turn of the millennium the national pro family movement switched tactics, targeting intellectual freedom policies and library ethics directly. While their campaign for mandatory Internet filtering of sexually explicit imagery in schools and public libraries was ultimately successful, fueling the momentum necessary support the Supreme Court upholding the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA) in 2003, pro family activists had launched a much larger project with no end in sight: a critique of librarianship itself. By fanning the flames of anxiety about Internet porn in libraries, Excess Access packed a skillful one-two punch: clearly intended to shock and outrage viewers, it also leveraged viewer outrage toward a challenge to the professional authority and judgment of librarians.

Excess Access’ dramatization opens with a mother dropping her young son off at the public library, where a shifty-eyed, nervous-looking middle-aged man is downloading pornography from the Internet. After printing the pornography out, the man follows the boy into the men’s room. As the bathroom door swings shut and the scene fades to black, the man hisses in voice-over: “Hey kid! Look at this.” Meanwhile, the librarian, preoccupied with chiding children for chewing gum in the library, is apparently powerless to intervene when sexual predators threaten children’s safety. When the outraged mother returns to the library, demanding to know how the predator got the pornography in the first place, the librarian immediately pulls out the Library Bill of Rights, explaining that there’s nothing she can do to interfere with the man’s intellectual freedom to view pornography in the library. The mother muses in a later scene that she’s “known [the librarian] for years. Her hands
must be tied, or something.” That “something” turns out to be the American Library Association, and the ethics of a profession the video aims to expose as corrupt and illegitimate.

While conservative activists were certainly concerned about the cultural consequences of pornography generally, their concern porn in libraries suggests a deeper critique of librarianship at the root of the movement. In the process of organizing opposition to libraries’ anti-filtering policies, pro family activists advanced a competing vision of librarian professionalism, calling for evaluation, judgment and intervention during an era when library leaders were championing a neutral stance toward Internet content. At the same time, conservative activists clearly doubted the ability of librarians to make decisions, often characterizing them as either dupes of the American Library Association, or too cowed and intimidated to challenge the intellectual freedom party line. Though they believed librarians should be cultural “gatekeepers,” activists ultimately put more faith in the values of the community and the anxieties of parents than they did in librarians’ judgment.

“An Imperfect and Robotic Technology:” How (and Why) the ALA took on Filtering and CIPA

In 1998, a group of Loudoun County, VA citizens and library patrons, dubbing themselves Mainstream Loudoun, challenged their public library’s decision to filter internet access as a violation of their First Amendment rights. It was a case that many librarians watched with great interest; indeed, the ALA lent its extensive lobbying and legal resources to the case, as it had done in two previous cases related to regulating
Internet content. However, this previous legislation aimed at limiting access to Internet content (CDA, 1996 and COPA, 1998) had focused on limiting the expression of the originator of the speech, or the publisher. Mainstream Loudoun vs. Loudoun County Board of Trustees was the first legal case directly involving the receivers of online information, and not coincidentally, the first to rule on the use of Internet filters in public libraries.\(^{340}\)

A federal district court eventually struck down the Loudoun County Library filtering policy, ruling that, when the public library purchased internet access, they made an acquisitions decision that included everything available on the Internet. Any attempt to restrict Internet access would thus be tantamount to removing books from the library shelves. Citing Pico vs. Island Trees, a 1982 case that sanctioned the removal of books from libraries for partisan or doctrinal reasons, the court concluded that content-based restrictions could only be justified by a compelling government interest. Though protecting children from harmful materials might be considered a compelling interest, the court ultimately decided that the filters in question were not narrowly tailored enough to protect that interest because they blocked constitutionally protected speech.

The issue of filtering in libraries seemed to be settled. However, pro-family activists continued to organize for some kind of filtering mandate for public libraries and schools. The result was the Children’s Internet Protection Act, passed by both houses and signed into law by President Clinton in 2000. It contradicted the Mainstream Loudoun ruling, but avoided some of the pitfalls that had doomed its predecessors, the Communications Decency Act (1996) and the Children’s Online Protection Act (1998). While it mandated the use of filtering in libraries and schools that accepted the e-rate, it

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\(^{340}\) Heins, *Not in Front of the Children*, x.
also included a provision for adults to request unfiltered access by request for “bona fide research and other lawful purposes” and for minors to request access to wrongfully blocked sites.341 Most significantly, it allowed some wiggle room for financially secure libraries to opt out if they were willing to forgo the e-rate. The ALA challenged CIPA in a federal district court, citing Mainstream Loudoun ruling that Internet filters were not sufficiently tailored enough to serve state interest, as well as charging that managing requests for unfiltered access would represent a serious professional burden for librarians.342 However, the Supreme Court upheld CIPA in 2003 over the ALA’s objections, ruling that all libraries using the e-rate must submit a statement of intention to comply with CIPA by July 2005.

The ALA’s opposition to CIPA and to filters had its roots in more general intellectual freedom principles they believed to be applicable in both print and online environments. In general, librarians were urged to apply these principles regardless of the medium in question. The most recent editions of the Intellectual Freedom Manual (2002, 2006, and 2010) attempt to apply general intellectual freedom principles in an online context. While the authors of the Intellectual Freedom Manual acknowledged that “time, place and manner” restrictions can be levied on patrons’ access to electronic information, they insist that such restrictions “should not be based on content.”343 In addition, the authors caution against denying access to information “perceived to lack value” and reiterate that, as with print resources, “[t]he provision of access does not imply sponsorship or

Moreover, they defend minors’ access with arguments identical to those submitted to defend their access to print materials, noting the need for youth to become “thinking adults” and participate in “an informed electorate,” as well as noting their essential First Amendment right to all information. The ALA argues that libraries should make online content available under the same “constitutional protections that apply to the books on libraries’ shelves.”

However, the Internet offers some different challenges and opportunities for librarians. The first is in the need to educate patrons in how to navigate the vast and often confusing fields of information in an online format. The authors of the Intellectual Freedom Manual write that the way that libraries “…empower individuals to explore ideas, access and evaluate information, draw meaning from information presented in a variety of formats, develop valid conclusions, and express new ideas” may be even more crucial in navigating the online environment. Overall, the Internet is viewed quite optimistically as an opportunity for libraries to provide more diverse kinds of information to their patrons, information they might not be able to access otherwise. The authors cite the online environment as opportunity, rather than challenge, offering minors a chance “to participate responsibly in the electronic arena…nurturing the information literacy skills demanded by the Information Age.” The Internet’s ability to enable “individuals to receive speech from the entire world and speak to the entire world” is also cited by the authors, noting the

344 Ibid.
provision of global information as not simply a right for patrons, but an opportunity for libraries to correct inequities of access to these resources.

Yet the Internet also proves to be a challenging venue for intellectual freedom when principles meet collection development practice. Despite the Loudoun ruling, any analogies between the Internet and the library’s physical shelves ultimately broke down when it came to collection development and control over the content (and quality) of the library’s resources. The Internet’s sheer vastness and diversity of material meant that librarians’ professional practices of selection and evaluation were no longer practical or even possible. The *Intellectual Freedom Manual* authors write that “[p]roviding connections to global information, services, and networks is not the same as selecting and purchasing materials for a library collection.”348 In fact, some material online may not meet the library’s collection development requirements at all. Still, this need not be the librarian’s concern; rather, the role of active selection is delegated to the patron, with “…each user [left] to determine what is appropriate.”349 This boundary between providing access and making selections puts the onus on the patron to decide what is suitable or unsuitable for her purposes. The librarians’ responsibility in the online environment is only to provide access to information, without judgment, leaving it to the users to determine whether that information meets their needs and interests—unless, of course, the users are minors, in which case parents have the final say. Interestingly, librarians are explicitly cautioned to police the line between personal belief and professional practice when dealing with online materials; they “should not deny or limit access to electronic information because of its allegedly controversial content or because of

349 Ibid.
the librarian’s personal beliefs or fear of confrontation…[or] on the grounds that it is perceived to lack value.”

While the 5th edition of ALA’s *Intellectual Freedom Manual* did acknowledge the Internet as a potential source for library challenges in 1996, it was the 6th edition in 2002 that fully codified the library field’s position on the use of filtering software. In an article on challenges and issues facing the field, Shaevel and Becker argue that filters compromise not simply patrons’ First Amendment rights, but the “core values of librarianship,” particularly the protection of access to all library materials for all categories of users. They also critiqued the “imperfect and robotic technology” for imposing the biases of “corporate entities” on the community, limiting “the community’s right to govern its own library and that library’s selection policies.” Given all these factors, the ALA council affirms that filters “block access to Constitutionally protected speech violat[ing] the *Library Bill of Rights*.” The “Statement of Library Use of Filtering Software Policy Statement” enumerates other problems with filtering technology, including viewpoint or content discrimination, vague and subjective criteria for site blocking, the propriety nature of information about how sites are blocked, and the imperfections of the technology, leading to “over-blocking” legitimate sites. The policy statement characterizes filters as “designed for the home market…to respond to the preferences of parents making decisions for their

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353 Ibid.
354 Ibid., 246.
children” and thus ultimately “dissonant” with the mission of libraries serving diverse communities and providing information access to all users.355

In general, librarians’ professional judgment is constructed as a uniquely civic-minded and public one, in contrast to both the commercial interests of filtering software companies, and the religious and moral convictions of the pro-family activists. With no professional ethics or responsibilities to curb them, software companies were thought free to impose their viewpoints on a community, forcing it to “…conform its library’s selection policies to the biases and beliefs of the corporate entities which design filtering software, while disregarding the community’s right to operate its library according to its own norms and values,”356 The ALA believes that filtering software imposes commercial values and norms on communities, interfering with librarians’ ability to interpret community needs and to connect community members with the necessary resource. Thus, the professional roles and responsibilities of librarians are explicitly linked to the empowerment of the public, and of citizens in a democracy. While filtering is definitely framed as a violation of citizens’ rights, it is also deemed to interfere with the ability of librarians to make professional judgments in the service of those rights, disrupting the delicate balance between professionalism and civic responsibility that lies at the heart of the ethic of intellectual freedom.

The ALA continues to oppose the use of filters in libraries on both ideological and professional bases, though it grants that some libraries may have to filter because of CIPA, or state, municipal, or board policies. In these cases, libraries are advised to use filters at the least restrictive level, and to educate patrons about their right to request unblocked access.

Arguments about patron rights and librarians’ obligation to uphold and advocate for them are common in the professional discourse, and find their most iconic and powerful expression in the Library Bill of Rights. As in other areas of potential conflict and challenges, the Manual advises librarians to adopt policies that “emphasize the library’s support for the principles of intellectual freedom and its respect for the diversity of the community.” Shaevel and Becker also counsel librarians to make use of time limits, privacy screens, and Internet education rather than resorting to filtering their terminals’ Internet access.  

Difficulties with selecting and evaluating information on the Internet aside, it is notable that, while acknowledging wrinkles and complexities, the ALA has maintained—and, in some cases, intensified—its case for libraries as institutions that are vital to citizen education and democracy. In fact, notions of citizenship and community are interwoven into not only defenses of patrons’ rights of access, but also into the professional work of librarianship. Intriguingly, though it is the patrons whose intellectual freedom rights are being asserted, without libraries, it is suggested, such a right would be meaningless. “In a democracy, libraries have a particular obligation to provide library users with information necessary for participation in self-governance.”  

In order to fulfill this obligation, librarians must be free to exercise professional judgments, judgments that are hampered by filtering, certainly, but also by any challenges to library collections and policies, as well as by librarians who fail to counter these challenges with the Library Bill of Rights.

358 ALA, “Questions and Answers: Access to Electronic Information, Services, and Networks,” 92.
Taking on the ALA: The Pro Family Filtering Campaign

The passage of the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA) in 2000, and the ALA’s subsequent challenge to CIPA’s constitutionality were in many ways tailor-made catalysts for pro family activism. Pro family organizations such as the American Family Association had long made fighting pornography their primary political focus, while Family Friendly Libraries’ explicit attacks on the ALA meant that many activists’ consciousnesses were already attuned to the relationship between “offensive” library materials and library policy. The controversy over CIPA offered pro family library activists a boost from conservative and religious anti-porn organizations, while allowing those groups to give their faithful a more concrete blueprint for grassroots activism. The American Family Association launched a campaign, along with the release of “Excess Access,” to arm local activists with the tools they needed to challenge ALA policies in their public libraries. Even Dr. Laura Schlessinger got in on the action, using her popular radio program to goad listeners into becoming “Warriors” against the ALA. 359 Thus, the perceived threat of pornography to young minds, coupled with a persistent idealized image of library space as “safe” space, brought anti-ALA activism into the conservative mainstream.

Pro family activists took on the filtering issue not simply because it was timely, but because for many, the combination of kids, pornography, and libraries was an unthinkable combination. Factor in the ease and accessibility of Internet access, and the alarm factor was raised significantly. Though Karen Jo Gounaud admitted that so-called “adult” materials in libraries were not a new concern, she thought the “introduction of unfiltered Internet” had

359 Laura Schlessinger, “Dr. Lauraland: The Warriors are on the March!” Dr. Laura Perspective (July 1999),18.
hastened public libraries’ decline into “library licentiousness and parental rights denial,”
drawing pornography and libraries into an unacceptably close embrace as “shameful
bedfellows.”\[^{360}\] Metaphors abounded for libraries with unfiltered Internet. “Excess Access”
demed such a library “a playground for children and the adversaries of parents,”\[^{361}\] while
Dr. Laura referred to public libraries as “a peep show booths.”\[^{362}\] In a packet of information
distributed by the American Family Association, a document entitled “Arguments Used by
the ALA and Your Local Librarian,” called the library “the equivalent of an adult book
store. Pornography and children have no business with one another, especially not in a
public library.”\[^{363}\]

Part of the genius of the pro family campaign to compel public libraries to filter was
their skillful maneuvering between the very real problems of pornography in libraries and a
socially conservative response framed as “common sense.” While “Excess Access” offered
glimmers of sexual conservatism, warning that children would learn about “the joys of gay
sex” as a hand pulls the title *Gay American History* from the stacks, most of the campaign’s
rhetoric was studiously bipartisan.\[^{364}\] David Burt, founder of Filtering Facts, a pro-filtering
advocacy organization, was often quoted in the pro family press while explicitly being
identified as a non-religious person. His profile made him the perfect one to argue that
“[p]rotecting children is of interest to people of all beliefs…Whether or not branches of
government—libraries—should use taxpayer dollars to provide free hard-core pornography

\[^{360}\] Karen Jo Gounaud, “Online Summit,” accessed December 21, 2011,
\[^{361}\] “Excess Access.”
\[^{362}\] Laura Schlessinger, “Is Your Library Friend or Foe?” *Dr. Laura Perspective*, (July 1999), 8.
\[^{363}\] American Family Association, “Arguments Used by the ALA and Your Local Librarian.” (AFA, 1999).
\[^{364}\] “Excess Access.”
to children isn’t about ‘religion’ or even politics. It’s about common-sense.” Further, having “decent” communities where parents feel that their children are safe was framed by anti-porn activist Phil Burress as an issue of values and standards, rather than politics: “Community standards are not left or right. They are high, low, or somewhere in between…Liberals and conservatives alike, for the most part, want a wholesome, clean community in which to raise their families. They want a community free of sex shops on every corner.” Having presented the pro-filtering case as the overwhelmingly reasonable one, pro family critics are cleared to bemoan the current state of ALA-fueled library insanity. “I can’t believe one trip to the library has turned our lives upside down,” the mother in “Excess Access” remarks, in palpable disbelief. Dr. Laura is similarly aghast that enemy has become the once-beloved public library: “What is going on in the world? I never imagined I would one day be fighting to protect children from pedophiles and from their own public libraries!..Is this some Orwellian vision of the future, where the safest place in the world suddenly becomes the most dangerous?” How did the “most dangerous” place in the world become that way? The pro family media cite three culprits, all of whom they claim molest children in some way: the pedophiles who use the library, the pornographic images themselves, and the ALA. Because its policies are depicted as aiding and abetting the first two culprits, the ALA emerges in the pro family media as the clear enemy.

The presence of pedophiles and child molesters in the library is highlighted in almost every pro-filtering argument in the pro family media. It is not simply that porn might be

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366 Don Wildmon, “How You Can Take Back Your Local Library” (AFA, 1999), 16.
367 “Excess Access.”
368 Schlessinger, “Is Your Library Friend or Foe?” 8.
accessed, but what behaviors it could stimulate in unscrupulous patrons. Libraries without filters, argues Focus on the Family Citizen writer Karla Dial, are “magnets for molesters.”

Pedophiles are drawn to the library by the promise of free porn and the carte blanche to look at it and even print it out in public. Once they have access, “their desires are fueled by what the library allows them to have” and the almost certain presence of children creates a temptation comparable to “giving an alcoholic access to alcohol. They are looking for this, and we shouldn’t give them the opportunity.”

Dick Black, a Loudoun county library board member and longtime conservative activist, concurs. “[T]he only purpose for viewing pornography is sexual gratification…And the public library is not the kind of place where you want men coming in and becoming sexually aroused. This creates a dangerous situation for children, even if they’re protected from seeing it.”

Even if the porn viewers don’t act out as a direct result of what they see, they can use their viewing itself as a form of harassment of patrons and library staff. And “acceptable use” policies (enforced with the infamous “tap on the shoulder” by a supervising librarian) won’t do the trick if the patron is consulting an innocuous-looking “training manual on kidnapping and rape for sexual pleasure, or for ways to lure children into seemingly harmless, but dangerous situations.”

It is clear from the pro family media that the problem is not simply porn, but the behaviors and intents of those who view it at the library.

The theme of molestation continues in pro family pro-filtering discourse, where pornography is claimed to have the ability to attack kids even without the aid of a human intermediary. The accidental viewing of a pornographic image not only shocks the viewer,

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370 Ibid., 23.
372 Randy Sharp, “Supplement to the Arguments Used by the ALA and Your Local Librarian,” (Tupelo, Miss.: American Family Association, 1999).
but burrows into his or her mind, never to be erased. According to the AFA’s Randy Sharp, stumbling upon hard-core pornography “instantly penetrate[s] the computer user’s mind, [and] the damage done to a child’s innocence is permanent and cannot be reversed.” Similar to Dr. Laura asks readers to imagine a scenario wherein they are a parent accompanying their preschooler to the library, “anticipating a pleasant visit and the armful of new books you’ll take home.” But then, as they pass the library’s new computers, they are “…assaulted by the site of hard-core pornography splashed across one of the screens. ‘Mommy, what’s that?’ your preschoolers says, confusion in his voice. You hurriedly usher him away and out of the library—but how can you remove the image now planted in his brain?” The greatest fear of conservative activists is that children will be exposed to pornography and be virtually “molested” and irrevocably damaged by the experience. Accordingly, in “Parent Alert: Beware the Public Libraries,” Gounaud writes that “[t]hese electronic playgrounds can almost instantly molest young minds with free samples of topless Playboy Playmates, masturbating Hustler models, obscene ads for ‘Cybersex Toys’ and sites like ‘Anybody want to molest me?’ and ‘It feels good to molest animals and children.’” In their defense of filtering technology, Family Friendly Libraries contrasts the supposed malleability of filters with the irrevocable damage done to children by pornography: “Restoration of access to legitimate sites is easy. Restoring a child’s molested mind is not.”

373 Ibid.
374 Schlessinger, “Is Your Library Friend or Foe?” 8.
Despite the sinister aims of pornography and its denizens, it quickly becomes clear that the ALA is real enemy of the piece in the pro family media. Intriguingly, many pro family critics promote their pro-filtering mission as rescue mission to recover the quality of librarians’ work lives. First, they make it clear that it is not the local librarian’s fault for not defying ALA policy, because the organization is so powerful that it effectively intimidates its membership into toeing the party line. “Though the ALA strenuously denies it,” Dr. Laura warns, “many librarians have written to tell me that crossing the ALA can also mean losing your job.”

Donald Wildmon cites the ALA’s influence in the training and hiring of librarians as a way to keep them “hostages” to ALA policy. “Many decent hard-working, God-fearing librarians are fed up with the ALA. But they fear what the ALA will do to them if they speak out.”

Wildmon exhorts readers to become activists in order “to rescue our libraries and librarians from the morally bankrupt American Library Association.”

In a sound bite for “Excess Access,” Phil Burress calls ALA’s influence “institutional inbreeding” and cites it as the reason that librarians are “told what to think and how to react by the American Library Association.”

David Burt concurs, arguing that librarians are taught to hold up the Library Bill of Rights “so that it sounds like it’s a legal document, it sounds like it’s the law,” meanwhile giving “lip service” to the notion of patron input in collection development decisions. Reconsideration forms are offered, “as if they were actually going to consider the request, when in reality they’re never going to reconsider their request.”

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378 Wildmon, “How You Can Take Back Your Local Library.”
379 Ibid.
380 “Excess Access.”
381 Ibid.
After intimidating librarians into following their dictates, according to the pro-family activists, the ALA then hangs them out to dry in the sordid, stressful workplace permeated by pornography and sexual harassment. The “Minneapolis 12,” a group of female public librarians who sued the EEOC because their bosses would not protect them from a “hostile workplace” of patrons viewing pornography on library Internet terminals, are often featured in the pro-family media as evidence that the ALA does not care about—or take care of—its own. As York argues in an article for Concerned Women for America’s *Family Voice*, “[t]hey—and their innocent patrons—were exposed to the vilest obscenity imaginable: child porn, bestiality, sodomy, torture.”382 Randy Sharp argues that acceptable use policies (as opposed to filters) put “employees in the potentially dangerous position of challenging a sexual predator, pedophile or addict, who historically, is prone to violence.”383 And yet the ALA filed a suit to block implementation of CIPA “…despite the sordid effect Internet porn has on its own librarians.”384 Libraries with unlimited access to the Internet are presumed to attract troublesome patrons, luring them into proximity with children and even female library workers. They might harass librarians or take pleasure from librarians and other patrons noticing what they are looking at online. As Gounaud puts it, “[f]ree pornography attracts a different breed of library patron than those who would use the net for legitimate educational and entertainment purposes. They are not ashamed of others seeing what they are pursuing. In fact, these porn pursuers, usually male, seem to enjoy watching

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383 Sharp, “Supplements to the Arguments Used by the ALA and Your Local Librarian.”
the reaction of the librarians, usually female, and others who are within range of their sexually explicit surfing escapades.”

This discourse of librarians in distress is overlaid with a subtle dismissal of library work and librarian professionalism. Morse writes that the age of the Internet makes librarians “long for the days when their worst problems were collecting nickel fines for overdue books and shushing noisy children.” In the face of the problems presented by Internet porn access in libraries, librarians are portrayed as helpless to correct behavioral problems, their hands tied by the ALA. Pro family activist Tallie Grubenhoff reported visiting her local library in Selah, WA, only to be shocked by a group of 11 and 12 year old boys and girls “whooping it up” while looking at porn. “The librarian explained that she couldn’t do anything about it” so Grubenhoff was obliged to discipline them herself. The librarian in “Excess Access” chides her young patron for chewing gum —“no gum in the library!”— yet she is helpless to prevent ill-intentioned patrons from downloading and printing out porn.

Tellingly, pro family activists argue that filters are in librarians’ best interests too, freeing them from the “police work” of monitoring patrons’ online behavior. They cannot imagine another role for librarians with regard to the Internet other than “policing,” and argue that this job should be “automated and technical.” Presumably, this will allow librarians to spend more time doing “the real work” of librarianship, and thus improve their relationships with community members. “Librarians,” argues Gounaud, “should not have to police and confront patrons who choose to operate in prurient web sites outside of

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388 “Excess Access.”
recommended library policy guidelines…it places librarians in the uncomfortable, even dangerous role of being confrontational cyber-activity cops instead of friendly information professionals.”

The answer, then—even beyond installing filters in public libraries—is to take on the ALA and its policies. Guidelines for library activists urge them to educate themselves on the ALA and their “political and cultural agenda.” Dan Kleinman of Safelibraries is also adamant that the battle begins with the ALA, warning activists to “beware that the ALA will attempt to mislead you every step of the way” and encouraging them to “speak up, speak out, and attend library board meetings…Do not be afraid of the ALA.” The AFA sends its would-be activists on research missions to determine whether or not their local libraries are infiltrated by ALA policies. Detective work to figure out whether your library is “a community friend or foe” includes fishing for porn sites: “Search for “XXX, hardcore, nude [and] follow one of the search result links. If you successfully link to a porn site, your library has unrestricted Internet access.” Once educated about the ALA, activists are empowered to make their own decisions about which issue or issues on which to focus library campaigns. Acknowledging the power in multiple, diffuse grassroots movements, Donald Wildmon exclaims that “[t]his fight is a local fight. There is no way we can conduct it from our AFA headquarters. YOU must fight for your own libraries; you, and the members of your local community.” Similar language of empowerment characterizes Gounaud’s “Ten Ways to Create a Family Friendly Library.” As she argues, “in the battle to restore decent limits and common sense to public libraries, remember that you are protecting

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389 Gounaud, “Realities of Library Porn.”
390 Schlessinger, “Is Your Library Friend or Foe?” 11.
392 “How Safe is Your Public Library?” (Tupelo, Miss.: American Family Association, 1999).
393 Wildmon, “How You Can Take Back Your Local Library.”
your children, your tax money, and your community. Public libraries are supposed to answer to you—not to the American Library Association.”

Meanwhile, Dr. Laura urges activists to “draw up your list of concerns and prioritize them, describing as clearly as possible what they desired solutions would be and practical ideas for their implementation...[and] “[d]on’t forget that the ballot box is the ultimate opportunity for you to affect public policy—including public library policy—by selecting moral and ethical leaders and de-selecting those less honorable.”

Though activists are allotted significant freedom in how they take on the ALA in local library theaters, one message is clear: “intellectual freedom” is merely a green light for pornography in libraries. Similarly, efforts to fight ALA policy are reasonable actions taken by concerned parents, and pro family activists are advised to propose them that way. “Take great care not to appeal like a book-burner,” cautions Wildmon. “Don’t accept the censor label,” agrees Burress. “The real censors are the librarians [and their directors] who choose every day what will and won’t be in the library.” The territory of the First Amendment and of free speech is not to be ceded to the ALA. As Dick Black argues, “[i]f you get into theoretical speak about the First Amendment and freedom of speech, you’re on their turf. You need to talk about whether or not libraries should provide pornography to children or if libraries should be places for the sexual gratification of adults.” By staying “on message” and keeping pornography center stage, pro family critics believe that they will be better equipped to dodge the charge of “censorship”, which Gounaud argues is “one of the most

394 Gounaud, “10 Ways to Create a Family Friendly Library.”
395 Schlessinger, “Is Your Library Friend or Foe?” 11.
396 Wildmon, “How You Can Take Back Your Local Library.”
397 York, “Porn-Free Zone?” 12.
abused words in the American Library Association’s campaign against parents.”

Meanwhile, the ALA themselves are charged with hypocrisy, for upholding values like “intellectual freedom” and “diversity” while attempting to shut down parental and community dissent. “I hear and read the words ‘inclusive’ and ‘diversity’ in everything the ALA does,” Burress declares, “but have quickly learned they are neither ‘inclusive’ nor ‘diverse’ when only ALA-approved persons can serve the community as a trustee or employee of the library.”

Perhaps the most memorable denunciation of the profession is from “Don,” a disgruntled former librarian featured in a sidebar in Dr. Laura’s Perspective. “The biggest censors I have ever met have been librarians,” he claims. “They’re the most discriminatory, most censorious, narrow-minded bunch I’ve ever been around…They hide behind ‘Intellectual Freedom’ because it protects them; they can buy anything they want, and it makes a martyr of them. Then there’s no more discussion: ‘You are a bigot, we are open-minded, end of conversation.’”

Pro Family Images of the Librarian

Who are the librarians of pro family media discourse? From the fictional portrayal of the librarian in “Excess Access” to the aggrieved patrons’ descriptions of librarians in Burt’s “Dangerous Access,” is it perhaps more clear what they are not: engaged with the real concerns of their communities. One of the biggest problems of fighting Internet porn in

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398 “Excess Access.”
400 Schlessinger, “Is Your Library Friend or Foe?” 10.
libraries, according to Burt, is that patrons who raise concerns meet with librarians’ “indifference or exasperation” for their troubles.\textsuperscript{401} Funded by the Family Research Council, Burt’s report was based on Freedom of Information Act requests to state library agencies to release email messages about porn-related incidents in public libraries. These incidents ranged from accidental viewings of pornography on a neighbors’ terminal to adults and teens actively soliciting youth after viewing pornography in the library. Though a sizeable number of libraries refused to comply, and the report was criticized for its non-random sampling and its failure to define “pornography,” Burt’s data raised sufficient alarm in pro-family circles to help shift the movement’s anti-porn activism to libraries and librarianship. While the porn-related incidents were themselves intended to shock activists, the heart of the problem, according to Burt, was that librarians either refused to take the incidents seriously, or threw up their hands in defeat because they claimed to be powerless to improve or change the situation. Burt places the blame squarely at the foot of the ALA, arguing that such reactions “are consistent with how the ALA instructs librarians.”\textsuperscript{402} Such tepid responses on the part of librarians only exacerbate the problem, according to Burt, who claimed that passive librarians actively encouraged “the transmission of child pornography in their libraries.”\textsuperscript{403}

Whether negligent in their duty to inform the police of a crime, or prone to commiserating with patrons over the problems of library porn, the librarians described in \textit{Dangerous Access} approach their work with a sense of defeat. The librarians of Burt’s study shrug off porn-related incidents as beyond their job description, as a patron from

\textsuperscript{402} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{403} Ibid.
Sacramento whose child accidentally viewed porn reports. “When I spoke to the staff person, I was informed that she had no control in this matter, that [it] was the parent’s responsibility to control their children.” Though the emphasis on parental supervision of children’s Internet use is consistent with most public library policies of not acting in loco parentis, it is the callousness of the librarian’s response that seems to impress Burt as much as or more than policy. Another striking episode in this vein is the response of a supervisor to a staff member concerned about a patron making regular appointments to view child pornography on the Sonoma, California Public Library’s Internet terminals: “I don’t like it either, but there is nothing we can do about it. The best thing for staff is to ignore it…please use your time in more constructive ways.” Other librarians’ responses are more benign, even sympathetic, but still center around the librarian’s essential powerlessness to do anything about the problems of porn in the library. For instance, a patron in Olympia, Washington reported an incident to the librarian who “…simply shook her head and said there was nothing she could do about it.” Still another patron from Novi, Minnesota reports her librarian acknowledged the extent of the problem—“this happens all the time”—but insisted “…there’s nothing [she] can do.” While the librarians portrayed in the emails run the gamut in terms of uncooperative and sympathetic attitudes, the message is clear: in stark contrast to their professional image, these librarians cannot help their patrons.

When librarians do register their concerns about porn in libraries, it is often from a position of personal offense or a grievance about working conditions, rather than from a conviction of civic or professional responsibility. A librarian from Sonoma, California
writes: “I am personally offended having to work in surroundings where pornography is openly viewed.”408 A branch manager of the Yakima Regional Library in Washington complained “…it is against my personal convictions to provide pornography or X- or R-rated pictures to children. When I applied to work in a library, running a porn shop was not part of the job description.”409 A librarian in Littleton, Colorado references the tragic school shooting by arguing “[w]e have enough problems with juveniles without giving them a library to gain access to whatever illegal and crime related material they want.”410 A librarian of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, writes: “I don’t care if someone chooses to look at pornography…but please don’t expect me to see it in my workplace. It really affects me when I have to go tell someone to remove that site from the screen because it is against policy. I don’t mind telling them, but I end up getting a close up view of what they are looking at.”411 The separation of personal belief from professional practice is, again, consistent with librarian ethics. However, Burt seems to suggest, with the inclusion of such remarks, that librarians are deliberately withholding any kind of principled judgment, in order to promote intellectual freedom at the expense of children and family safety.

Lack of library safety is a key point made by pro family activists, not simply for children, but for the library staff itself. Because they believe viewing porn in libraries causes unsavory and illegal patron behaviors, they also believe that librarians “unarmed” with filters face hostile and even dangerous workplaces. As in other conservative campaigns against pornography, pro family activists borrow feminist arguments that pornography

408 Ibid., 18.
409 Ibid., 7.
410 Ibid., 8.
411 Ibid., 18.
oppresses and demeans women, that it is even a form of hate speech against them. The dominance of women in the library profession, particularly those in youth services, adds strength to their arguments that pornography constitutes a hostile workplace environment.

Pro family activists claim that the ALA does not care about these librarians. For example, Karen Jo Gounaud writes that they essentially abandon librarians by placing them in a den of porn surfers with no recourse to complain, in stark contrast to their otherwise rampant liberalism: “[Librarians are] expected to handle these leering men without complaint unlike any other professionals working in this Title VII [sic] era of frequent feminist litigation.”

Of course, the harassment of librarians by patrons does happen, and pornography can add undeniable fuel to the fire. A Kansas City, Kansas librarian in Burt’s study reported that “[p]atrons are viewing pornography and [one] man took great joy in embarrassing a staff member by leaving a picture of [three] women having sex on the screen and then calling her attention to it.”

Perhaps the biggest coup for the pro family activists was the case of the “Minneapolis 12”, a group of librarians who sued their employer for damages produced by a hostile workplace. Burt quotes their press statement at length: “Every day we, too, are subjected to pornography left (sometimes intentionally) on the screens and in the printers. We do not like it either. We feel harassed and intimidated by having to work in a public environment where we might, at any moment, be exposed to degrading or pornographic pictures... The issue is not one of intellectual freedom, but rather whether obscene material should be publicly displayed.”


\[413\] Burt, Dangerous Access 2000, 19.

\[414\] Ibid.
inconvenience of dealing with problem patron behaviors related to porn, however, Gounaud and others argue that librarians are too intimidated by the ALA to speak up. She claims that librarians are “afraid to complain openly because of threats of career endangerment from ALA agenda promoters” and that ALA “threaten[s] libraries and librarians with professional censure” for daring to go public about the problems of porn in libraries.

Why would the ALA fail to protect its own, and even threaten them with reprisal for speaking out? While almost all pro family activists blame the ALA’s commitment to intellectual freedom, they vary in their takes on how malevolent they believe the organization to be. In the activist kit accompanying “Excess Access,” AFA president Donald Wildmon claims the ALA doesn’t care about children in the least, spurning God’s charge to take care of them: “It’s clear that our children mean nothing to the ALA…God calls on us, their parents and concerned adults, to protect them…[meanwhile] the ALA has the audacity to say that pornography does not harm children! What gall! What arrogance!”415 Many writers claim that the ALA wants to “sexualize” children by exposing them to sexually explicit materials. Dan Kleinman’s “Libraries, Children, and Value Voters” includes section headings titled “The ALA’s Agenda to Sexualize Children;” and “Everyone Wants to Protect Children Except the ALA.”416 David Burt believes the ALA is simply “tragically misguided” about the effects of pornography on children, believing it does no harm and that “providing free access to pornography is liberating to children…ALA views that as a heroic action.”417

But it is really the ALA’s commitment to intellectual freedom for youth that pro family activists cite as the culprit for their apparent cavalier attitudes toward parental rights.

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and child safety. Dr. Laura Schlessinger accused the ALA of “wield[ing] the First Amendment like a club against parents’ rights and children’s innocence in the misappropriated name of ‘Intellectual Freedom.”’ He contrasts such noble sounding terms with the information available on “Go Ask Alice,” a sex-information site authored by Columbia University, and recommended on one of the ALA’s web pages “where your youngster can learn such vital information as how to clean blood off a cat-o-nine-tails after sadomasochistic sex. But it’s your child’s ‘right to know,’ isn’t it?” Dr. Laura goes on to skewer the ALA for its apparent blindness in classifying everything equally as information: “But since when did pornography qualify as ‘information’ that everyone, including children, must have access to?” Thus ALA’s intellectual freedom policies are irrevocably intertwined with the presumably equally sinister aims of pornography. The short-term solution is filtering; the long-term solution is a revamping (or, in pro family discourse, “returning to”) the ethics of the field of librarianship itself.

Conclusion

In the wake of CIPA, the ALA has been careful to make provisions for the law, remaining critical of filters but not opposing their use in libraries outright. In the 8th edition of the Intellectual Freedom Manual, the ALA “does not recommend” the use of filters to block access to constitutionally protected speech on computers located in publicly funded

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419 Ibid., 8.
420 Ibid., 9.
libraries.”\textsuperscript{421} However, the reasoning behind this position is still framed both in terms of patron rights and in terms of the core values of the profession. Patrons seeking digital resources “…enjoy the same rights to publish information and receive information as do those who use the print media” and filters violate not just these rights, but also “… the core values of librarianship.”\textsuperscript{422} In addition, the ALA continues to argue that filters don’t work, even for their supposed purpose of protecting children. The answer to the need for safety is information literacy instruction furnished by the librarian. The characterization of filtering as “an imperfect and robotic technology” remains, and ALA insists “…education offers the best means of addressing the issue of Internet safety for both children and adults.”\textsuperscript{423}

Nevertheless, the ALA recognizes that libraries accepting the e-rate are legally bound to filter their Internet terminals. In this environment, it becomes even more crucial for librarians to alert adult patrons to their right to have filtering software disabled, and to be diligent about unblocking wrongly blocked sites for minors. The ALA also continues to recommend that filters be set “at the least restrictive level” and warns that “…public libraries must remain cautious about using filtering. Ultimately, the CIPA scheme was upheld because it was tied to funding and the government conceded that an adult’s request for disabling of the filter could never be denied and did not have to be justified [emphasis added].”\textsuperscript{424}

Difficulties with selecting and evaluating information on the Internet aside, it is notable that, while acknowledging wrinkles and complexities, the ALA has maintained—

\textsuperscript{422} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{423} Ibid., 40.
and, in some cases, intensified—its case for libraries as institutions that are vital to citizen education and democracy. In fact, notions of citizenship and community are interwoven into not only defenses of patrons’ rights of access, but also into the professional work of librarianship. Intriguingly, though it is the patrons whose intellectual freedom rights are being asserted, without libraries, it is suggested, such a right would be meaningless. In order to fulfill this obligation, librarians must be free to exercise professional judgments, judgments that are hampered by filtering, certainly, but also by any challenges to library collections and policies, as well as by librarians who fail to counter these challenges with the Library Bill of Rights. In maintaining these responsibilities to citizens and communities, librarians will also have to consider online access in light of the ever-prevalent reliance on filtering technology.

While the ALA’s views on filtering have remained the same since the passage of CIPA, their anti-filtering rhetoric has softened and become more understated. The 6th and 7th editions of the Intellectual Freedom Manual describe filtering as a violation of both patrons’ freedoms and of “…the core values of librarianship, which esteem a person’s right to read and hear ideas without limitation.”425 Filtering is decried as inconsistent with the library’s purpose, imposing a pall of exclusion over what should, by democratic rights, be an arena of inclusion. By interfering with an atmosphere of unfettered access, filtering is deemed disruptive of the library’s ability to provide access to a diverse range of points of view, corrupting what would otherwise (presumably) be a free marketplace of ideas. The very ideal of an informed citizenry is thought to rely upon libraries themselves, not only providing a range of choices, but providing the opportunity to exercise those choices. Thus, filtering and materials challenges are accused of threatening democracy itself, because a

democracy “…operates best when information flows freely and is freely available.”  

Moreover, there is no other institution that can fulfill this responsibility to its citizens; it is “the library’s unique responsibility” to make sure that citizens “have the tools necessary for self-improvement and participation in the political process.”  

In sum, through its opposition to the use of Internet filters in libraries, the ALA is able to articulate a professional role for librarians that includes creating and maintaining a community of citizens. This role can only be hampered by “the imperfect and robotic technology” of filters; in fact, the ALA believes that education offers the best means of addressing issues of Internet safety, a task which obviously cannot be left in the hands of either filtering software companies, or censorious individuals who want to impose their morality on the community. What the ALA has failed to recognize, however, is that pro-family activists have also taken up the language of community and citizenship, casting the activities of the ALA (and librarianship itself) as “private interference” with what should be the free exercise of democracy. By failing to recognize this, the ALA has become “tone deaf” to how their own rhetoric can (and has) been used against them in the public debate. This has resulted in many missed opportunities, but especially the opportunity to organize the general public around intellectual freedom issues; a public for whom “community” and “values” resonate more deeply than “information” and “access.”

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426 Ibid., 33.
427 Ibid.
428 “Access to Electronic Information, Services, and Networks.”
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

What role do models of reading play in pro family library conflicts and controversies? How do pro family worldviews and social movements structure these challenges? Implicit answers to these questions simmer below the surface of discussions of library policy and politics, yet are too often submerged in favor of highlighting potentially controversial library materials and those who may be offended by them. While such discussions of the “who and what” of library challenges are useful ones, this study goes further in order to bring the how and why of library controversies front and center. A discourse analysis of the pro family media reveals that conservative library activism is deeply implicated in a social movement context, driven by powerful ideologies about reading, information seeking, education, citizenship, and pleasure. These dynamics, in combination with the professional knowledge and practices of librarianship, illustrate that a politics of reading structures pro-family challenges to library materials and policy. By highlighting these politics, this study fills a crucial gap in both LIS and media studies scholarship, and will help scholars and practitioners alike to better understand how ideology structures library controversies.

Targets of library censorship and controversy, while following some predictable arcs—e.g., sex and violence, homosexuality, disrespect for authority—are nevertheless constantly shifting. Even if it were possible to predict what might offend their community members, librarians would still have to balance a material’s potential to offend with the stated objectives and purposes of the library. My study does not aim to be predictive;
indeed, I believe it illustrates that attempts to predict “hot topics” and future controversies are of limited use. Rather, it assembles and evaluates common threads in pro family discourse, threads that reveal a literalist and didactic understanding of reading, a protectionist stance toward young readers, and a normative, uncontroversial role for libraries in their communities. It is these threads and ideological frameworks that govern a wide array of library controversies, regardless of the offending material in question. Whether they are battles over *King & King*, a picture book featuring two princes who marry, or fights to filter all social networking sites from teens’ public library computer terminals, library controversies erupt because conservative activists have successfully articulated a competing view of youth reading and the role of libraries. Certainly, individual parents and librarians might disagree about what youth should read and who is best suited to guide their reading, and these are not small quarrels. However, such quarrels are best understood within the context of conservative library activism, a context that is fruitfully explored in a discourse analysis of pro family media sources.

Perhaps not surprisingly, librarians’ professional literature has tended to discuss library conflicts in terms of first prevention, then successful management, including resources like sample policies, reconsideration forms, guides for successful public relations, and often eloquent defenses of intellectual freedom and the right to read. The prevalence and success of pro family library challenges, however, suggests that a deeper understanding of the social movement context and the worldviews that drive it would be invaluable to the field. An attention to the ideologies that fuel conservative library activism will not only aid librarians in a more nuanced understanding of library conflicts, but also will force professionals to think critically about their own ideologies of reading, information seeking,
and the role of the library. The management-oriented and practice-driven library literature offers professionals models and frameworks, but not always the context for using such models and frameworks with a critical awareness of their social and political consequences. Knowledge about challenges of the past can inform the challenges of the present, but requires a more explicit discussion of historical context to further thoughtful and reflective professional practice. Every library controversy involves the interplay of complex factors, including community tensions, cultural conflicts over values, interactions between local activists and larger organizations, and the relationship between libraries and the communities they serve. Librarians and authors of professional literature can only benefit from greater awareness of such factors, including the ability to identify them and to use them in managing library challenges. Without this awareness, librarians risk missing key pieces of each controversy’s puzzle, including the role that their own professional literature plays in articulating and promoting particular models of reading and library service. With this awareness, librarians have an opportunity to better respond to activists with thoughtful and articulate defenses of intellectual freedom in libraries, as well as to better communicate to the community at large why intellectual freedom matters.

Second, LIS scholarship requires research that places library work with youth at the center of larger questions about the production and creation of knowledge. The “practice turn” in science and technology studies has turned the lens of analysis of knowledge production to laboratory practices. As LIS becomes increasingly interested in the production of various kinds of academic knowledge, perhaps now we might consider library work, especially library work with youth, as a site of knowledge production within the

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context of larger political struggles. Youth librarianship and youth reading are among the most visible activities in the political realm of LIS; studying how these practices operate in terms of power, on multiple, intersecting levels, could be a fruitful one for the field as a whole. Outside of LIS, this study will have a broad, interdisciplinary appeal; studies of the pro family movement, whether histories, sociologies, or media analyses, have neglected libraries as a site of conservative activism. While the context of recreational reading and viewing gives library activism its own unique character, a study of pro family library activism will inform and be of interest to scholars who study the culture wars generally, particularly those with an interest in public schools as a site of conservative activism.

Finally, while analyses of evangelical media, including “ex gay” materials, apocalyptic narratives such as the *Left Behind* series, and didactic, movement-oriented materials for teens and children have been fruitful for exploring and better understanding pro family movement culture, texts written by and aimed at activists continue to be overlooked and under-analyzed as sources of information about the pro family movement. My hope is that this research will stimulate further interest in and attention to organizations such as Family Friendly Libraries, and media texts such as the American Family Association’s “Excess Access.”

I anticipate that my study will be useful to librarians and scholars in several key ways: First, it will engage reading research on pleasure and choice in youth motivation to read, much of which complicates and challenges pro-family arguments about reading’s effects on youth. By contextualizing the persistent suspicion of pleasure in pro-family discourse as part a larger belief in reading’s didactic character, I offer an analysis of ideologies of reading that may help librarians better articulate their own beliefs about
reading and its role in education. Moreover, this focus on pleasure and choice also reveals why libraries and library work with youth are increasingly central to the politics of reading. Though school and public libraries have long been recognized as places where youth can find diverse choices as well as guidance for their recreational reading, little attention has been paid in reading research to the role of intellectual freedom in structuring librarians’ guidance of recreational reading, as well as the ways in which this work has been increasingly politicized.

Second, my research will highlight the political implications inherent in competing models of how youth read. I argue that similar frameworks and models for understanding reading govern a wide array of controversies, regardless of content, subject matter, or media format. The professional literature of youth services librarianship prepares librarians for potential challenges by identifying the “likely suspects” in terms of library materials, organizations, and issues that may attract controversy. However, it tends not to explicitly address intellectual freedom’s role in structuring an alternative model of reading to the one articulated by librarianship’s most vocal critics. My research will offer librarians and educators an opportunity to better understand and answer pro-family critics; or, at the very least, will offer some tools for identifying how competing models of reading structure diverse controversies.

Finally, by linking the politics of reading at the individual level to the way youth reading has been mobilized as a political issue, this study challenges scholarly and popular perceptions of both domains. It is not often recognized how basic understandings and misunderstanding of youth reading structure broader cultural and political conflicts. Thus, competing political claims about readings effects on youth and the role of reading in
education can be better understood when we analyze the beliefs about reading that bolster them. For it is the moment when the individual child encounters a text, and the potential for transformation that this encounter offers, that fuels the hopes, dreams, and fears of a family, a community, a country, and a profession.
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**Literature**


APPENDIX A: FAMILY FRIENDLY LIBRARIES TEST

The Test in Brief

First, it would be helpful for you to read the Family Friendly Libraries vision and charter document. Second, find out all you can about how your own system is governed, how it functions, and under what policies. Next, particularly if you believe there are serious differences between what you have and what you should have, share what you've learned with other like-minded parents and citizens. Together, draw up your list of concerns and prioritize them.

The next step is taking your concerns through the library system "chain of command", with friendly but firm insistence on what you believe is right and necessary. If the system is not cooperative, and especially if it is hostile, share what you're doing with other community groups -- churches, civic organizations, etc. and include the press where appropriate (such as public meetings where presentations are made on the issues you raise). Don't forget to praise where praise is due. Finally, the ballot box is the ultimate voicing of your opinion on any part of your government. And never lose sight of the fact that you are protecting your children, your community, your tax money, all rightfully yours to protect and defend. The library system ultimately answers to all of you -- not to the American Library Association.

Library Government

1. What is the most direct governing body for your system?

Is there a Library Board? Board of Directors? Or a loose knit group of people generally in charge? Find out what kind of group is at the head of your system.

2. How is this governing body put together?

Are they elected? Appointed? Hired? If so, by whom? In other words, to whom does this group answer?

3. Who is on the Board?

Get the names, political parties, terms of service, phone and fax numbers. A copy of this list should be given to all the caring parents and other concerned citizens so they will know where to write or fax their opinions. Most library systems already have such a list they can easily copy and supply to those who request it.

Library Policy

1. What is the main document driving day-to-day library policy?

You should have no trouble getting a copy for your files. Go through it carefully, underlining its strengths and weaknesses. Look for policies and procedures that have direct influence on children and on parental authority. Sometimes a committee of friends and fellow citizens is helpful for this process.

2. What is the philosophy or philosophies behind the policy document?

Most, but not all library systems, treat the American Library Association ideas and principles as the ultimate authority for their operations style. The "Library Bill of Rights", for example, is often treated as if it were part...
of the law of the land. It's not -- it's just the private suggestions of a private organization and has only as much authority over your system as the citizens in that community allow it to have.

3. What is the system or procedures for altering and amending library policy?

How are new ideas introduced? Who is allowed to introduce new ideas? How often can changes be made? When was the last evaluation done on current policy? How has local library policy changed over the years? Here it is helpful to know what you can about the history of your library system, even back to its founding days if possible.

4. Policy specifics impacting family life:

What are the rules regarding parental supervision when children are in the library? When may they come unaccompanied? What safeguards are exercised to protect unaccompanied minors? What rights do parents have to minors' borrowing records? What rules govern obtaining a library card for minors? What are the rules governing display of and access to explicit adult materials? To Internet? To other visual, particularly video materials? Does the library purposely support traditional family, or do they openly defend "diversity" i.e. anything goes? How do they see their responsibilities concerning support for local law and order?

Library Personnel

1. What are the professional and training requirements of those employed by the library system?

Here, your main concern is for those folks who work directly with the public, especially with the youngest members of the public. What kind of character requirements are sought? Is there a search for previous criminal records? Are the requirements tied in any way to the recommendations or philosophies of the American Library Association?

2. What are the official procedures for filing praise or complaints?

How is the public encouraged or allowed to register opinions? What grievance procedures are available to the public? How has the system responded to patron comments in the past where library employees were concerned?

3. Do library personnel affect library policy?

What is the chain of command within the employees? How do they influence policy? How do they see the public? How do they relate to American Library Association business?

4. Where do volunteers fit in?

How are they recruited? Trained? Used? Do they have any impact on library policies or procedures? What is required to become one?

Library Funding

1. What is the budget?

You should be able to obtain a copy on request for one or several years back.

2. What are the sources?
What percent comes from local taxes? State? Federal? Donations?

3. What strings are tied to the sources?

In some systems, for example, the amount of state funding is directly tied to the number of personnel fitting the "professional librarian" description, a title determined by the level of completed education in an institution with programs accredited or approved by the American Library Association. This indirect but powerful tie between the ALA and library money is an important one to evaluate. If that tie interferes with local control, it should be changed.

4. How can citizens have an impact on the funding?

Find out about budget hearings, local government control of funding and spending. Don't overlook the possibilities of donations where satisfactory accountability to family values is present.

Library Collection Development (a special part of Library Policy issues)

1. What parts of the library policies impact on the books, periodicals, and other materials that are made available?

2. How can citizens most effectively give input about collection development?

3. How are book donations treated?

4. How well does the system handle controversial subjects like abortion? Euthanasia? Suicide? Sexuality issues? The occult?

Check for balance, age-appropriateness, hidden agendas. This is time consuming, but extremely important. For example, I suspected a strong bias in our library system for pro-gay books. I zeroed in on the Dewey Decimal number assigned to "homosexuality" and found a 93% bias to the pro-gay side. My data - titles, authors, # of copies, etc. all came from the library computers. Result: Library bought $1100 worth of new books on ex-gay success stories, etc.

5. How are the materials on these issues handled in regard to children--access, reading level, etc?

6. Are library basics, standards, classics, historic books and documents, maintained well? (See the enclosed FRC "Library Literature Survey" booklist)

7. Where is your library collection development putting its emphasis? What categories seem to be showing up the most in new book displays?

8. Who really selects and orders the new books and materials? Who decides what to keep and what to discontinue or discard?

Library and the Law

1. What are the sexuality codes for your state and community?

For example, is sodomy still illegal in your state. Having such a law still on the books gives more teeth to citizen demands that their tax money not go to support the encouragement of illegal activities. Public health issues are also tied to sexual lawbreaking.
2. What are the laws concerning protection of minors?

These fall under "harmful to minors" categories. Every state has some version of this kind of statute. It is at least symbolic of society's continuing acknowledgment of responsibility to protect the young from certain recognized evils. Nevertheless you may find your state has a "loophole" in the statutes on obscenity or pornography, exempting schools and libraries from prosecution. This hole was originally meant to protect innocent teachers and librarians from inadvertent purchases of material with hidden sexual or inappropriate subject matter they were unaware of. It was not meant to be a catchall basin for all the suggestive, indecent material that is available for purchase these days in our sex-saturated culture. Suits can still be raised in civil court, but it is time, nevertheless, to dispose of that ill-used loophole through corrective state legislation.

3. What community standards exist protecting minors and upholding parental rights?

Do movie theaters take the codes seriously? Do video rentals require parental permission for obtaining "R" rated movies, for example? Do stores selling soft porn (Playboy, Penthouse, etc) sell them only to those whose ID's identify them as being 18 or older? Are the liquor sales carefully monitored from minors? Are parents given full access to their children's school records? Medical records? Most of society still regards parents as the main source of authority. The library system must do likewise, if it is to continue calling itself a community library.

Library Issues: General Guidelines

1. Keep careful records of your research.

2. Involve as many other citizens and community leaders as possible, including media.

3. Give praise when due, but don't back down on what's important.

4. Expect change to require time, diligence, persistence, hard work.
APPENDIX B: “ODE TO THE ALA”

Is that a dirty book I see?
One moment -- I'll look through it.
I'm keeping track of ev'ry one
Just so I can review it.

It's hard to find a worthy tome
On Magna Carta hist'ry,
But sleazy sex and suicide --
Those subjects are no myst'ry.

"Intellectual Freedom"
Is the mantra of the day --
Porn for all ages,
Compliments of ALA

"Right Wing" is the enemy,
"Left Wing" is O.K.
That's the First Amendment
As retold by ALA

Freedom to protect your kids
And how tax money's spent
Never seems accepted
In the ALA big tent.
R-rated flicks, tobacco, 
alcohol and Playboy buff --
Careful local businesses
Don't give our kids that stuff.

Only in the library
Are parents told, "Beware!" 
You're on your own to keep your kids
From porno, if you dare."

American Licentiousness Association iz
The leader of the
Krazy Kiddie Mind Molester Biz!

How dare we criticize them --
That's censorship for sure.
So leave your common sense at home --
Diversity's the cure.

There is no right and wrong, they say --
Children can't be hurt
Except by parents trying to
Protect them from the dirt.
Time to end the arrogance

Of ALA attacks

While moms and dads protect their kids

From trouble "in the stacks."

Librarians who care about

Children and community,

Please join us in bringing back

Decency and unity.

Liberty needs limits --

Freedom isn't free.

Protecting right from wrong requires

Responsibility.

Books and magazines and tapes,

Computer, "Internet" --

Libraries can offer these

Without losing respect.

For children's sensibilities

And adult reading stuff,

On the shelves, but separate,

Adjusting isn't tough.
The U.S. Constitution

Will survive concerns we raise

While libraries and families

Return to better days

Of partnership and public trust --

Not rivals, but a team

As libraries resume their role

In our Republic's dream.