CENSORSHIP AND BANNED BOOKS FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my family, and specifically, to my grandfather, Arnold Jenkins. Thank you, Pa, for teaching me the values of kindness, gentleness, and contentment, and for encouraging me to pursue higher education. You were always such a blessing to me, even during some of your most difficult times. You are so loved and missed!
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Lastly, I would like to thank my pastor and youth pastor for assisting in the data collection process. You allowed my research idea to become a reality, and I thank you for your prayers and encouragement during this process.
Personal Note

For as long as I can remember, I have been fascinated by stories. There is something about the progression of a plot as characters learn and grow along their designated journeys that captured my attention as a child, and as an adult, that passion has not changed much at all. This interest in stories drove me to experience all of the forms in which they are portrayed, such as novels, films, television, music, and video games.

However, as I was growing up, I realized that some information in these stories was considered to be morally worse than others. When I questioned an adult about this, I was told the material was too violent, explicit, or inappropriate for me to see. At this same time, I observed that many of my childhood friends were also not allowed to view certain content for similar reasons. As one can imagine, this was a frustrating experience for me at the time, and it left me wondering if this material really was as harmful as people described.

During this time, I also observed that there was a clear connection between religion and censorship. I personally was raised in a Christian household and I was often around other Christian families, many of which censored certain content from their households. For some people, censorship solely exists in their lives because of their religion.

Since my childhood, I have talked to my parents about their reasons for sheltering me and my siblings from certain material. To sum up these complex conversations, my parents basically said that at the time, they were simply concerned about our well-being and wanted to protect us from anything that could harm us spiritually or mentally at a young age.

Although I understand these reasons, I still was left asking myself many questions about this issue. Is the act of sheltering people from certain content effective or even correct? Do challenged materials leave lasting impacts on the viewers? Does the act of censorship itself leave
lasting impacts on people? These were only a few selected questions that caused me to pursue this topic, and I expect to find some answers to them in my research.
Abstract
Removing material due to controversial content has been a common practice for much of recorded history. This action is often done in concern for the psychological and emotional well-being of viewers, especially if these viewers include children. However, this does not necessarily mean this practice is always warranted. Many researchers have studied this topic as well as its effects, expanses, and connections to religion. Research shows that exposure to certain material can potentially cause changed behavior in individuals who do not possess the maturity needed to process them effectively. Individuals who are more mature or emotionally stable show no lasting impacts when exposed to controversial content. Additionally, the Bible encourages Christians to exercise caution regarding what they expose themselves to. New research was conducted in an effort to compare the opinions of Christian parents and Christian college students. This study concluded that the majority of both populations believed in the importance of protecting children through censorship. These populations differed in their opinions regarding the extent and severity of which censorship should be practiced in the lives of average people.

KEY WORDS: censorship, banned books, television, film, media, children, parents, Christianity.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

For as long as humanity has been in existence, art has remained a constant among generations, cultures, and religions. Naturally, art has evolved over time due to improved technology and different ways of life. However, it appears that each civilization’s art was fit for the time and purpose of its creators. Humans who lived before recorded history painted scenes from nature on the walls of caves because they desired to portray their lifestyles as hunters and gatherers. Ancient Egyptians depicted stories of their gods Ra, Anubis, and Horus through hieroglyphics and pictures drawn on papyrus or stone walls. Artists during the European Renaissance expressed their views of beauty through paintings on canvas, sculptures of marble, and printed books. Although they are vastly different, all of these societies are known for artwork that is astounding, yet characteristic to their unique existence.

Similarly, modern advancements in technology have granted those in the 21st century the ability to express art through other unique platforms, such as film and television. Although these achievements are incredible, there is bound to be at least some controversy regarding them since art has remained a topic of debate since its invention. Some individuals are bound to not agree with certain themes since art often presents topics that are taboo or immoral. Once these opponents encounter the material they believe to be unsuitable, most will attempt to avoid it, prevent others from accessing it, or eliminate it altogether so only approved materials remain.

These practices are more commonly referred to as banning and censorship. Both have been used extensively throughout time, and they have affected people of all generations, both in private and public situations. The influence of these practices as well as their importance in society are largely debated topics, and although some never reach definite answers to their
questions, researchers have studied this topic intricately in order to assist in the discovery for the truth.

As mentioned in my personal note, I decided to study this topic because I have had a lifelong fascination with pop culture and how people react to it. My Christian background has also granted me access to various viewpoints on censorship gathered through personal experiences and experiences of others around me.

The questions driving my research are listed below. I hope to find answers to these questions by consulting studies conducted by researchers in fields regarding psychology, literature, history, and technology.

1. How has censorship evolved throughout time?
2. How does censorship, or the lack thereof, affect people, especially children?
3. How does censorship affect the authors and creators of the pieces in question?
4. What does the Christian faith dictate regarding censorship?

In addition to consulting the works of other researchers, I have conducted my own study in order to solve some unanswered questions regarding this topic. The driving question for this research is as follows: How are opinions on banned books and censorship similar and different between Christian college students and Christian parents? These surveys present new information regarding the connections between Christianity and censorship as well as differences in opinions between two generations.
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Simply stated, censorship is the action that one party takes to prevent a second party from accessing all or parts of information that are considered harmful, controversial, or unacceptable for some reason. The practice of banning material is done in an effort to restrict all access to a certain media piece from all members of a certain population. When one typically thinks of censorship and banning, most people probably picture images of marked out words in books, organized book and merchandise burnings, or the removal of certain titles from public organizations, such as libraries and schools. However, censorship also exists in other places. One of the most prominent areas for censorship is the family’s home unit. Many adults hold memories of parents or authority figures withholding certain films and television shows from them as children. While this action does not elicit the same violent and extreme images often associated with censorship, parental censorship is still just as prevalent in our society as mainstream censorship.

If one is to comprehend the topic of censorship, it is necessary to look back into history in an effort to understand how the past has affected our modern perception. Even to the average person, it is obvious that censorship has remained constant throughout time. In fact, many events that are taught in history classes today are somehow related to or caused by censorship. For example, most children learn about the burning of the library in Alexandria or Martin Luther nailing the 95 Theses to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany. Although these are two common examples in history, the connections to censorship could possibly be overlooked in the classroom depending on what exactly the teacher focuses on during the lesson.

An additional, yet unfortunate, example of censorship in history is that of Galileo Galilei. This event is often overlooked in relation to censorship because most focus on Galileo’s
achievements alone, not the trials he had to endure in order to provide the world with the valuable information he discovered.

Galileo was a famous Italian astronomer who proved through observation and mathematical calculation that the Earth orbited the sun. After proving his theory in 1632, Galileo published his findings, but the Catholic Church, who held the majority of political and religious power during the time, did not approve of Galileo’s theory. The following year, Galileo was charged with heresy and forced to recant all of his findings, even though they were ultimately true. Afterward, the Catholic church banned the rest of his remaining works, and Galileo spent the last years of his life in seclusion for a crime he never committed (Bald and Wachsberger 96-99). Although Galileo suffered unnecessarily for his discoveries, he made an impact on the development of science by laying the foundation for our modern understanding of the universe.

Continuing with this part of history, one book that most individuals would not normally consider worthy of censorship is the Bible, especially when looking through a Christian perspective. However, even though it is the main religious text for millions of people around the world, it has faced quite an amount of criticism throughout time. During the middle ages, the Bible was upheld by the Catholic church, but in order to keep the Scripture from being misinterpreted, it was only preached and transcribed in Latin, which was exclusively a language for educated people. In the late 14th century, a man named John Wycliffe believed that the common man should be able to read the Scripture in the same manner as a priest, and as a result, he became the first person to translate the Bible into English. Even though the church in Britain banned Wycliffe’s Bible, it was still read and copied frequently (Bald and Wachsberger 27-28). This showed that the majority of people had the desire to read and think for themselves rather
than be narrated to. This action also helped in bringing down the power held by the highly educated over the lowly commoners.

Taking inspiration from Wycliffe, a man named William Tyndale was the first to translate the Bible into English from its original Greek and Hebrew versions. His Bible was made available to more people due to the invention of the printing press, and Tyndale was persecuted greatly for it. He was tried for heresy in 1536 and burned at the stake along with copies of his translated Bibles. Other translators would suffer similar fates, but the Scripture continued to be translated into other European languages (Bald and Wachsberger 28). Even today, the Bible is being translated into languages that do not yet have a copy of their own by companies like Wycliffe Bible Translators, which was named in honor of John Wycliffe (Wycliffe Bible Translators). Thankfully, these translation projects do not face nearly as much opposition as those during the Protestant Reformation.

Centuries later, a new act of censorship would take place in Europe. In the early 1930s, World War II was approaching, and the Nazi regime was spreading its anti-Semitic views. On May 10, 1933, nearly all German universities collected books that supported Jewish values or content deemed “unpatriotic” from libraries and ceremoniously burned them as a form of protest. It is stated that these book burnings almost served as a cleansing for Germany, in which the old German beliefs would die in the flames and new German beliefs would rise as a stronger force from the ruin, similar to a phoenix—a mythical creature that dies by fire and is reborn from the ashes (Ritchie 627-643). Additionally, many authors who wrote these questionable works were tortured or sent to concentration camps along with millions of other innocent citizens (Ritchie 630). It is not clear who exactly organized this event, but regardless, many people were harmed as a result, and thousands of works were destroyed in the process.
Around this same time period, censorship was taking place in a newer form of media. Film censorship was a growing trend both during and after World War II, especially in the southern United States. An article by Bruce R. Brassel describes a report on film censorship in Mobile, Alabama, between the 1940s-1960s. Cinemas were regulated by film censorship groups and the police in order to protect the public population from obscene content. The majority of people responsible for censoring these films were from Christian backgrounds and their main objective was to regulate public theaters in order to keep the population pure and innocent (Brassell 90-93). A few years later when televisions became common household items, films and other televised programs were often regulated by parents rather than organizations in the community because it became a much more private affair.

As the 21st century approached, censorship and banning books remained common practices. One of the most popularly challenged materials in the early 2000s, especially by religious organizations, was the *Harry Potter* series for its topics of magic and witchcraft that are woven throughout the entire plot. Fundamentalist Christian groups in Pennsylvania, Maine, New Mexico, and Michigan organized public events in which they would burn or tear the books to pieces (Bald and Wachsberger 160). Although this was practiced among some groups, the most prominent form of resistance was the effort to ban books in schools and libraries. The American Library Association, an organization dedicated to promoting the freedom to read, lists *Harry Potter* as the most challenged book for 2001 and 2002, and the second most challenged book for 2003 (*American Library Association*).

Since censorship is still a driving force today in schools, libraries, and other public platforms, it is important to consider the main motive behind challenging these materials. In many of the previously mentioned historical examples, the driving force for challenging
certain material was to prevent the public from accessing content that opposed popular beliefs at that time. The Catholic church suppressed the works of Galileo, Wycliffe, and Tyndale because they believed these works contradicted their religion in some way. In Wycliffe’s circumstance, the church believed that the only complete and holy translations of the Bible were in the traditional languages of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. From their point of view, a version in another language could possibly be misunderstood or translated incorrectly, therefore compromising the power and divinity of the Holy Scriptures (Bald and Wachsberger 27-28). To not believe this at the time was not just going against popular belief, but also the church’s interpretation of the Bible itself. While this explanation does not excuse the horrible acts of persecution that were imposed upon authors like Galileo and William Tyndale, it clarifies why the church was motivated to take this stance.

Even though fear of contradicting the Bible was the main motive of people centuries ago, one must ask if the motive has changed for modern day society. Additionally, since the church no longer holds the majority of power in society, who now is the driving force behind censorship?

Andrea Nakaya, editor of the book *Opposing Viewpoints: Censorship*, voices at the beginning of this novel, “Many people believe that some of the content generated by the entertainment industry is extremely offensive and harmful to society and that a certain amount of censorship is necessary to protect America’s children and its culture” (10). Alexander McGregor similarly states in his book *The Catholic Church and Hollywood: Censorship and Morality in 1930's Cinema* that the church thought of itself as a “guardian for American bodies and souls” (2). Ken Wachsberger prefaces the novel *Banned Books: Literature Suppressed on Religious*
Grounds by saying that potential censors (parents, school boards, religious organizations, etc.) want to prevent their children from accessing “original or disturbing thoughts” (preface VII).

Even though all three of these authors are writing about different aspects of censorship, they address two common ideas. First of all, modern day censorship is most commonly driven by the will to protect children, and by extension, society as a whole, from potentially negative content. Second of all, censorship today is driven by adults who are in authority over those children, whether it be parents, school administrators, religious leaders or local government officials.

Now that a clear motive has been established for modern day censors, it is important to determine the exact reasons behind why certain titles are being targeted more than others. According to the American Library Association, between 2000-2009, the most common reasons for challenging a book were the use of “sexually explicit content”, “offensive language”, material that was “unsuited for the age group”, and “violence” (American Library Association).

In an interesting article, Carly Grace Akers discusses whether more contemporary or classic books were challenged between 2000 and 2010. Akers consulted data from the American Library Association for the majority of the research and concluded that contemporary books were challenged far more than classic novels (393). This is important because contemporary novels encompass the genre of young adult literature which is widely popular among pre-teens and teenagers. Perhaps these novels are more appealing to teenagers than other genres because they contain characters, situations, and relationships that are relatable to the average modern teenager (Oberdeck 28). Many avid readers enjoy following stories and characters that are similar to their own so they can relate to them and have a deeper connection with the story, and
young adult novels incorporate many of the same themes and milestones that are prevalent in teenage life.

Another question that is frequently presented when discussing this topic is whether the practices of censorship and banning books is ultimately correct. This is a thoroughly argued point, of which a definite answer has not been found. Censorship, although expansive in its reach to the public, is also a private and individual issue. Opinions on this issue are shaped by personal situations, experiences, religion, parenting style, and worldview, as well as each individual person’s right to freedom. Discussed below are differing opinions on censorship itself, and its importance of censoring material for children.

One of the most common written compositions used to defend an argument on censorship is the First Amendment to the Constitution. The First Amendment concisely states the following:

“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.” (U.S. Constitution Amendment 1).

The first chapter in Opposing Viewpoints: Censorship defends the limits that are imposed upon free speech. It is suggested that censorship is a necessary commodity for our society. From this perspective, it is not an issue on whether censorship should be used, but how it is used (Goldberg 16). The author, Jonah Goldberg, argues that American society has become too defensive of small freedoms, like the right to produce offensive art, while also allowing censorship to flourish in more important categories, like televised political debates. It is identified in this chapter that some censorship is necessary for society to function properly.
Illegal acts, such as child pornography, are banned from the public because of its psychologically harmful material for all ages. Copyright laws are enforced to protect the creator's rights to their property. These are inevitable forms of censorship, and to eliminate these in the name of complete freedom would cause chaos throughout America (Goldberg, 17-18). Goldberg concludes his chapter by arguing that the Founding Fathers were not against censorship entirely. Their intentions were simply to prohibit the federal government from restricting free speech and press, however, that does not mean that individuals should not practice caution and censor material as they see fit for themselves (Goldberg, 18-19).

The American Civil Liberties Union disagrees with this viewpoint completely. They state that all speech, including hate speech, should be protected in order to stay true to the First Amendment. They argue that if only popular ideas were protected, there would not be a need for the First Amendment since it is in existence to protect the opinions of all Americans, even if some of those opinions are offensive or controversial (22). Additionally, freedom of expression is necessary in order to advance in knowledge because one must consider all of the possible facts before settling on one idea (American Civil Liberties Union 23).

Kevin W. Saunders presents his opinion that censorship should be used to protect children, and that children should not have the same First Amendment rights as adults. It is acknowledged that children should grow up in a psychologically safe manner in which their exposure to material is determined by their age and maturity level. Saunders uses high statistics on teen violence, pregnancy, and substance abuse to show how our society has failed to protect children in recent years (25). It is also stated that it is appropriate for adults, both within and outside the family unit, to act in a parental way towards children by sheltering them from material that could be potentially harmful (Saunders 24-31). Saunders also presents that too
much exposure to harmful material could cause children to essentially act out what they see and hear. The unfortunate shooting at Columbine High School in 1999 was used as an example of this since both teenage shooters played violent video games in their spare time (30-31). While Saunders makes an important observation regarding this correlation, it is not stated as a proven fact that increased exposure to harmful material directly causes increased harmful activity.

Charles Taylor disagrees with Sauders’s stance by saying that censorship is not an effective way to protect children. In fact, he contends that censorship could potentially cause more harm than good because it prevents children from experiencing certain things that they will ultimately face later in life, therefore leaving them ill-prepared when they try to process these new concepts as teenagers or grown adults. It is suggested in this article that issues such as increases in teen pregnancy and STD rates are the result of abstinence-only sex education. This is interesting considering Saunders argues that teen pregnancy increased as a result of not enough protection, while Taylor argues it is a result of too much protection (Saunders 25-27; Taylor 40-41) Regardless though, while abstinence-only programs do protect teenagers from some awkward conversations, from Taylor’s perspective, it ultimately leaves them unprepared for experiences they will eventually encounter. It is also added that children’s curiosity is immediately sparked when they are presented with something that is forbidden to them (Taylor 37-38). Perhaps if parents had more conversations with their children rather than giving them strict commands, children would not desire to betray their parents’ trust by doing exactly what they were told not to do. From this mindset, sheltering children from all harmful material is an insult to their intelligence because they are treated as too fragile to handle concepts that exist in the real world.
Although this is important to discuss, the theoretical correctness of censorship is relative to the debater. The effects that censorship, or the lack thereof, has on its subjects is a widely studied aspect and presents itself in people’s actions, thoughts, and feelings. Author Christopher J. Ferguson studied the physical and mental reactions of students after reading banned books in 2014. Using a study that involved 282 adolescents aged 12 to 18, Ferguson concluded that reading a few banned books contributed to more participation in civic responsibilities. However, reading an excessive amount of banned books correlated with mental health issues (Ferguson 357). Ferguson also found that banned books had very little, if any, impact on adolescents’ physical behavior, participation in crime, or decrease in GPA, although those who read for pleasure had higher GPAs than adolescents who only read for scholarly purposes (360).

Another author who discusses challenged novels in relation to children and youth is Robert Seney. Seney makes the argument that children with exceptional intelligence should be allowed to read books that would normally be considered too high for their age level. It has been observed that intellectually gifted children will quickly become bored in the classroom if they are not given stimulating material (Seney 28-29). While this is true, this practice can potentially cause issues because these children will be reading material that contains situations they may not fully understand due to their lack of exposure to controversial concepts. Additionally, gifted children, if given the opportunity to read above their age level, can potentially be introduced to certain concepts their peers have not yet encountered. This could lead to feelings of elitism among others their age, or even feelings of isolation from their peers because of their academic differences. Most research, however, shows that the academic benefits of accelerated education outweigh the negative outcomes (Snowman and McCrown 226). Regardless though, education is
an individual experience, so the unique situation of each child needs to be considered when deciding the best course of action.

Deanne E. Brocato and Craig A. Anderson conducted two separate studies about how violent media can affect the physical and emotional responses of children. Brocato’s study focused on violence in advertising, whereas Anderson’s study focused on violent media in general, including films and television shows. Brocato surprisingly discovered that most parents were not concerned about violence in commercials (99). Parents tended to be more concerned about bloody or gory content in films and television shows. However, the study determined that children showed more physical aggression when they were exposed to violent advertisements (Brocato 101-102). Similarly, Anderson’s study concluded that children acted more aggressively when exposed to violent media, however, adults were also included in this study, and their reactions were not as pronounced (81-106). It was also observed that boys tended to be more prone to violent actions than girls (Anderson 102). Some explanations for the children’s reactions included desensitization to the material, predispositions for violence, gender, and age. Nonetheless, both of these studies concluded that violence in visual media and violence among children were connected in some way as observed by children acting more physically aggressive post-exposure.

Ellen Wartella conducted a survey on the reactions of American teenagers, young adults, and parents who watched the popular Netflix original show *13 Reasons Why*. This series is about a teenage girl named Hannah who commits suicide after being faced with bullying, sexual abuse, and other hardships. The show centers on Clay, a friend and co-worker of Hannah’s, as he listens to pre-recorded tapes made by Hannah before she commits suicide. In each of these tapes,
Hannah names people who did something to her that contributed to her struggle with depression, which caused her death later on.

This show, as well as the book it is inspired by, have been extremely controversial due to its graphic and open use of mature topics like depression, rape, self-harm, and suicide. Some adults have been wary of this show since they speculate that the graphic nature of the show will inspire teens to act the same as the characters or trigger people who already suffer from mental health issues. Compared to the previous conclusions made by Brocato and Anderson, this is a valid concern since children copied the acts they viewed on screen. However, age can also affect the results of this study since Wartella’s subjects were teenagers and adults, not young children.

In Wartella’s survey, the population was divided by age group: six hundred parents with adolescent children, six hundred adolescents between the ages of 13 and 17, and 500 young adults between the ages of 18 and 22 for a grand total of 1700 participants (6). Each person was required to watch 13 Reasons Why, and then they were asked a series of questions regarding their thoughts and feelings on the show. Mental health, self-esteem, and general outlooks on life were taken into account when calculating the results of this study.

Overall, the show was given quite a large amount of praise from participants because it opened communication between parents and children about tough issues (Wartella 14). Half to two-thirds of adolescents and young adults said that watching the show made discussing difficult topics with parents and friends more comfortable (15). Many participants stated that the show made them think about their actions toward other people, but most also acknowledged that the content was hard to watch, especially the rape and suicide scenes (15). Nearly 45% of young adolescent viewers voiced that the rape scene was too intense for them and the content of the show was too graphic (19). While this show does deal with difficult topics, many revealed that
the show informed them of ways they could get help in real crises. At the end of the series, the last episode, titled *Beyond the Reasons*, provides commentary from cast and mental health professionals as well as links and contact information for helpful resources (21-24). Wartella concludes this study by saying that although this show does have some negative effects, the positive effects far outweigh them since it inspires conversations among people and promotes education on tough subjects.

Daniel Romer also chose to focus on *13 Reasons Why* for his research in which he re-evaluates a study conducted on teen suicide rates after the release of the show in 2017. In this study, it was shown that there was an increase in suicide among teenage boys for 9 months after the release of the show. Romer questioned this finding because he believed that girls would be more likely to imitate Hannah in *13 Reasons Why* because she is a female character, and therefore, more relatable to young girls (2). Additionally, this original study did not take into consideration the suicide trends of that year outside of the influence of the show. After looking at monthly suicide trends using a time forecasting method, Romer observed that the increase in male suicide rates was no greater than that of the month prior to the release of the show, showing that this increase did not completely result from the show itself (3-5). This study acknowledged that it was inconclusive whether the show had directly inspired some teenagers to take their own lives since only trends among certain groups were considered rather than individual experiences.

Benedikt Till and four other contributors conducted a similar study to Ellen Wartella’s research. The objective of this project was to investigate how films with suicide scenes affect people who do not suffer from depression or suicidal thoughts. Each participants’ mental health was taken into consideration when choosing subjects for the study and anyone with pre-existing or currently existing mental health issues was turned away for their own protection. Additionally,
all of the participants were adults aged 18 and over, so the effect of material on children was not a focus of this study. The results of this research revealed that once a participant viewed a scene depicting suicide in a film, there was an increase in sadness and inner tension, but there was also an increase in self-esteem (Till 324). This was unexpected, but it was explained that the participants who had this increase felt more grateful for their life circumstances, and they were satisfied that they were not in the same position as the character in the film (Till 324). A similar result was found in Wartella’s study since participants reported feeling empathetic for the character in tough situations (15). The authors of this article also found that the emotional impact of these scenes was greater to the participants who felt like they could relate to the suicidal character (Till 325).

Even though material with mature themes can have negative and positive effects on children, one aspect that is often overlooked is the opinions of children themselves. Authors Natasha Isajlovic-Terry and Lynne McKechnie consider just that in their study. For their research, they conducted a small group interview with six children between the ages of nine and twelve about banned books. When prompted with questions, the children revealed that they believed adults had the right to control what they read, but they thought completely taking away any book was not fair for everyone (Isajovic-Terry and McKechnie 41). They also stated that some material was too mature for younger age groups, but at the same time, some admitted to disobeying their parents’ wishes by accessing books they were told not to read. This article further enhances this message by quoting Anne Curry who states, “Books that deal openly with controversial subjects are the ones young people like the best… We need to provide them with challenging books, including the controversial ones… (Isajovic-Terry and McKechnie, 39).”
This is interesting considering Charles Taylor and Robert Seney’s viewpoints are almost identical to the findings of Isajovic-Terry and McKechnie.

Even though censorship is often used to protect children, the topic of censorship itself is now being openly taught to children more than ever through books and websites. There are many platforms that inform children and young adults about what censorship is, the reasons for enforcing it, and whether it is good or bad. One example of a young adult book targeting the practices of censorship and banning is the novel *Property of the Rebel Librarian* by Allison Varnes.

In this fictional story, the main protagonist, June, goes to school only to find that the beloved librarian has been fired for providing the students with books that contained controversial material (Varnes, 20-29) At the same time, June’s parents confiscate her own collection of books so they can verify if they are age-appropriate, even though she has already read the majority of them (30-31). While walking to school the next day, she discovers a “little library” that holds many of the books deemed inappropriate by her school and parents. She gathers these books and begins an underground operation in which students from the whole school come to her for prohibited reading material (54-90). Eventually, the school discovers that June was running this rebellious operation, resulting in her whole collection of new books being confiscated. However, this catches the attention of a local news station, and soon, June is known throughout the entire country for her action (201-229). A few days later, she gives a speech to the school board saying that she does not regret what she did, and she would gladly do it again if given the chance (230-240).

This book is clearly meant for middle schoolers since the language is simple and the story addresses other coming-of-age issues like dating, self-confidence, and bullying. Although some
of the situations in this book are exaggerated compared to reality, it does present some good information on the issue of censorship. When June gives her speech to the school board, she addresses the irony in the school’s stance on banned books by saying, “What good is an education that doesn’t require us to think? You don’t want us to read certain books because then we might ask the wrong questions.” (Varnes 238).

This is an important point since similar instances happen in schools around the world. The purpose of education is to give children access to ideas and opinions that are different from their own so they can learn to sympathize with and understand people different from them. Certain content is removed from the student bodies simply because it contains something questionable, however, that challenges the very idea of education itself since some ideas and opinions are being prevented from ever entering the curriculum. This sentiment is also shared by Robert Seney, who states that children, especially those gifted above their age level, pick up on mixed messages very quickly (29). In one instance, adults encourage children to learn and grow, however when the learning materials contain certain content, children are then discouraged and sometimes reprimanded for exploring these ideas.

Student’s opinions are often shaped by the adults who mentor them. Of course this includes parents, but teachers also have valuable input on the topic of censorship since they are possibly one of the most important populations in regard to it. Teachers choose the information that is discussed in their classrooms, and sometimes these topics can be age sensitive. Additionally, teachers spend close to seven hours daily with students. This undoubtedly affects the children’s opinions and worldviews since they spend nearly the same amount of time with their parents.
A study conducted by Kara Lycke and Thomas Lucey considered the opinions of college-age students who aspired to be teachers in the future. These future teachers were presented with questions and scenarios regarding controversial topics teachers might want to inform their students about, how they personally would teach controversial material, and how this could theoretically affect the students in the classroom (Lycke and Lucey 17-21). The opinions on these topics varied among the future educators based upon the grade level they intended to teach and the specific material they chose to study.

For example, one aspiring elementary educator studied the children’s book *And Tango Makes Three*, which has been banned for its presentation of homosexuality. The educator believed that homosexuality was an important topic to teach children and that this book could be helpful in presenting this subject because it does so in a compassionate way. This educator explained that she would teach this to her students using a lesson related to families and relationships, and although this participant recognized the importance of free speech, they also admitted that teachers are held to limitations since they cannot directly ignore concerns of parents (Lycke and Lucey, 19).

Another group that is often not heard in regard to their opinions on censorship is the authors and creators who made these challenged materials. An interview conducted by Warner Brothers Studios offers insight into the beliefs of one of the most well-known authors today, J. K. Rowling. As previously mentioned, Rowling, who is known for creating the worldwide phenomenon of *Harry Potter*, has also been met with a great deal of criticism because of the magical content and mature themes in her books. In this interview, she was asked about how she personally feels regarding instances in which people have censored, banned, or destroyed her books (Warner Brothers Studios). Even though she stated that she disagrees completely with
their actions, she said that they were free to make their own choices. It is also indirectly implied that regardless of their intentions, someone had to buy the books and merchandise in order to burn them, so she receives profit either way (Warner Brothers Studios). Although she was not upset with people who oppose her work, she stated that she does have problems with people who “try to protect children from their own imaginations” (Warner Brothers Studios). She explains her point by saying, “we all have a certain degree of darkness within us, some more than others perhaps.” She implies that humankind cannot avoid this “darkness” by simply ignoring it. Instead, people should be having conversations about it while examining it in order to cope in a healthy way (Warner Brothers Studios).

Similarly, another video by the vlogbrothers gives insight into a different author’s perspectives on censorship. This video is a personal vlog by the author John Green who is known for penning the young adult novels *Looking for Alaska*, *The Fault in Our Stars*, *Paper Towns*, and many others. Like Rowling, he is against the practice of censorship. His main argument is that a parent or school administrator tends to question a certain book because they find one page of questionable content (Green). Very often, these adults have not read the novel in its entirety and take the passage out of context or imply that the rest of the book is filled with obscene content just because of that one page. Perhaps these adults have good intentions because they want to protect their children or themselves, but John Green argues that “ultimately if you have a worldview that can be undone by a novel, let me submit that the problem is not with the novel” (Green).

As mentioned previously, throughout history and even today, Christians have been some of the most fervent advocates of censorship. However, although Christians are still known for monitoring the media they consume, some are being more open-minded by viewing pop culture
through a Christian perspective, even if the content does not directly focus on Christian concepts. Author Ted Turnau presents this viewpoint in his book, *Popologetics: Popular Culture in Christian Perspective*. Turnau explores extensive topics in his report, such as the history of pop culture, the negative and positive aspects of censorship and banning, and possible strategies Christians can use to view pop culture through a Christ-centered worldview.

Some of the most important topics Turnau addresses are the unhelpful ways to interact with pop culture. One of the approaches Christians tend to fall into most is the act of completely avoiding certain pieces because they contain material that is contradictory to their faith (Turnau 87). This approach is one of the main reasons for practices like banning and censorship. As demonstrated in previously mentioned research, this is a natural response of parents, and as Turnau states, it is understandable why they have these reactions (88). Many parents think that exposure to immoral content will cause their children to portray these actions through their behavior. However, Turnau uses the example of violence in television to show that the reactions of viewers are not consistent and depend on many different factors. Those who are affected most by violence include those with impaired intellectual or educational ability (small children or people with mental disabilities), those with aggressive personalities, and those who were already in an emotional state before viewing (Turnau 90).

This supports the research of Brocato and Anderson who both studied the effects of violent media on people. Brocato, who only studied the impact of violent advertisements on children, saw a large increase in violent behavior after viewing the material. Meanwhile, Anderson studied reactions of both children and adults and noticed a large difference between these two age groups since children acted more aggressively than adults after viewing the violent material. It is also identified by Turnau that some acts of violence have little to no effect on
viewers, such as violence that is done in a humorous fashion (like those in cartoons) or violence that is done without ill intentions by professional law enforcement officers (91). Therefore, not all violence is the same since it does not have the same effect on viewers.

Context is key when examining pop culture. Without context, the material cannot be fully and accurately understood (88). For example, two different films, *Schindler’s List* and *Showgirls*, both contain female nudity in them. The outside observer who is not familiar with these films might assume that the use of nudity instantly deems these films inappropriate or immoral. However, this is not completely true considering the intention or context behind using nudity in these films are completely opposite. Turnau explains that *Showgirls* uses nudity to project women as appealing sexual objects for men while *Schindler’s List* uses nudity in the effort to accurately portray the humiliation inflicted upon thousands of women during the Holocaust (93). Due to these vastly different intentions, one cannot come to the conclusion that the portrayals of nudity in both films are the same.

To aid people in their search for appropriate media, Turnau encourages parents to watch movies and television shows with their children so they can have conversations about difficult or confusing concepts (99). He also suggests that parents look for signs in their child’s behavior after watching certain content (99). If a child reacts in a negative way to certain material, it is a sign that they are not yet mature enough to understand and cope with what they are seeing. Protection of children is undoubtedly important, however, simply avoiding content all together is not helpful. This potentially eliminates the possibility for growth and learning that could come as a result of watching a film or television show, so long as it is done responsibly. Additionally, all children are different, so it is nearly impossible to eliminate certain content from a large
population, like a school or library, and still respect each child’s emotional capacity while also allowing the more mature to flourish by expanding their horizons or learning.

Conrad E. Ostwalt also follows ideas similar to Turnau’s in his research by examining award-winning films from Christians perspectives. All of the films he selected were made between the years of 2000 and 2013 and include anything from the *Passion of the Christ* to *The Life of Pi*. Some of these selected films have also been frequently challenged by the Christian community, such as the previously mentioned Harry Potter franchise, the Twilight saga, and the Lord of the Rings films (Ostwalt 46-48). Despite their disputed content, Ostwalt was able to find some sort of Christian theme or content in all of them, such as a character sacrificing themselves for a bigger cause or resisting a powerful force of evil (46-48). These themes are almost universally morally good, so one must consider whether it is worth avoiding a piece all together if it has only a few negative aspects. It is challenging yet important to consider whether a few controversial scenes overshadow the underlying positive themes that lie within plots of stories.

John W. Oberdeck also discusses the correlation between challenged materials and Christianity. He suggests that popular young adult literature, including titles that have been banned, seem to be more appealing than religion to teenagers (28). Oberdeck describes this further by saying that it is easy to have an intellectually deep conversation with a teenager about the plot of a popular novel, but it is much harder to have a conversation of the same depth with that same teenager about theology or the church (28). This is probably due to the fact that most young adult novels are filled with situations and relationships that are understandable to most teenagers, such as themes of growing up or trying to find one’s purpose in life (28). Perhaps the Bible feels outdated to their age group when compared to the modern themes they are used to reading. Nevertheless, this is a troubling presentation for the church, especially since as a whole,
the church strives to be a place in which all people, including youth, are able to feel welcome and grow in their faith.

A solution to this problem is not given in this particular article, although blogger Kimberly Tucker is quoted in saying, “I hope that with open minds and willing hearts we will not simply ignore pop culture but learn from it” (Oberdeck 28). In this quote, Tucker is suggesting that if the church wants to connect with the next generation, they need not ignore the materials that have a large amount of influence over today’s young people. Whether they agree with it or not, teenagers will be drawn to the popular material that is advertised in Hollywood, and Christians must face popular culture pieces at some point if they want to prevent alienating an important age group from their congregations.

The Bible itself never mentions the word “censorship,” but it discusses this concept in other ways. One of the most quoted verses used to defend the practice of censorship is Philippians 4:8 which says, “Finally brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – think on these things” (New King James Bible, Phil.4.8). This verse tells the reader to only think on good, virtuous material. Many Christians, interpret this as avoiding anything sinful and only keeping the good qualities. While this is true, the phrase “if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy” is often overlooked in comparison to the list of virtues before it. There are many morally good themes in modern media pieces, as shown by Turnau and Oberdeck. Some of them may just not appear on the surface.

“Be in the world, not of the world” is a common phrase that is often quoted in churches, missions’ organizations, Christian schools, however, this exact phrase does not appear in
Scripture. First John 2: 15-17 comes close to this though by telling followers how to react and engage with the world (1 John 2.15-17).

15. Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

16. For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world.

17. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

These verses mention the love of the “world” many times. This does not refer to the physical earth or the people who live in the world, instead it is referring to sinful practices such as lust and pride. This group of verses is basically telling readers to not “love” or enjoy these sinful acts. However, this does not necessarily mean that the best courses of action to take against these practices are ignorance or judgment. As much as one may try, it is nearly impossible to avoid every single harmful thing in the world, so Christians must exist in the world without actively participating in sinful actions.

Overall, the Bible cautions readers by telling them to avoid sinful acts. Instead, Scripture encourages Christians to pursue things that are good and pure over things that are evil or vile. Nevertheless, people interpret the definitions of these virtues differently, so the decisions made regarding censorship of certain material remains a largely individual process that is unique to the viewers’ situations and backgrounds.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Question

How are opinions on banned books and censorship similar and different between Christian college students and Christian parents?

Differing Sides

For many people, censorship starts in the home with parents preventing their children from accessing certain television shows and movies. For the children, this can be frustrating because they think their parents do not understand them or completely disregard how they feel about this issue. From the other point of view, parents often think that they are protecting their children from content they believe to be potentially harmful. Regardless of which side is correct about this issue, both are equal in importance, and the opinions of each respective side need to be treated as so. Additionally, both sides should be heard so compromises can be established. This way, adults can rest assured that their children will be protected, and children can feel free and trusted to handle the material they desperately want to access.

The Surveys

As mentioned previously, viewpoints from each of these groups are needed to conduct a well-rounded and fair representation of this argument that is personal, complex, and expansive for many families and organizations. In order to give each side a chance to express their opinions, I have created two separate surveys, one for college students at Southeastern University and one for Christian parents from a local Baptist church.

The survey designed for students consists of 28 questions. The first of these questions is simply for demographics (gender, age, etc.) whereas the remainder is a mixture of questions regarding the materials they were not allowed to access as children, the current status of their spiritual life, and their personal beliefs on censorship as a whole. Additionally, this survey will
be a mixture of multiple-choice and fill in the blank questions. All of the questions in this survey are included further below.

The survey for parents consists of 25 questions. Like the student survey, the first of these questions is for demographics and the remainder of the questions addresses topics like their personal faith, how they have enforced censorship in their home, what materials they have prohibited their children from accessing, and their views on censorship as a whole. Like the other survey, this will be composed of a mixture of multiple-choice and fill in the blank questions, and all of the questions are included further below.

Student Survey:

1. Gender
   - Male
   - Female
2. Age
3. What is your major/area of study?
4. How many siblings do you have?
5. Where do you fall numerically in your family?
   - Only child
   - 1st
   - 2nd
   - 3rd
   - 4th
   - 5th
   - 6th or higher
6. List the movies you were not allowed to watch growing up?
7. Why were you not allowed to watch them?
8. List the tv shows you were not allowed to watch growing up?
9. Why were you not allowed to watch them?
10. Have you watched these movies or tv shows since turning 18?
11. If so, what did you think or feel when you watched each of them?
12. What books were you not allowed to read growing up?
13. Why were you not allowed to read them?
14. Have you read these books since turning 18?
15. Did your school/ schools censor or ban any books from the student body?
• Yes
• No
• I don’t know.
• I was homeschooled

16. If so, for what reasons were they banned?
17. What did you think or feel when you read them?
18. Did you grow up in a Christian household?
19. Are you a Christian today?
20. If so, what denomination of Christianity are you affiliated with?
21. Were your siblings allowed to watch or read anything you weren’t?
22. Do you personally think that censorship and banning books is correct?
23. Who, if anyone, do you believe should censor or ban media?
24. What conditions justify a piece of media to be censored or banned? Check all that you agree with.
   A piece of media should be censored or banned if it includes...
   • Cursing/ foul language
   • Drug use
   • Smoking
   • Drinking
   • Violence
   • Suicide
   • LGBTQ+ content
   • Conversation about puberty or menstruation
   • Sex education
   • Explicit and graphic sexual content
   • Conversation about rape or sexual assault
   • Questioning religion
   • Ridiculing religion
   • Communism
   • Politics
   • Magic
   • Fantasy/ fairy tales
   • Witchcraft
   • Foreign cultural practices
   • Ancient religions and mythology
   • Racist language and racism
   • Police brutality
   • Other _________________________
25. Check the answer that best describes you.
   - I wish my parents had been more lenient with the content they allowed me to access.
   - I am satisfied with the amount of protection my parents imposed upon me as a child.
   - I wish my parents had been more strict on the material they allowed me to access.

26. Which do you believe is a bigger problem?
   - Too much sheltering
   - Too little sheltering
   - I believe neither is an issue.

27. Do you think you will censor or ban material from your future children?
28. Why or why not?

Parent Survey:

1. Gender
   - Male
   - Female

2. Age

3. Were you prevented by a parent or other authority figure from watching or reading certain content as a child?

4. If you answered “yes” to the previous question, have you watched or read any of these materials since turning 18?

5. Did you grow up in a Christian household?

6. Are you a Christian today?

7. Are you currently married?

8. If you answered yes to the previous question, do you and your spouse share the same views on censorship?

9. How many children do you have?

10. What gender and age are each of them? (Please follow the example pattern) 15-year-old female, 12-year-old male, and 3-year-old female, etc...
11. Which media pieces do you monitor for your children?

12. Do you believe it is important to prevent children from accessing certain types of media, especially those with controversial or questionable material?

13. Why do you believe so?

14. Check which books you have heard of. (Provided by the American Library Association’s list of the top 11 most challenged books of 2018.)

15. Which of these books, if any, would you be hesitant to let your child read? List all that apply.
   - *George* by Alex Gino
   - *A Day in the Life of Marlon Bundo* by Jill Twiss, illustrated by EG Keller
   - *Captain Underpants series* written and illustrated by Dav Pilkey
   - *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas
   - *Drama* written and illustrated by Raina Telgemeier
   - *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher
   - *This One Summer* by Mariko Tamaki, illustrated by Jillian Tamaki
   - *Skippyjon Jones series* written and illustrated by Judy Schachner
   - *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie
   - *This Day in June* by Gayle E. Pitman, illustrated by Kristyna Litten
   - *Two Boys Kissing* by David Levithan

16. Have you personally read any of these books in their entirety?

17. Does the school/schools that your child/children attend ban or censor any media from the student body?
   - Yes
   - No
   - I don’t know
   - I homeschool my children

18. If you answered “yes” to the previous question, for what reasons were these materials banned or censored?

19. What conditions justify a piece of media to be censored or banned? Consider both modern and classic media. Check all that you agree with.
   A piece of media should be censored or banned if it includes…
   - Cursing/ foul language
   - Drug use
   - Smoking
   - Drinking
   - Violence
   - Suicide
• LGBTQ+ content
• Conversation about puberty or menstruation
• Sex education
• Explicit and graphic sexual content
• Conversation about rape or sexual assault
• Questioning religion
• Ridiculing religion
• Communism
• Politics
• Magic
• Fantasy/ fairy tales
• Witchcraft
• Foreign cultural practices
• Ancient religions and mythology
• Racist language and racism
• Police brutality
• Other __________________________

20. Have you had conversations with your children about why they shouldn’t watch or read something?

21. What do you tell them if they do question why they can’t read or watch something?

22. Do you believe that your current views on censorship will change in the future?

23. Will you allow your children to access material you currently do not allow them to view once they reach a certain age?

24. Do you believe censorship is necessary for our society, including for adults?

25. Why do you believe so?

   Every question on these surveys is numbered. This will be important for reference later because each question will be referred to by their designated number in the Data Analysis.

Distribution of Surveys

Both of the surveys were created and distributed using Google Forms. Once the survey questions were finalized, I sent a few emails asking professors who teach religion, psychology, and humanities courses whether they would be willing to distribute my survey to their students. I chose these three specific subjects because the students majoring in these fields typically have
strong opinions on censorship and are willing to discuss it in detail. If a professor agreed, I sent
an electronic version of the survey to them via a link in an email. From there, the professors
would forward the message to their students. Students could then decide whether they wanted to
participate in the survey or not. I also sent the student survey to the honors program so my fellow
honors students could participate if they desired.

For parents, I first confirmed that I would be allowed to do the survey at this particular
church by asking the lead and youth pastors for permission via email. Once I received permission
and my questions were approved, I sent the link for the survey in an email to the youth pastor of
this Baptist church. From there, the youth pastor sent an email to parents who regularly attend
the church. After that, these parents decided whether they wanted to take the survey or not.

Collection of Data

For both the student and parent surveys, each participant's answers were sent back to me
electronically through Google Forms. As I received data, Google Forms automatically organized
it into charts and graphs based upon common answers for each multiple-choice question. It also
calculated percentages for each multiple-choice answer by considering the total number of
responses and the number of times a certain answer was selected. For the fill-in-the-blank
responses, Google Forms listed exactly what the participant typed in response to the question. No
charts, graphs, or percentages were made automatically by Google Forms for fill-in-the-blank
questions because this information was unique to each participant.

Analysis and Organization

Due to time constraints, I had to stop collecting data earlier than I originally planned. For
both surveys, I ceased collecting responses on March 9, 2020. Once all the responses were
collected, they were analyzed for similarities and differences among their respective groups.
Answers from the parent survey were compared with those from the student survey and vice versa. Also, trends were observed among certain groups of the same age, gender, area of study, or church denomination.

**Drawbacks of Research**

First of all, I decided to focus on the practices of censorship and banning in regard to books, film, television only. There are many other media forms that have been challenged over the years, including video games, music, and art. However, these formats were either not as extensive to the target populations or not as frequently challenged. Therefore, I decided to only study the effects of books, film, and television because most people have had a censorship experience with these mediums or have at least been exposed to all of them at some point in their lives.

Since I was prevented from collecting responses for a longer time period than originally planned, fewer parents participated in this research than I would have ideally wanted. I only received 7 participants, some of which did not answer all of the questions. I received a much larger sample from the student population with a total of 31 participants. However, because of the major difference between these two groups, the majority of comparisons between them are depicted using percentages rather than whole numbers. Even though the original percentages contained decimals, they were rounded to the nearest whole number in order to make reading smoother and aid in the understandability of the content. Also, it must be noted that due to the difference in quantity, the responses of these two groups do not correlate perfectly when they are compared to each other.

Additionally, all of the participants from the parent population were affiliated with the Baptist church whereas the majority of student participants were affiliated with Pentecostal
churches. If this study was to be done again in the future, it would be beneficial to collect data from parents who attend various churches in order to gather a more statistically accurate representation of Christian opinions as a whole.

The generational differences among students could affect data as well. Due to survey regulations, I was not allowed to include children under the age of 18 in my research. This meant that the youngest students legally allowed to participate in this research would only be 18 years old. At this age, they would have been given ample time to reflect on movies and television shows from their childhood and how those media pieces, or the lack thereof, affected them while growing up. However, some participants in the parent population mentioned they had children who were currently under the age of 18, with some being as young as 6 years old. This could affect data because popular culture has changed from the past generation to the current generation. Books, films, and television programs that were enjoyed in the early 2000s by today’s generation of college students are no longer as influential to groups of younger children.

Lastly, after reviewing the data, I realized that there were some holes in my research. I did not ask many of the same questions to both survey groups, although I did ask questions with similar points. However, this made it more difficult to compare data since the answers did not completely match. For example, the students were asked many questions regarding the exact titles they were prevented from accessing, whereas parents were given questions regarding theoretical approaches they would take in situations that involved censoring media from their children. While both of these are similar, one deals with concrete answers whereas the other is based on “what if” scenarios. If both populations were asked the same type of questions, analysis and comparison between the two groups would have resulted in a smoother research process and more accurate conclusions.
Chapter 4: Analysis of Data

Student Survey

A total of 31 university students participated in this study by taking the student-specific survey. In this group, 24 individuals were female and 7 were male. All were between the ages of 18 and 22. The participants were further categorized by age, resulting in each age group having almost the exact same number. Age groups 18, 20, 21, and 22 all had six participants each, whereas age group 19 had 7 participants.

Each participant also revealed their major or area of study at Southeastern University. Since there was not much commonality among these responses due to each student’s unique preferences and the variety of combinations for double majors and minors, the participants were categorized using the college their major belongs to. The six academic colleges at Southeastern University include Arts and Media, Behavioral and Social Sciences, Business and Entrepreneurial Leadership, Education, Ministry and Theology, and Natural and Health Sciences. Figure 1 shows the percentages of participants in each college program.

Figure 1:
Participants were also asked questions regarding their connections to Christianity. In response to questions 18 and 19, all except for one individual stated that they grew up in a Christian household, and 100% stated that they were Christians today. They were also questioned about their denomination affiliation in question 20. All 31 participants responded to this question and seven affiliations were listed. Nearly one-third of the population (32%) stated that they were affiliated with the Assemblies of God. This was expected since Southeastern University is an academic organization under the Assemblies of God. The second largest affiliation was non-denominational churches (26%). The remainder of participants stated they were affiliated with Baptist (19%), Catholic (7%), Church of God (7%), Pentecostal (7%), or Christian and Missionary Alliance (3%) churches.

Questions 6 through 9 asked participants about the films and television shows they were prevented from watching as a child as well as the reasons behind why they were prevented from accessing these titles. In response to question 6, participants either stated titles or genres of film. The four most common titles were *Harry Potter* (36%), *Twilight* (10%), *Pitch Perfect* (6%), and *The Fault in Our Stars* (6%). Twenty-three other films were mentioned once by various participants, accounting for 3% each. Among this list were titles like *The Wizard of Oz, The Hunger Games,* and *How to Train Your Dragon* (refer to Figure 2 in the appendix for all listed titles). Some participants also mentioned rating systems and other characteristics of films that served as the causes of restriction. Thirty-six percent of participants mentioned that they were not allowed to access rated R movies, 20% said they could not access PG-13 movies, and 13% said they could not watch horror films. Another 13% stated these questions did not apply to them in any way.
Question 7 asked participants to explain why they were not allowed to view this material. Figure 3 shows each reason that was mentioned as well as the number of times it was listed by participants. As one can see, the top five most common reasons as to why these students could not access the previously mentioned titles as children were because of the use of “witchcraft,” “sexual content,” “violence,” “inappropriate themes,” and “profanity” in their plots. This was expected since *Harry Potter*, the most commonly mentioned film title from question 6, has been challenged for its use of witchcraft multiple times since its release. The sixth answer, magic, is interesting because it is two times lower than witchcraft. This suggests that student participants, as well as their parents, must view these two similar concepts in very different ways. Surprisingly, satanic content and drug use were only mentioned once. Since the participants come from Christian backgrounds, it was originally expected that these two reasons would be higher on the list.

**Figure 3:**

![Bar chart showing reasons for prevention of exposure to certain films as children](image)

In response to question 7, Participant 5 stated “My parents felt that movies would be a bad influence on our moral, social, and spiritual development. They wanted to have the role of
guiding us and they did not want our lives to be influenced by outside forces.” Participant 17 said something similar in that “My mother didn’t think it (the controversial material) would be ‘healthy’.” Participant 29 also voiced a similar, although rather humorous, parental concern, saying “My dad did not want me to see anything with witchcraft, magic, horror, or content that would ‘make me lose brain cells’.” Although this sentiment is somewhat common among parents, all three previous explanations reveal the fact that parents shelter children from certain media content because they are concerned for the children’s mental, spiritual, and developmental health. This supports the research that was previously mentioned in the Review of Literature. By compiling these sources, it was concluded that the main reason for censorship today is for the protection of children.

Question 8 asks participants to list television shows they were not allowed to watch as children. In response, the four most commonly listed programs were *Wizards of Waverly Place* (32%), *SpongeBob* (29%), *Pokémon* (10%) and *Hannah Montana* (10%). Four other shows received 6% of responses each, including *Friends, Rugrats, That’s So Raven,* and *Fairly Odd Parents*. Twenty-eight other programs were only listed once, accounting for 3% each (refer to Figure 4 in the appendix for all the listed program titles). Other participants listed channels, TV maturity ratings, and program genres as reasons for protection. Sixteen percent of participants claimed they were not allowed to watch Disney Channel, 10% were not allowed to view Nickelodeon shows, and 6% were not allowed to watch Cartoon Network. Others listed TV-MA rated shows, crime investigation shows, and reality TV as other defining qualities that deemed a program unwatchable.

Question 9 asks about the reasons for preventing these shows. Figure 5 depicts the given reasons as well as the number of responses for each reason. The most common answer that was
listed was the use of “inappropriate content” for a certain age group. This is a very vague answer since many characteristics could be included under the title of “inappropriate.” It is important to keep in mind that participants could have been referring to anything from sexual content to bitter attitudes, and their exact intentions cannot be assumed. The next common response was that the characters showed “disrespect towards parents.” This was especially common when referring to Disney Channel shows. Next, witchcraft and magic are listed as reasons, and identical to the results from question 6, witchcraft is listed twice as often as magic. One particularly interesting answer is that the content in the shows was “annoying to parents.” Even if no harmful material was identified for a certain television show, parents of at least 2 participants kept their children from viewing the program because they thought the characters were irritating.

Figure 5:

In response to question 9, participant 5 stated, “My parents felt that Disney encouraged poor behavior. They did not like that the children were disrespectful of adults. We were taught unquestioning submission to adult authority and Disney’s social agenda stood in direct contrast to that.” Participant 10 voiced a similar experience saying, I wasn’t allowed to watch any cartoons
in which characters acted in a “disrespectful” manner. Likewise, participant 21 said, “...For a short period of time, we weren’t allowed to watch shows like Jesse and Austin and Ally because one night our pastor had a sermon on being careful about what you put in your mind and what you watch, etc. and my parents didn’t like that the shows made the parents more stupid than their children. They thought it taught kids to think they were smarter than their parents and disrespect them.”

All three of these students reported that their parents believed certain television shows were inappropriate because the characters questioned, disobeyed, or disrespected parents or other adult authority figures. Some even outrightly stated that their parents believed their children would act in similar ways to the characters if they were allowed to observe their onscreen behavior. Based on previously reviewed research of Anderson, Brocato, and Turnau, this is a reasonable sentiment since it is possible that behavior can change if a person is exposed to certain media. However, this depends on many factors such as age and intellectual impairments (Turnau 88-90) Also, it must be acknowledged that Anderson, Brocato, and Turnau only considered the results of media with violence. Therefore, it cannot be concluded that different “inappropriate content” correlates with changed behaviors in children after viewing.

Question 10 asked participants if they had watched these films and television shows since turning 18 years old. Forty-seven percent of the participants said they had watched these titles completely and another 47% stated they had seen only watched portions of them. Only 7% of people said they had not watched these movies or television shows at all. Participants who had watched all or parts of the censored material were then asked how they felt after viewing them. The most common answers stated that they either enjoyed the material or they did not think the material was extremely harmful. Others voiced that exposure to certain material should depend
on age. Some also said they were grateful for the parental guidance that was enforced on them, and a few stated that they felt guilt or shame while watching certain titles. Very few stated that they either resented their parents for too much protection or sympathized completely with their parents’ opinions.

For example, participant 10 stated, “I think the TV a child watches has a lot less impact than the way they’re actually raised and parenting...and more than anything, I resented my parents for not letting me watch those things because all my friends at school were allowed to watch them. I think that had a much greater negative impact than any of the shows ever would’ve.” Participant 6 said “I enjoyed parts of them. I grew to dislike negative things such as profanity, innuendos, blood, and gore while appreciating positive things... I mostly stay true to what my parents taught me through censorship, which is to guard my eyes.” Additionally, participant 21 stated that “it almost felt like I was doing something wrong. A lot of those things I still haven’t watched even though it would be perfectly fine now.” From these responses, one can see that people have various feelings after internalizing certain films or television shows, ranging from enjoyment of the material to feelings of guilt for exposing themselves to questionable material.

Other than digital media, students were asked what books they were not allowed to read. Surprisingly, most participants stated that this question did not apply to them or that no books were withheld from them (53%). However, out of those that did list book titles, the most common answer was *Harry Potter* (42%), which was also the most commonly mentioned film title. Other common titles included the *Hunger Games* (10%), *Twilight* (10%), *Divergent* (7%), and *Percy Jackson* (7%). Five other titles were only mentioned once, accounting for 3% each. These titles included *Left Behind, Fifty Shades of Grey, The Fault in Our Stars, Diary of a*
Wimpy Kid, and the Golden Compass. The majority of these book titles have also been adapted for the screen. As shown previously, student participants listed many of these same titles when asked what films they were not allowed to watch as children, including Harry Potter, Twilight, and The Fault in Our Stars. When asked why they were not allowed to read these titles, the majority of answers were similar to the previously given answers for prohibiting films and television, with the most common reasons being witchcraft, magic, and sexual content.

Students were then asked whether they had read these books since turning 18. In response, 65% of participants stated that they had not read these books whereas only 27% said they had. Only 8% stated they had read parts of these books. Although the “no” group has a much larger total, it is necessary to remember that 16 of the 31 participants stated that no books were withheld from them during childhood.

Question 15 and 16 asks if books were banned or censored from the participants schools as well as the reasons for these actions. Thirty-nine percent answered “yes,” 36% said “I don’t know,” and 19% stated “no.” The remaining 7% disclosed that they were homeschooled, making this question irrelevant to them. Many voiced that these books were banned because of “inappropriate” or “worldly” content that contradicted the Bible. Out of those who voiced more specific reasons, the most commonly mentioned were the use of vulgar language and sexual content. Additionally, two participants directly indicated that they attended Christian schools which are typically known for being stricter in regard to the material that is available to young students.

The last two questions on the student survey inquired about the future actions participants might take regarding censorship. When asked if they would censor material from their own children, 57% answered “yes,” 20% answered “maybe,” and 13% answered “no.” For those that
answered “yes” or “maybe”, the overwhelmingly common reason regarding potential censorship in the future was for the protection of young children. Many of the participants address the fact that some children are not ready to encounter certain material due to age and maturity. However, some additionally add that this fact does not limit an individual's freedom forever. Participant 20 summarizes this well by saying, “I want my children to have a strong foundation of their belief system before they are introduced to certain materials. Then, they can determine what is appropriate for themselves.”

Even though the majority of participants stated that they would censor material from their children, 60% also said they believe too much censorship is a substantial problem. Thirty-seven percent voiced the opinion that the lack of enough censorship was a larger problem. Only 3% stated neither was an issue. This is interesting since many of the same participants are against an abundance of censorship while maintaining the fact that they will censor material from their own children. The limits for too much, too little, and just right are difficult to define. However, the majority of student participants either directly stated or implied that censorship is a case by case situation, and should be treated in an individually unique manner.

Parent Survey

A total of seven parents participated in this study by taking the parent-specific survey. Of this small population, five were female and two were male. All were between the ages of 36 and 65, with one being in their 30’s, three being in their 40’s, two being in their 50’s, and one being in their 60’s. All participants were affiliated with the Baptist denomination since the results of this survey were obtained and collected from a local Baptist church.

Participants were asked to include the number of children they had as well as the ages and genders of each of them. The findings of these demographics were very diverse and shared
very few commonalities. Participants listed that they had anywhere from 1 to seven children, of which 57% stated that all their children were exclusively male or female while 43% stated they had children of both genders. Additionally, 100% of these participants had at least one child under the age of 18, however 72% stated they also had at least one child of legal age.

Question 3 asks parents if they personally experienced censorship as children. Seventy-one percent said “yes” while 29% answered “no.” However, one hundred percent of participants expressed the belief that it is important to prevent children from accessing certain types of media. Additionally, all stated that they monitor books, television, and film for their own children. These results show that experience with censorship as a child can possibly cause a person to be more likely to censor material from their own children. This is not completely true since some parents reported that censorship was not enforced on them in their youth, yet they enforce it on their own children anyway.

When asked why they believe censorship is important, participant 3 stated, “What you put into your head cannot be removed. It is important to limit Satan's access to torture you through the things we see, feel, hear, touch and imagine.” Participant 2 voiced that “Some content is wrong all-together, other content is age sensitive, meaning it cannot be processed properly at a younger age but could at an older age.” Participant one simply summarizes these previous two statements by saying, “The Bible clearly tells us to be careful of what we allow in our hearts.” Overall, the majority of answers expressed that the main reasons for censorship include the protection of children and the obedience to Christian values found in the Bible.

Question 17 inquires whether any books have been banned from their children’s schools, in which 43% answered “yes” whereas 57% answered “I don’t know.” None answered “no” or “I homeschool my children” in response to this question. When further prompted for the reasons
regarding censorship in their schools, all participants concluded that protecting children from inappropriate content was the main motive.

Using the American Library Association’s list of the top 11 most challenged books of 2018, parents were asked which titles they had heard of before, and if they would be hesitant to let their children read any of them (American Library Association). The only three titles that were recognized from this list were the *Captain Underpants* series by Dav Pilkey, *13 Reasons Why* by Jay Asher, and the *Skippyjon Jones* series by Judy Schachner. In response to this question, 14% of participants listed the *Captain Underpants* series as questionable, 29% listed *13 Reasons Why*, 43% listed *Two Boys Kissing*, and 29% listed all of the above.

An interesting observation was found when participants were asked if they have read any of these books in their entirety. One hundred percent answered “no.” This shows that even if they had not personally read any of the material in the book, some of the parents would still prevent their child from reading these works simply because of the title alone or previous knowledge they may have heard about the content. This also supports the previously mentioned opinions of the popular young-adult author, John Green. In regard to challenges against his novel *Looking for Alaska*, he states, “Text is meaningless without context and what usually happens with *Looking for Alaska* is that a parent shows one particular page of the novel to an administrator and then the book gets banned without anyone who objects to it having read more than that one particular page.” This also supports Turnau’s research since he also defends the fact that context is vitally important to the analysis and judgment of a piece.

Question 20 asks parents if they have had conversations with their children in the past regarding why they could not access certain media. All participants answered “yes” to this question. Parents also stated responses they would give to their children if they continued to
challenge their authority or ask questions regarding the material itself. For example, participant 1 said that she would simply ask her children, “What does the Bible say?”. Participant 3 said, “I usually say, ‘If you put garbage in, you will get garbage out’.” Both of these appear to be more black and white approaches toward censorship in which the material as a whole is viewed as inappropriate or harmful. However, participant 6 takes a different approach saying, “Because there is best time for everything and reading/watching that material is not the time yet for you (the children).” This response implies that this parent is withholding material from their children for age or maturity reasons.

Question 22 asks parents if their views on censorship will change in the future. Eighty-three percent answered “no” while the remaining 17% answered “maybe”. Parents were also asked if they would allow their children to access these currently questionable materials once they reach a certain age. The majority (71%) implied they would grant more freedom as their children grew whereas only a few (29%) answered “possibly” or “no” in response to this question.

Lastly, parents were asked if they believed censorship was necessary for our society to function properly. All participants indicated that censorship was a necessity for all people, including adults. In support of this view, participant 2 stated, “There are somethings that are so evil that it destroys a culture. Society already acknowledges this because they censor child pornography, and videoed murders and other such evils.” This response also reflects the previous data examined in the Review of Literature since researchers determined that some content, like child pornography, is harmful to all (Goldberg, 16-18). Participant 1 also voiced, “... I do believe that a Christian should self-censor what he/she reads, watches, or listens to, so that we glorify God in all that we do…” Participant 4 quotes the Bible by saying, “Philippians 4:8 "Finally,
brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.” According to this verse, Christians should filter everything they are exposed to in order to think on good virtues. Based on their answers, it seems like these parent participants are trying to do just that for themselves while also encouraging their children to follow these beliefs as well.

Comparison

Although these two groups were given separate surveys with different questions, both contained a few key questions that were identical or similar to those in the other group’s survey. Both groups were asked the same demographic questions regarding gender, age, and connections to Christianity.

Both groups had nearly identical results when categorizing participants by gender because the two sets of results showed more female than male participants. Every individual from both groups stated that they were Christians today, and the majority said they grew up in Christian households. Only 3% of the student population and 29% of the parent population grew up in non-Christian households.

Both groups were asked questions regarding their personal beliefs about the necessity or importance of censorship (question 22 for students and questions 24 and 25 for parents). Parental opinions were very strong regarding these questions since 100% of parents stated they believed censorship was necessary for society. However, student responses were much more diverse, as shown by Figure 6. The majority of students either believed that censorship was not correct or depended upon the situation. Of the students who believed censorship depends on the situation, 57% listed age as a crucial characteristic for determining appropriateness.
Nearly all the participants from both groups reported experiencing censorship at some point during their childhood. This majority was further prompted to tell if they have watched or read this material since becoming adults (questions 10 and 14 for students and question 4 for parents). Parent’s answers were split with 60% saying “yes” and 40% saying “no.” Students were asked separate questions regarding their exposure to previously prohibited screen-based media and books. Forty-seven percent stated “yes” and another 47% stated “parts of them” in response to the question about films and television shows. Only 7% reported having no exposure to these materials whatsoever after turning 18. These results were almost opposite compared to the question regarding books. Nearly 65% stated “no” to reading these books once reaching adulthood. Only 27% answered “yes” and 8% answered “parts of them.”

All participants were asked if books were censored or banned from schools they were affiliated with as well as the reasons for challenging these books (questions 15 and 16 for
students and questions 17 and 18 for parents). The most common answers for both of these groups were “yes” and “I don’t know,” however, similar to the previous question, the results were more diverse among students than parents. Some students answered “no” or “I was homeschooled” in response to these questions, whereas parents did not.

Both populations were asked the same question in which they had to check characteristics that justified a piece of media for being banned or censored (question 24 for students and question 19 for parents). Figure 7 below shows the comparison between the opinions of both groups with red representing the parent population and black representing the student population. As one can see, parents list certain characteristics more often than the students. The five characteristics possessing the largest differences between parent and student answers are “police brutality,” “conversation about puberty or menstruation,” “questioning religion,” “magic,” and “drug use,” all of which share a 22-26 percent difference between the two populations. However, some characteristics received about the same amount of responses from both groups, including “cursing/foul language,” “ancient religions/mythology,” and “racist language and racism.” For these three categories, students’ responses outnumbered those from parents, even though this was a very slight difference in the percentages. Additionally, some patterns found in the analyses of the surveys stayed consistent in this question. For example, the difference in responses between “witchcraft” and “magic” were still noticeable with “witchcraft” being listed more times out of the two.

Figure 7:
Lastly, both groups were asked questions regarding children. Parents were asked if they believed censorship was important for children and why while students were asked if they will censor material from their future children as well as their reasoning for doing so (questions 27 and 28 for students and questions 12 and 13 for parents). All of the parent participants agreed that censorship was important for children, and the majority used age-appropriateness and Bible verses as evidence for their opinions. For the student population, nearly 77% answered either “yes” or “maybe” to these specific questions. Similar to the parents’ responses, students used age-appropriateness and Biblical beliefs to defend the use of censorship, while others used the virtues of trust and open communication between parents and children as evidence to defend a lack of censorship.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

In the Review of Literature, although the studies were vastly different, the majority of researchers agreed that censorship of controversial material should be an individual matter rather than a public one. If one were to view these studies in black and white terms, most of the researchers’ opinions would be classified as anti-censorship. The vast majority state either directly or indirectly that the freedom to choose is more important than absolute protection, even though some acknowledge that censorship is a necessity in some cases.

The research from the Data Analysis does not exactly match these findings. The student population tended to agree with this stance more than the parents. Student responses were very mixed with some being very pro-censorship and others being completely against it. Most, however, were in a gray area, acknowledging that censorship was sometimes appropriate and sometimes not depending upon the situation. Parents, however, were almost universally pro-censorship since their main motivations were to protect their children. Additionally, parents expressed concern that this material would change their children’s behavior or influence them in negative ways. Some did mention that they might allow their children to access more material once they reached a certain age, and many added that once their children reached adulthood, they would have to decide for themselves what was and was not appropriate.

Overall, censorship and banning books have been common practices for years and they will likely continue to be common for many more years to come. After all, the majority of the student population stated that they would censor material from their own future children. Be that as it may, the reactions of old seem to be outdated or inappropriate. Public book burnings and other harsh and destructive practices are not called for in modern society, especially since libraries and individual citizens are more protective over their rights. Research has shown that the most beneficial way to deal with questionable material is to talk about it, openly and without
judgment. The only way to get past uncomfortable, or even dangerous content, is to have meaningful conversations about them. Censoring and banning them is a temporary fix since this does not erase the material from existence. Children will inevitably be presented with controversial information at some point in their lives. They need to be prepared for this interaction with new ideas in order to deal with them in an appropriate way, and having conversations about these topics is a good place to start.
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*United States Constitution*, Amend. I.


Appendix

Figure 1:

Participant Distribution by Academic College

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College of Natural and Health Sciences</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Arts and Media</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Ministry and Theology</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Education</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Behavioral and Social</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College of Business and Entrepreneurial</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2:

Common Film Titles Mentioned by Student Participants

- Harry Potter
- Twilight
- Pitch Perfect
- The Fault in Our Stars
- The Black Cauldron
- The Princess and the Frog
- Percy Jackson
- The Hunger Games
- The Maze Runner
- Diary of a Wimpy Kid
- Into the Woods
- How to Train Your Dragon
- Diary of a Wimpy Kid
- Struck
- Diary of a Wimpy Kid

Figure 3:
Figure 4:

Common Television Programs Listed By Student Participants

Figure 5:
Figure 6:

Figure 7:
Comparison of Parents and Students Opinions Regarding Conditions that Justify Censorship

Conditions for Banning and Censoring Media

- cursing/foul language
- drug use
- smoking
- drinking
- violence
- suicide
- LGBTQ+ content
- conversation about puberty or menstruation
- sex education
- explicit and graphic sexual content
- conversation about rape or sexual assault
- questioning religion
- ridiculing religion
- communism
- politics
- magic
- fantasy/fairy tales
- witchcraft
- foreign cultural practices
- ancient religions and mythology
- racial language and racism
- police brutality
- other

Percentage of responses