

# **High school library selection and deselection in context**

**by**

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Submitted to the School of Information Management,  
Victoria University of Wellington  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Information Studies

**October 2016**

## Abstract

**Research problem:** Robust collection management is needed if a school library is to meet its aims. Self-censorship by librarians threatens this as it excludes material that would otherwise suit the collection. The literature that exists tends to be anecdotal and lack depth, and largely has not addressed the context of New Zealand, which leaves two notable knowledge gaps. Additionally, commonly-cited strategies for addressing self-censorship, such as the adoption of a collection management policy, have been found by some researchers to have little effect in practice, but relatively few studies have addressed this so far.

**Methodology:** The study was gathered qualitative data through one-on-one interviews with nine high school librarians throughout New Zealand. Data was analysed through theme coding and content analysis.

**Results:** Collection management in New Zealand's high school libraries is fairly robust, and self-censorship is not as widespread as one might be lead to believe by existing literature. The main reasons for the self-censorship that did occur were the feeling that the school community did not support particular material, and the anticipation of receiving challenges. Self-confidence in one's ability to handle challenges appears to mitigate the latter factor. The presence of collection management policies, formal procedures for challenges, and statements on intellectual freedom did not appear to have any effect on the lack or presence of self-censorship.

**Implications:** This study contributes to the fledgling body of knowledge about self-censorship in New Zealand's school libraries. It provides further support for literature which has noted that self-censorship cannot be completely eliminated through the adoption of collection management policies, formal challenge procedures, and statements on intellectual freedom, but rather, must be addressed through active, principled day-to-day practice.

**Keywords:** Self-censorship; school libraries; collection management; selection; intellectual freedom.

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## Problem statement

Robust collection management is necessary for a school library to fulfil the needs of the curriculum, and the needs and interests of the students who use it. These aims are threatened by self-censorship, which excludes material that would otherwise suit the collection and support the intellectual, social, and emotional development of the students. Detailed understanding of the reasons behind self-censorship could aid attempts to mitigate it. However, there is little literature about self-censorship in school libraries, especially within New Zealand; the literature that does exist tends to either be anecdotal or lack depth. Furthermore, while strategies to mitigate self-censorship frequently hinge on adopting collection management policies, formal processes for challenges, and statements about intellectual freedom, there are preliminary indications that this has little effect in practice — but again, a dearth of literature makes it difficult to make definitive statements.

## Literature review

### Collection management

A school library supports its students both in their academic needs and in their interests. For the library to be at its best, the collection should be carefully developed and maintained. The need to support the curriculum is one of the primary focuses of a school library's collection (Australian School Library Association (ASLA) & Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), 2001; Bishop, 2007; School Library Service, National Library of New Zealand (NZ SLS), 1985; Stephens & Franklin, 2012; Tilke, 2002). Material purchased for this purpose should be accurate, authoritative, reliable, and current. (ASLA & ALIA, 2001, pp. 25, 29; Bishop, 2007, p. 12; NZ SLS, 1985, p. 18; Stephens & Franklin, 2012, p. 1). Tilke (2002, pp. 163–164), and the Australian School Library Association (ASLA) and Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) (2001, p. 26) noted that teachers should be consulted, so that the librarian is able to ensure materials meet educational needs.

Material should also reflect students' own interests in reading material (ASLA & ALIA, 2001, pp. 25–26; National Library of New Zealand, n.d.; Reichman, 2001, p. 86; Stephens & Franklin, 2012, pp. 2, 7); no matter how well-reviewed a piece is, it is unlikely to be used if students simply do not care about it. Morris noted that it is just as

important to cater to non-users as it is to users of the library — ignoring non-users tends not to turn them into users (2010, p. 254). He also stated that catering to students' interests is more effective when the librarian gets to know the interests and backgrounds of individual students, rather than just the broader trends in the collective mass (2010, pp. 240–241). Another helpful way of learning what students are interested in reading is to solicit requests (Reichman, 2001, p. 88; SLSNZ 1985, p. 16; Stephens & Franklin, 2012, pp. 59–60).

Other criteria which may be considered during selection are literary excellence (Reichman, 2001, p. 86), perhaps as noted in reviews from reliable sources (Stephens & Franklin, 2012, pp. 27–28); the format of the material; the quality of its presentation; and the state of the current collection — the question of whether a new addition would add something that the collection currently lacks (Bishop, 2007, p. 12).

For materials to remain relevant to the curriculum and to students' interests – and for the collection to remain a reasonable size – weeding is a necessity (Tilke, 2002, p. 166). Items can be weeded when they become outdated, or are otherwise shown to be inaccurate; are unpopular (for instance, circulate poorly); or are worn out, damaged, or otherwise in poor condition (Bishop, 2007, p. 121; B. J. Morris, 2010, p. 451; Stephens & Franklin, 2012, pp. 34–35).

When considering collection management, it is also important for the librarian to get to know the local community and its own interests and needs (Bishop, 2007; B. J. Morris, 2010, pp. 239–240; National Library of New Zealand, n.d.; Stephens & Franklin, 2012, pp. 19–20). It is particularly important to take different ethnic and religious identification into account, and to cater to the languages spoken in the community (B. J. Morris, 2010, p. 24; National Library of New Zealand, n.d.). Keeping this in mind, the collection should be diverse, balanced, and present a wide spectrum of viewpoints across both fiction and non-fiction (ASLA & ALIA, 2001; Bishop, 2007, pp. 170–171; B. J. Morris, 2010, p. 253; Stephens & Franklin, 2012, p. 2). A diverse collection supports a broader schoolwide commitment to supporting the diversity of its community (Reichman, 2001, p. 86), which includes catering to students with special learning needs and different levels of reading ability (B. J. Morris, 2010, pp. 253–254; National Library of New Zealand, n.d.).

As noted by Stephens and Franklin, catering to the broader community should diversify the library's collection, not restrict it. The collection must remain balanced and present a wide spectrum of worldviews and experiences even if the community, or a particular contingent of it, are opposed to a particular viewpoint (2012, pp. 33–34). That is not to say that the collection must include absolutely everything. Some materials simply will not meet the selection criteria; in addition, Morris noted that while selection certainly should not censor, it equally should not overexpose. He is quick to add that, nevertheless, the emphasis should be on what is to be purchased, not what should be avoided (2010, p. 254).

In achieving all of this, Morris (2010, pp. 254–255) and Bishop (2007, pp. 42–44, 168–169) noted in their guides to collection management that it is important for the librarian and the processes they use to be as objective as possible; Bishop added that it is important for librarians to be aware of their biases and preferences, to better mitigate the risk of them colouring their collection management decisions (2007, p. 170).

Along with remaining objective, librarians also need to plan ahead to be able to meet goals effectively and on time (B. J. Morris, 2010, pp. 243, 260; Stephens & Franklin, 2012, pp. 22–23). The commonly accepted best practice of developing a formal collection management policy is intended to address both of these needs.

### **The collection management policy**

In Tilke's view, a written collection management policy is paramount for the sensible development of the collection (2002, p. 177). Morris argued that a written policy is the cornerstone of the library programme (2010). Indeed, in laying out their recommendations and guidelines for collection management, he, ASLA and ALIA (2001), the National Library of New Zealand's School Library Service (1985), and Stephens and Franklin (2012) do not so much suggest or recommend the adoption of a formal policy as they take it as a matter of course that a policy will be adopted, and treat it as all but a requirement for robust, efficient and effective collection management.

Reichman described the ideal collection policy as brief and related to everyday practices (2001, p. 83). In his opinion, a completely objective process is unattainable, but solid collection management policy is one of the most reliable ways to mitigate arbitrary and biased decisions (2001, p. 87), a point on which Bishop (2007, p. 33) agrees. Morris's statement about how selection in general should focus on what should

be purchased, not what should not, was anticipated by (among others) Reichman (2001, p. 83) and Bishop (2007, p. 43), who state that selection criteria in a collection management policy should be positively-worded — that is, as inclusive as possible; focussed on the strengths for which materials will be included, rather than the weaknesses for which they will be rejected.

A collection management policy can help to ensure that the collection maintains a level of consistency throughout staffing changes (Reichman, 2001, p. 80); it can also aid in communication with the school's administration, parents, and the community (B. J. Morris, 2010, p. 247; Reichman, 2001, pp. 82–83; Stephens & Franklin, 2012, pp. 22–23).

The latter quality makes it easier for the librarian to justify decisions when called upon to do so, whether because the school administration has questions about weeding, or because a member of the community has challenged new material (Hutchinson, 2002, p. 55; Imrich, 2007, p. 23). A policy is even more helpful for challenges if, as frequently suggested, the collection management policy includes a formal procedure for challenged material (ASLA & ALIA, 2001; National Library of New Zealand, n.d.; NZ SLS, 1985; Tilke, 2002, p. 177); some recommend the addition of a statement about students' intellectual freedom (Bishop, 2007, pp. 42, 45; B. J. Morris, 2010, p. 247). Reichman has stated that when the policy does not address intellectual freedom or challenges, or worse, does not exist, the mishandling of queries and challenges is not a risk, but an inevitability (2001, p. 80).

A solid collection management policy is believed to help school librarians build a robust collection that meets the aims and purposes of a school library. There are also various things that could, to various degrees, prevent the achievement of these purposes and goals. One major hindrance to ideal practice, which preoccupies much of the literature, is self-censorship.

### **Defining self-censorship**

Self-censorship essentially involves the decision either not to purchase or to remove library material. Of course, selection and deselection are quite legitimate practices which also involve these decisions, which makes self-censorship easy to either overlook or to conflate with ordinary collection management. A clear distinction is necessary to avoid self-censorship becoming invisible, subsumed into a legitimate activity



(Freedman & Johnson, 2000, p. 357; McClure, 1995, p. 17; Williams & Dillon, 1994, para. 33-38, 41-42).

The key difference is whether the intent is to include material, or to exclude (or restrict) it. Selection should ideally focus on the inclusion of material if, among other things, it fulfils curriculum requirements or students' interests and needs. Material that meets these requirements can be selected. Self-censorship focuses on removing or never acquiring material if it has particular features, which might (among other things) be seen as somehow immoral or otherwise objectionable. Even if it fits the curriculum and students' needs and interests, Material cannot be selected if it has these characteristics, even if it fits the curriculum and students' needs and interests (McClure, 1995, pp. 18–19; B. J. Morris, 2010, pp. 254, 262–263; Whelan, 2009a, p. 28).

It is also necessary to distinguish between self-censorship from the general concept of censorship. The key distinction is whether the impetus to remove the item originated from inside or outside the library. If an outside group, such as parents, community groups, or teachers (who do not have library responsibility) attempts to have an item removed, this could be regarded as censorship. It is only internal decisions, made by library staff on their own initiative – though they may feel pressured to exclude certain material because of the community's and school administration's views and preferences – that constitute self-censorship (Williams & Dillon, 1994, para. 38).

Definitions of self-censorship are not limited to selection and deselection, however. Hielsberg (1994) and Hunt and Wachsmann (2012) argued that labelling attempts to prejudice attitudes towards a work, and thus qualifies as or at least encourages self-censorship. Hunt and Wachsmann, in particular, were concerned that it might lead teachers or librarians to declare certain areas off-limit to certain age levels, or if content warnings were included, embarrass students into avoiding books about particular topics (2012).

### **So what's the problem?**

Self-censorship is understood to be widespread throughout school libraries, though evidence of this is mostly anecdotal, partly because it is believed that self-censorship is difficult to measure (French, 2003, pp. 25, 28; Reichman, 2001, p. 10; Whelan, 2009a, p. 27). Many believe it poses an ideological problem for school libraries and media centres,

as it contradicts principle of intellectual freedom (ASLA & ALIA 2001; Hielsberg, 1994; “Intellectual Freedom: The Role of the School Library Media Specialist,” 1999; McClure, 1995; Reichman, 2001; Von Drasek, 2007; Williams & Dillon, 1994) — as aspired to by organisations such as the Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA), demonstrated by their “Statement on Intellectual Freedom” (2002). The National Library of New Zealand refers to this in its exemplar school library collection policy (2012, pp. 2–3). Outside New Zealand, support of intellectual freedom in schools is advocated by the American Library Association (Hopkins, n.d.), and, jointly, the ASLA and ALIA (2001).

It is also believed that self-censorship hinders students’ education (Reichman, 2001; Williams & Dillon, 1994). This is not just an abstract, ideological view; repressing material with violent themes or extreme political views can make it difficult to provide accurate information about world history and wars, for instance (Reichman, 2001, p. 4; Scales, 2010). Furthermore, as Reichman points out, keeping controversial materials in the open facilitates of balanced discussions about them, and allows for alternative viewpoints to be presented alongside them. Even if extreme views are not allowed on school grounds, students who are easily influenced might come across them in other places — in a contexts where they only hear the extremist perspective, rather than counter-arguments and alternatives (Reichman, 2001, p. 29). Finally, works which attract self-censorship may turn out to be the very same works that spark a hunger for reading and learning in students who have otherwise been uninterested in school and books (Von Drasek, 2007). Sometimes, this is precisely because of a work’s controversial elements (Freedman & Johnson, 2000, p. 357).

It has also been argued that self-censorship can hinders students’ emotional and (non-academic) intellectual growth. Freedman and Johnson argue that being able to access a wide variety of materials supports students with their efforts to define and redefine themselves (2000, p. 357). They, and others, also argue that providing students with wide range of material, some of it controversial, supports them in coming to an understanding of the world and of social issues (Freedman & Johnson, 2000, pp. 357–358; McClure, 1995, p. 24; R. J. Morris, 2013; Williams & Dillon, 1994, para. 49-50). This might help them deal with experiences they are currently grappling with alone, much to the benefit of their mental and emotional health (Garry, 2014; R. J. Morris, 2013;

Whelan, 2009a). It can also prepare them for issues which they have not yet encountered — and as McClure quips, there are some cases where “imagination [is] probably preferable to a street-corner encounter” (1995, p. 24).

### Measuring self-censorship

A common refrain in the literature is that self-censorship is rarely measured, and most evidence of it is anecdotal (French, 2003, pp. 25, 28; Reichman, 2001, p. 10; Whelan, 2009a, p. 27). Whelan suggests that this is because few are willing to self-report self-censorship, let alone discuss or monitor it (Whelan, 2009a, p. 27). Another possible contributing factor is that the conflation of self-censorship and ordinary collection management makes it difficult to discuss even when people are willing (French, 2003, p. 28; McClure, 1995, pp. 17–18).

The latter point may affect the findings of those studies that have actually attempted to gather data about self-censorship, but their findings have supported the anecdotal evidence nonetheless. In 1982, Beineke found that a majority of Indianan high school librarians believed that censorship was a problem, and that all but 3% reported that they themselves had practiced self-censorship (1982). In 1994, Jenkinson’s participants made it clear to him that self-censorship was prevalent throughout selection and deselection — even though he had only attempted to measure general censorship’s effects on deselection (1994, p. 22). In what is possibly the most widespread study of self-censorship in school libraries, the *School Library Journal’s* self-censorship survey found that factors which motivate self-censorship played a part in the selection decisions of up to 70% of respondents (Whelan, 2009b).

Coley described an alternative method of measuring self-censorship, which relies on collection analysis and comparison to lists of books which are likely to be censored or self-censored (2002). Little literature has taken up his methodology, but Garry used collection analysis and comparison to a literature list alongside interviews with librarians in her survey of LGBTQ resources in the public school libraries of Ohio. She found that holdings of these resources were severely limited, and described this as an indication of widespread self-censorship of such resources in school libraries in this area (2014).

## Why does self-censorship occur?

Works are frequently subject to self-censorship for the same reasons that groups outside the library may attempt to subject them to censorship: in short, because they include themes and content that are thought to be morally or otherwise objectionable, especially in the light of the fact that students can access them (McClure, 1995; Reichman, 2001, p. 3). “Objectionable” is a very wide scope. Content of a violent or sexual nature is commonly objected to (McClure, 1995; Whelan, 2009a, 2009b; Williams & Dillon, 1994), but as Schrader points out (1996, “Reader Response Theory”), just about anything else can be considered objectionable. One notable example which McClure shared was a fiction book which was challenged because somebody objected to its “negative” portrayal of hunters — in the eyes of the story’s protagonist, a rabbit (1995, pp. 12–13). Williams and Dillon reported that a number of people objected to books that used “politically correct” terminology (in some cases because it was felt that their authors were committing censorship through their wording choices), while others were unhappy that a book that depicted women using weapons in self-defence (1994, para. 16-25, 45).

However, school librarians may self-censor even when they do not object to such content themselves. A more frequent reason for self-censorship is the fear of others’ objections. While it is not insignificant the *School Library Journal* survey found that 23% of respondents had decided not to purchase a book because of their own personal views, a full 70% reported that their decisions not to purchase books were influenced by possible reactions from parents, while 29% were concerned about the possible reactions of school administrators (Whelan, 2009b). Hill argued that the fear of challenges and complaints is so significant that it is the key feature separating self-censorship from the general idea of censorship, and finds that self-censorship is especially pronounced when librarians hear of challenges received by the peers at other institutions (2010, pp. 9–10). Many others have reported that fear of an external reaction is a major characteristic of self-censorship (Beineke, 1982, p. 639; Freedman & Johnson, 2000; French, 2003, pp. 26–27; Jenkinson, 1994, para. 22; McClure, 1995, p. 17; Reichman, 2001, p. 22; Schrader, 1996; Whelan, 2009a, p. 28; Williams & Dillon, 1994, para. 40).

In addition to the threat of receiving challenges, Garry found that a general lack of community support for particular resources was a major factor in school librarians' self-censorship of those materials; she also noted that an apparent lack of support might only be perceived as such due to a vocal minority (Garry, 2014, p. 52). The *School Library Journal's* survey (cited in Whelan, 2009b) and McNicol (McNicol, 2016, p. 331) also found that school librarians may self-censor out of a general feeling of community opposition rather than because of the possibility of challenges specifically. In other cases, the a librarian may not anticipate any particular challenge or reaction, but will self-censor out of a general feeling that community opinion opposes particular material (Garry, 2014; McNicol, 2016, p. 331; Whelan, 2009b).

### **Mitigating self-censorship**

The literature almost unanimously advocates one particular strategy to mitigate self-censorship: It is reasoned that if self-censorship is mostly driven by conflict avoidance, and partially by librarians' subjective moral viewpoints, then it can be mitigated if school libraries adopt formal collection management policies which feature clear, concrete and objective criteria for selection and deselection, contain a statement in favour of intellectual freedom, and lay out a formal process for dealing with challenges to material. As already discussed above, it is felt that concrete and objective selection criteria would mitigate subjectivity, while the entire document would provide a sense of security to any librarians who are anxious about the possibility of receiving a challenge: Concrete criteria, and the inclusion of statements about intellectual freedom, would give librarians the grounds to justify their decisions; a formal process for challenges may reduce anxiety by making it clear exactly how librarians are meant to cope with receiving a complaint (Freedman & Johnson, 2000, p. 366; French, 2003, pp. 25, 28; Garry, 2014; Hill, 2010, pp. 11–12; Imrich, 2007, p. 23; McClure, 1995, pp. 20–21; McNicol, 2016; B. J. Morris, 2010, pp. 246–247, 263; Reichman, 2001, pp. 23, 80; Schrader, 1996, "Alternatives to Censorproofing", para. 2; Tilke, 2002, pp. 90, 177, 269–270; Von Drasek, 2007, p. 67).

However, others have suggested that, while adopting a formal collection management policy is certainly advisable, it may not be as effective at mitigating self-censorship as others have made it out to be. Hielsberg argued that intellectual freedom is an active practice, and that self-censorship will not be reduced simply by adopting a

written statement about it (1994, p. 770). Williams and Dillon agreed: they found that formally committing to intellectual freedom does not actually lead to less self-censorship in practice. This was partly due to the conflation of self-censorship and selection — even robust selection policies must necessarily allow material to be rejected, which is, in turn, enough to allow self-censorship (1994 para. 55-56, 63). Similarly, Nieuwoudt’s study of self-censorship in public libraries in New Zealand found that some librarians self-censored despite self-reporting that they are in favour of intellectual freedom; others believed that censorship was necessary and ethically sound, regardless of their organisations’ commitments to intellectual freedom (2012, pp. 47–49). More recently, McNicol reported that even when librarians express support for intellectual freedom and objective, diverse collection management in theory – which they often do – it does not necessarily follow that this will be reflected in their practice (2016).

In the case of the issue of labelling books, Hielsberg does not suggest a solution (but rather seems to oppose their use in general) (1994). Hunt and Wachsmann do not suggest a solution as such, but note that labels can be used effectively rather than restrictively, informing choice rather than preventing it, particularly if students are taught that the labels are a tool, rather than rules (2012).

### Research objectives

The objective of the study was to explore collection management in high school libraries in New Zealand, and to examine self-censorship in the broader context of everyday practices. It was hoped that the study would thereby provide further evidence and understanding of the factors which are currently “commonly understood” to cause school librarians to self-censor, within the little-studied context of New Zealand in particular. Another aim was to shed light on the extent to which the self-censorship really is inversely correlated with producing statements on intellectual freedom, formal challenge procedures, and formal collection management policies.

### Research questions

The primary research question was: *What factors affect self-censorship in the high school libraries of New Zealand?*

This was divided into the following secondary questions: *What are librarians' self-reported reasons not to purchase particular material?*

*To what extent (if any) does the threat of challenges to library materials encourage self-censorship?*

*What sort of relationship (if any) exists between self-censorship and the adoption, or lack, of formal processes to deal with challenges?*

*What sort of relationship (if any) exists between self-censorship and the adoption, or lack, of objective selection and deselection criteria?*

*What effects (if any) does the formal adoption of statements on intellectual freedom, have on self-censorship?*

## Methodology

Since the study's focus was on in-depth analysis and description, it focussed on qualitative data. Data was gathered through one-on-one interviews that were structured after a list of questions which was more a guide than a set format. The initial set of questions was modified after feedback from pilot interviews, and an initial actual interview — see appendices.

Focus groups were the first format considered, but it was concerning that focus groups have been found to lead participants to alter the presentation of their opinions (and hold back on others altogether) to suit the group (Dawson, 2007, p. 31; Powell & Connaway, 2004, pp. 154–155). In light of this, and Whelan's finding that that few are willing to admit to self-censorship (2009a, p. 27), it was felt that focus groups would have risked participants suppressing their real actions and opinions.

One-on-one interviews, on the other hand, were appropriate to the scope of the study, and it was hoped that they would mitigate any reticence brought on by the desire to preserve one's image, though it probably could not be eliminated altogether. The format allowed participants more time to talk about their individual experiences, and the contexts in which they themselves work, which is important for the goals of the study.

Interview questions were be phrased in terms of collection management practice, rather than self-censorship *per se*. Firstly, the study was partly about self-

censorship's place in the context everyday collection management practice, and the influence of the two upon each other. It was also felt that this could lead to more accurate answers because of the aforementioned reticence about self-censorship on one hand, and the possibility that leading with questions about self-censorship could instead over-emphasise it on the other. This is also in response to Powell and Connaway's guidelines for interviews, where they noted that using less emotionally-laden (and implication-charged) phrasing can lead to in better answers (Powell & Connaway, 2004, pp. 135–136).

### Sample population

The sample population would consisted of nine New Zealand high school librarians and media centre managers who had responsibility for selection and deselection decisions (ten was aimed for).

The decision to restrict the sample to high school librarians was made in light of the limited scope and timeframe of an INFO 580 research project. As the age, and maturity and reading levels of students are factors in collection management, including both high schools and primary schools in the sample could have overemphasised these themes in the data if the differences were not accounted for from the study's outset. This would quickly have become cumbersome within the study's relatively small scope. Furthermore, the limited size of the sample – up to ten interviewees – could have meant that a sample which included both primary and high school librarians would have resulted in a poor, over-small sample of both groups, and a data set that did not reflect reality well.

### Data analysis

Data analysis began with the content analysis of interviews. Key themes, patterns and concerns were identified and coded, in order to make the raw data of interviews and their transcripts easier to navigate during in-depth analysis (Goodman, 2011, p. 22; Leedy & Ormrod, 2013, pp. 148–149). Themes were coded on their appearance in the raw data, rather than pre-defined by the research questions. This allowed for preliminary conclusions to be drawn about the commonality of particular themes, and the frequency with which they appeared. As a tool to guide analysis, the frequency with which particular themes and responses appeared as enumerated. However, the main purpose of the content analysis was to explore relationships between the themes that



arose in the data, and to synthesise and describe contextual factors that appeared to affect collection self-censorship, and thus describe the relationship between the self-censor (or alternately, the ideal collection manager) and their context.

### Assumptions and limitations

As mentioned above, this study was limited to high school libraries in New Zealand, because differences in students' age, maturity and reading level could result in significantly different selection practices at different schooling levels (McNicol, 2016, p. 336). Limiting the scope of the study allowed for finer details about collection management to be discussed, and for light to be shed on factors other than a school's overall age range. However, the consequence is that any conclusions drawn in the study may have limited applicability to other levels of schooling, though general principles could apply.

Also as mentioned above, the study did not ask about self-censorship directly as it was assumed that this could lead to less accurate data. Individual participants may have been reticent or over-reported the issue, both of which could be further complicated due to the blurry boundary between self-censorship and general collection management that makes it easier to conflate the two. The study did not ask about self-censorship directly. Therefore, conclusions about self-censorship drawn in the study could be different if different questions had been asked, or different methods applied. This study is only part of a larger picture (or alternatively, only one view of a situation that would look different through a different lens). A more complete picture could be drawn by comparing multiple studies. Some possibilities for further studies are discussed in "Opportunities for further research", below.

For it to be possible to draw any conclusions in the study, it was necessary to assume that participant's answers to questions about their own practice were accurate and complete. In reality they could very well be incomplete, and participants' actual collection management practices could be greatly influenced by factors which they did not think to mention at the time of the interview, did not think to mention, or obliquely mentioned in an implication subsequently missed by the researcher.

Because of the limited sample size of the study and its qualitative nature, conclusions drawn indicate general trends, but may have limited application to any particular, individual school library.

## Findings

### Collection management

The first questions in the interview asked about the factors librarians considered when selecting – including what would prompt them not to purchase a book – and weeding.

When asked about criteria considered during selection, seven of the nine librarians interviewed mentioned the curriculum as a factor. One member of this group said they took a targeted approach to curriculum topics, while another advised that they tried to provide a broad base, covering not just an individual topic but also issues around it.

Six participants said that they discussed lesson plans and collection requirements with teachers. Two of the latter group did not directly mention the curriculum as a factor; since the curriculum is likely to factor into at least one side of discussions with teachers about their lesson plans, there is a strong chance that the curriculum was at least an influence on all nine participants. Two of those who consult with teachers said that discussions took place in advance of the year ahead. One of these two, and another who had not mentioned planning in advance, said that consultation with teachers was an ongoing process throughout the year.

Seven participants mentioned student interest as another criteria during selection. Five of this group stated that they used requests as one way to measure this. One participant recalled a time when they had rejected a request because the book did not meet the library's selection criteria for non-fiction, and characterised this as self-censorship. Another said they had once rejected a book because it was at too young a reading level. A third participant reported they had decided against purchasing a requested book that had been rated R18 by the New Zealand Film and Literature Classification Office, and said that this was not because of the book's content, but because of personal discomfort with the idea of having to keep the book in their office (as New Zealand law does not allow it to be at all accessible by those who are underage) and "play censor" by only allowing students who could prove they were 18 to access it.

Six participants stated that a book's visual appeal to students was another important factor.

Seven participants stated that that non-fiction works had to be reliable sources of information — current, accurate, and authoritative.

Six participants said that selection was influenced by the library's relationship to its community. Four spoke of this in terms of broadening the collection to reflect a wide range of student backgrounds and demographics. Three (including one in the latter group) said that the need to purchase material that the community supported restricted their choices. One said they discussed potentially controversial books with their school pastor before selection decisions, usually with the result that they purchased the book. Similarly, a participant outside this group said they discussed books with their student counsellor if they thought the book's themes could be harmful.

A different member of the group who felt restricted by the library's relationship to its community said that one effect of this was that they rebelled slightly, by deliberately seeking material that would push (if not transgress) the community's boundaries. Another participant outside this group also said they made a point of looking for boundary-pushing material.

Five participants mentioned using reviews as a criterion considered when selecting books. Two of these also stated that they also considered recommendations from authoritative sources in general.

Four of the participants said that the balance of the existing collection was a factor they considered during selection.

Four stated that actively trying to fill gaps in the collection (outside of changes to curriculum requirements) was a goal that influenced selection; half of this group related this to replacing worn books removed during weeding.

Three participants mentioned age-appropriateness as a selection criteria; one said that this made for a wide range of material, while another found that it restricted their decisions.

Two participants stated that reading level was a criterion used during selection. One said they provided a very broad range of reading levels, to reflect the wide range of literacy levels in their school; another said that materials selected had to meet the criteria of an appropriate minimum reading level.

One librarian said they avoided prejudiced and "explicit" books.

When asked about criteria used during weeding, all participants referred to circulation data as a key criterion. Two mentioned their concern that this less useful for non-fiction, as it is more likely to be used within the library without circulating. These two, and one more, said that they used in-library use as a supplement to circulation data. All three mentioned that measuring in-library use was imperfect at best.

Five participants stated that they considered a book's condition when weeding. Two of these stated that this was partly because poor condition affects a book's visual appeal to students, and thus its chances of being used; they (and no others) also said they used visual appeal itself as a weeding criterion. One of the group for whom condition was a factor said if damaged and worn books could not be replaced, they neither repaired nor removed them initially, but instead kept the books in a stack and repaired them books if they were requested, withdrawing them after a set period otherwise.

Four of the participants said that a book's age was a factor during weeding. Three of these, and one more, stated that they considered whether the contents of non-fiction books remained up-to-date and accurate. Two said that they discussed borderline cases with teachers.

One participant said that the need to have a balanced collection affected their weeding decisions, while another stated that they used the selection criteria as a whole as a weeding guide.

### **Collection management policies and formal procedures for challenges**

The following two questions asked whether librarians had a collection management policy, and a procedure for challenges.

Six participants had a collection management policy in place, while three did not. Two of the latter group said that this was because they felt that a policy was unnecessary, because they were experienced enough to know what to do without one.

Three of those who did have a policy went on to say that having one is helpful because it provides clear justification for selection decisions, and that this gives them a sense of security in regards to the possibility of challenges. Another participant with a formal policy said that they had found it a helpful when talking to administration about

the collection — particularly when discussing weeding, which administration had previously resisted on the grounds that it was the loss of an asset.

All three librarians who mentioned having rejected a students' request to purchase had a formal collection management plan. The participant who said they avoided prejudiced and explicit material during selection did not have a collection management plan. There was no correlation between the presence of a collection management policy and any other point mentioned by the participants. Every other factor in selection and deselection spoken about by more than one participant was mentioned by at least one participant from each group.

One participant mentioned her concern that others might make ad-hoc gut decisions when selecting and weeding, rather than referring to a specific plan, which could and would result in an unbalanced collection. Two others did indeed mention making gut decisions, but specifically about whether a book would be interesting and visually appealing to students.

Six librarians had a policy for formal challenges in place. This included five of the six who had a formal collection management policy, and one of those without. Three librarians (including one of those who did have a collection management policy) did not have a process for challenges, but each member of this group stated their confidence in their ability to handle a challenge regardless. As with the presence of a collection management policy, the presence or lack of a challenge procedure was not strongly correlated with any of the selection or weeding criteria mentioned by the interviewees.

### **Possible challenges as a selection factor**

The next question asked whether the possibility of receiving challenges affected selection decisions.

Eight participants answered in the negative. Five of these reported that this was partly because they were comfortable with their ability to justify their selection decisions (they were a mixed group of those with and without collection management policies). One of these added that a good relationship with, and support from, the school's administration added to their feeling of security about this issue. Another felt that challenges were a bigger issue with curriculum material than with library material.

The one participant who did report that the possibility of challenges was a selection factor was one of the three who had said that they felt the library's relationship with the community restricted selection decisions. They also had both a collection management policy and process for challenges in place.

However, they stated that this was only a minor factor, mainly related to graphic novels, which made violent content very accessible. Otherwise, they had found that teaching students self-regulation had largely mitigated the possibility of challenges as a factor in selection. Two other librarians reported that their belief in their students' ability to self-regulate was one of the reasons why they did not feel potential challenges were a selection factor.

The study did not set out to address the issue of book labelling, but when asked about challenges as a selection factor, three librarians reported that they provided content warnings or recommended year levels for particular books, but that they did not enforce the recommendations. A fourth librarian said that they had labels printed, but had not yet seen fit to use them.

### **Statements on intellectual freedom**

The following question asked whether librarians had adopted statements on intellectual freedom.

Two participants had adopted such statements, which were listed in their respective collection management policies. It was one of these participants who had described their rejection of a request (on the grounds of non-fiction selection criteria) as self-censorship. Neither librarian with a statement on intellectual freedom felt restricted by the library's relationship to the community. The presence of a statement on intellectual freedom was not correlated with any other theme.

### **Author demographics**

The final question of the interview asked whether an author's demographics (such as race or gender) or their political views played a part in selection decisions.

Two participants said that demographic factors such as an author's race or gender played a part in their selection decisions; both stated that this was purely because they made a conscious effort to develop a collection which each student could see themselves reflected in. There was a more even split over whether an author's

political perspective was a factor in selection and deselection: four answered in the negative, while five said it was a factor. As with the question of author demographics, all who said it was a factor added that this was because they had to ensure that the collection provide a wide, balanced spectrum of opinions. Three said they recalled cases where they removed or did not acquire material that had a strong political perspective. In one case, no material presented the opposite argument, so balanced material that presented both perspectives was chosen instead. In the other two cases, the material's politics were coincidental: in the first, the books were outdated regardless, and replaced with material that was more up-to-date; in the second, a particular set of donated material had so many inaccuracies and outright fabrications that teaching staff felt that this could harm students' academic success.

## Discussion

To briefly answer the research questions: There is very little evidence of a relationship between self-censorship and the presence or lack of collection management policies, formal procedures for challenged material, and statements on intellectual freedom; the possibility of challenges to material does appear to be a minor factor encouraging self-censorship. Librarians' other self-reported reasons not to purchase material include a lack of student interest; a lack of visual appeal; factual inaccuracies; a lack of relevancy to the current curriculum; prejudiced or explicit content; a lack of community support for the material; and the librarian's discomfiture at "playing censor" with age-rated works. The possibility of challenges; prejudiced and explicit content; and a perceived lack of community support for particular material were the major factors that emerged as influences on behaviour that can be described as self-censorship.

The high school librarians interviewed for this study all largely followed the basics of solid school library collection management: student interests and curriculum needs are paramount for selection. Student interests are often expounded upon by soliciting requests while further effort to support curriculum needs is frequently made by consulting with teachers. The majority of interviewees mentioned that they ensure that items in the collection remain up-to-date and accurate. Visual appeal is not frequently mentioned in the literature. However, most librarians focussed on visual appeal as much as they did the appeal of a book's content, and weeded out items that did not have good visual appeal, after finding that they did not issue well. Some

mentioned that no matter how well-reviewed books are, a good-looking cover is one of the most reliable ways to excite students' interests. Another librarian stated they had found that no matter how "good" a book was, it would never be used if its cover was appealing.

Weeding was largely informed by circulation data, in-library use where this doesn't suffice, and the requirement keeping the collection current and accurate. Condition is another factor.

Most librarians said that they actively attempted to build a collection that was balanced and presented a wide range of opinions, which is certainly one of the ideals in the literature (ASLA & ALIA, 2001; Bishop, 2007, pp. 170–171; B. J. Morris, 2010, p. 253; Stephens & Franklin, 2012, p. 2). Bishop would presumably be pleased with the one librarian who mentioned that they maintained awareness of her own biases and the fact that being truly objective is impossible, which mirrors his suggestions (2007, p. 170).

Overall, self-censorship did not appear to be as widespread in New Zealand's high school libraries as the literature makes it out to be in America. Four in this study's nine reported behaviour which could be described as self-censorship in the terms laid out above. This is about 44%, as opposed to the 70-87% cited in Whelan (2009b) — though the *School Library Journal's* survey was not limited to high schools, unlike this study, so this comparison can only go so far even before the difficulty of measuring self-censorship is taken into account.

The only direct mention of librarian self-censorship in the study echoed Williams and Dillon, who found that (what was, in their opinion) ordinarily justifiable collection management practice was sometimes labelled as self-censorship (1994, para.41-42). One librarian, who mentioned that she had self-censored in not meeting a student request, said that this was done because the requested book had not met the library's (positive) selection criteria for non-fiction. While it certainly could be argued that not denying student requests is not ideal – requested books have demonstrably met the criteria of student interest, at the very least – it is hard to reconcile her description with the definitions of self-censorship that centre on morality-based regulation of content, negative selection criteria, and fears of receiving challenges.



Much of the literature about self-censorship suggests mitigating or outright preventing it by adopting a formalised collection management policy and procedure for challenged material, with the idea that (when the policy is put together well) this both makes collection management objective and provides a sense of security in the face of possible challenges. This is partly vindicated by the three librarians who said that one of the reasons they found a collection management policy helpful was that it made it easier to justify selection decisions, which in turn provides solid grounds against challenges. However, it cannot be assumed that any of these librarians would otherwise be self-censoring out of a fear of receiving challenges: All three librarians who did not have a collection management policy or a procedure for challenges reported confidence in their own ability to handle challenges; the only librarian who did report that potential challenges were a factor during selection had both a collection management policy and procedure for challenges. This reflects Williams and Dillon's suggestion that adopting such policies and procedures may not actually reduce self-censorship in practice (1994), and Hielsberg's remark that intellectual freedom requires more than a collection policy, and censorship is inevitable (1994).

However, the fact that this was just one of the librarians involved in the study suggests that the issue of confidence in the face of challenges is less prevalent in the New Zealand high school library environment than it has been made out to be in the school libraries of the United States.

Another librarian reported that one of the reasons why they did not worry about potential challenges during selection was that they felt supported by the school's administration. This is mirrored in literature which found that lack of support from administration increases self-censorship, and that greater support could have the opposite effect (Freedman & Johnson, 2000, pp. 200, 357; French, 2003; Garry, 2014, pp. 52–53; Whelan, 2009a, 2009b). However, it is interesting to note that feeling supported by administration was reported to provide confidence less often than having a collection management policy (though several librarians reported their self-confidence without elaborating). It is also interesting that feeling unsupported by school administration was not mentioned by any of the librarians who described practices similar to self-censorship. Relevant data about this issue could be missing, since this study did not directly address support from school administration, or the lack thereof,

but findings seem to suggest that this is not an especially prevalent issue, at least in the New Zealand high school environment.

Interestingly, one of the reasons why most librarians felt that potential challenges were not an issue for selection – the ability of children and young teenagers to self-regulate – is echoed by the New Zealand Office of Film and Literature Classification in their decision not to mandate an age rating for E.L. James's *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Despite the erotic nature of the book, the officials decided that most children would realise that it was clearly intended for adults and take no interest in it, in part because of its cover and size. If any younger readers picked the book up regardless, it was felt that they would soon put it down again (before reaching any of the erotic passages in the book) because the author's mature, slow-paced writing style — and that, if it came down to it, parents and caregivers (rather than librarians and booksellers) could and would prevent children from reading the book (Baker, 2015, pp. 2–3).

While the study was not intended to address book labelling, participants occasionally mentioned labels for recommended ages, content warnings, or genre when asked about challenges. Those who mentioned age labels or content warnings universally stated that these were guidelines, not rules which had to be enforced, and that they were happy to see students reading outside of their age group — which meets the Hunt and Wachsmann's suggestions for effective rather than restrictive label use (2012). Additionally, the approach to labelling was universally to label only some items with a suggested age or age group, rather than to label the entire collection. This mitigates any concerns of embarrassing students out of choosing particular books, and indicates that overall use of labelling was limited, even though about half of the research sample mentioned age labels. In the case of one librarian, even labelling only select items was merely hypothetical: they had had labels printed, in case they were required as a compromise after a challenge, but had never yet used them. This demonstrates Hunt and Wachsmann's thoughts about the when a labelling system can be helpful more than it illustrates Hielsberg's concerns (1994). Additionally, if insecurity about challenges is a factor which encourages self-censorship, the ability to use labels as a response seems like a useful tool. A labelled library book is still available, which is clearly preferable if the alternative (in the mind of a hypothetical librarian) is not to purchase it at all.

While acknowledging the community and building it with them in mind is essential collection management practice (Bishop, 2007; B. J. Morris, 2010, pp. 239–240; National Library of New Zealand, n.d.; Stephens & Franklin, 2012, pp. 19–20), it is important not to avoid material merely because the community disagrees with it (ASLA & ALIA, 2001; Stephens & Franklin, 2012, pp. 33–34), which has been seen to happen (Garry, 2014; McNicol, 2016; Reichman, 2001; Whelan, 2009a, 2009b; Williams & Dillon, 1994). In this study, while four librarians followed good practice in broadening their collection with their community in mind, three librarians did report that they felt the need to limit their collection in cases where they felt the community would be unhappy with certain choices. However, while Garry was particularly concerned with the self-censorship of LGBTQ material for this reason (2014), most librarians in this study, including those who felt restricted by the library's relationship to the community and its values, mentioned that they had made a conscious effort to include a range of LGBTQ material in order to reflect their students and support their students' needs.

However, responses to the need to reflect the community are multifaceted and cannot be neatly divided into good and bad (or “balanced” and “unbalanced”). Literature about collection management is quite clear about the need to keep a finger on the pulse of the wider community around the school, and within this study, one of the librarians who had mentioned that she restricted her choices in light of the library's relationship to the community talked at greater length about the ways in which the community had broadened their horizons, and the collection.

Even when the library's relationship to the community leads a librarian to self-censor, this seems to be a minor factor in the grand scheme of a librarian's collection management practice. All librarians, including the three who felt restrained due to the community and the one who restricted their selection practice due to potential challenges, reported that if an author's demographic groups and political views were at all considered during selection, it was to ensure that the collection presented a wide, balanced range of viewpoints and perspectives. In one case this did involve the rejection of material which was dedicated to one extreme, but this was because it could not be balanced by material which was dedicated to the other; instead, material with a more objective overview of both perspectives was used. In two further cases, librarians recalled rejecting material with a strong political perspective, but in these cases the

material's politics were incidental, as the material did not meet other selection criteria: in one case, educational needs could be better met by weeding out outdated books (which happened to have a particular stance) and replacing it with material which was more up-to-date; in the other, the material up for consideration was poorly-written and, in the opinion of teachers in the school, factually inaccurate to the point where it could harm students' academic success.

Reichmann writes that he understands the impulse to remove or never accept "extremist" material in order to protect students, and to avoid being misconstrued as condoning the material, but argues that discussing these views with students in a structured environment, and ensuring that they also encounter alternative viewpoints, is a better approach which leads to better-informed students (2001, p. 29). He would be encouraged by the attitude taken by most of the interviewees, who stated that they were comfortable with presenting extreme views in the context of a balanced collection which made multiple perspectives available. Some stated that they would deliberately guide students towards a range of perspectives on one topic (particularly if this was required for a class). One librarian directly referred to Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and asserted that including it and similar documents in the collection was not endorsement but rather, in light of its relevance to the history curriculum, education.

One issue which was not described in the literature was age-restricted material. One librarian who declined a request for a book which had been rated R18 by the Classification Office not because of its content, but because of her discomfort at having to keep it behind the counter and "play censor". Declining a request is not ideal selection practice, perhaps, but the legislative environment of New Zealand would certainly make this situation difficult to manage. It is illegal to supply restricted material to underage people, so R18 materials can only be provided to those who can prove they are 18 or older. Some students may not have identification that shows their age, and librarians probably will not have access to administrative student records, so the librarian would potentially be forced to withhold it from many students even if they were the correct age. Furthermore, it is illegal to allow others to supply restricted material to underage people, which makes it illegal for the librarian to allow an 18-year-old student to access the book if there is a chance that this student would allow a student under the age of 18 to use it in turn; this situation could require more constant

monitoring than the librarian could afford the time for (The Government of New Zealand, 1991, §§ 125-130). Combined with the fact that any R18 purchases would have limited utility in a high school library, where the book's legal audience will always be a minority of students, the decision not to purchase such material no matter its other attributes is certainly understandable.

The collection management practice of New Zealand's high school librarians, as reflected by this study's sample, seems to meet a good standard overall. Although four of the nine librarians reported some measure of practice which could be described as self-censorship, this seemed to only be a minor aspect of their practice in each case. Librarians who did have collection management policies and formal procedures for challenges did feel better for them, but those without held up at least as well, and three of those who did have collection management policies and formal procedures for challenges self-censored regardless. The major factors causing self-censorship were the anticipation of potential challenges and a reluctance to contravene community values. It is difficult to see how adopting a collection management policy could prevent the latter, given that ideal collection management practice addresses the school library's community, and collection management plans must leave room for material to be removed or rejected, which in turn leaves room for situation.

Just as it is impossible for selection choices to be truly objective, it seems likely that entirely preventing self-censorship is an impossible task. Nonetheless, it can be mitigated — not only through the adoption of policy, but through a conscious commitment to robust, objective collection management in practice, and maintaining awareness of one's own biases and cautions in order to better counter them.

### Opportunities for future research

The intentions behind this study did not include examining the ways in which school librarians treat classified material with age restrictions. This was only dealt with after a research participant mentioned it in an interview. There certainly seems to be room for a broader study examining how schools and school librarians manage age-rated material, perhaps with a view towards developing a set of best practices or guidelines that make that management easier.

Self-censorship is notoriously hard to measure, and has hardly been measured in New Zealand, particularly within the context of school libraries. Additionally, it seems

that Coley's suggestion to measure self-censorship through analysing collections and comparing them to lists of books which are likely to be seen as objectionable (2002) has not been widely acted upon. Quantifying self-censorship was not one of the primary goals of this study, but measuring self-censorship with Coley's method – particularly in a New Zealand context – could be illuminating, especially when compared to existing literature. This could even be an interesting alternative approach to studying collection management practice in general.

Garry (2014) found that school librarians are likely to self-censor if they feel their communities do not support particular material; this study found that some school librarians were indeed concerned about a lack of community support for particular materials. However, while Garry found that this resulted in the self-censorship of LGBTQ material above and beyond any other material that could be seen as objective, this study found no evidence to suggest self-censorship of LGBTQ material. It could prove rewarding to explore what specific themes and types of material New Zealand school communities lack support for, and extent to which this is reflected in their school librarian's collection management practice.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Initial interview guide

Could you describe the sort of criteria you look for when you're selecting or weeding books — the reasons why you'd purchase a book or not, or remove a book from the library?

Are any of those criteria or processes formalised at all?

Do you have any sort of formal processes for challenges to library material, or complaints about it?

*(If not covered by previous answers)* Does the possibility that material might be challenged or prompt complaints play a part in your selection and deselection decisions?

Has the library or the school adopted any sort of statement on the intellectual freedom of its students?

How important is the idea of intellectual freedom to you personally?

*(if applicable and not already covered)* To what extent do you think it applies to your students?

Is there any extent to which things like an author's race, gender, sexuality or political views affect your decisions to purchase and not to purchase material?

## Appendix B: Modified interview guide

Could you describe the sort of criteria you look for when you're selecting book — the reasons why you'd purchase a book or not?

What about when you're weeding?

Are any of those criteria or processes formalised at all?

Do you have any sort of formal processes for challenges to or complaints about library material?

*(If not covered by previous answers)* Does the possibility that material might be challenged or prompt complaints play a part in your selection and deselection decisions?

Has the library or the school adopted any sort of statement on the intellectual or academic freedom of its students?

Is there any extent to which things like an author's race, gender, or political views affect your decisions to purchase or not to purchase material?

## Appendix C: Participant information sheet



### SCHOOL OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

TE KURA TIAKI, WHAKAWHITI KŌRERO

LEVEL 5, RUTHERFORD HOUSE, PIPITEA CAMPUS, 23 LAMBTON QUAY, WELLINGTON

PO Box 600, Wellington 6140, New Zealand

Phone +64-4-463 5103 Fax +64-4-463 5446 Email [sim@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:sim@vuw.ac.nz) Website [www.victoria.ac.nz/sim](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/sim)

## Participant Information Sheet

**Research Project Title: High school library selection and deselection in context**

**Researcher: Vince Timmo, School of Information Management, Victoria University of Wellington**

As part of the completion of my Master of Information Studies, this study is designed to analyse and describe factors which affect selection and deselection (i.e. weeding) in New Zealand's high school libraries. Authors and scholars advocate particular best practices for collection management fairly consistently, but there is growing evidence that the impact of some of these is understated. The situation needs to be explored further, however. Additionally, the ways in which particular factors of a school library's relationship to its broader community influences selection and deselection decisions is underexplored in a New Zealand context.

To this end, the study will be built on interviews about school librarians' own collection management practices, their thoughts and feelings about particular contextual factors and "best practices", and any relationship between the two. Victoria University requires, and has granted, approval from the School's Human Ethics Committee.

I am inviting high school librarians and library and media centre managers, who have responsibility for selection and deselection decisions, to participate in this research. Participants will be asked to take part in a half-hour-long interview. Permission will be asked to record the interview, and a transcript of the interview will be sent to participants for checking.

Participation is voluntary, and you do not have to answer any questions you feel uncomfortable with. You will not be identified personally, nor will the organisation you work for be identified, in any written report produced as a result of this research, including possible publication in academic conferences and journals. All material collected will be kept confidential, and will be viewed only by myself and my supervisor Dr. Philip Calvert. The research report will be submitted for marking to the School of Information Management, and subsequently deposited in the University Library. Should any participant wish to withdraw from the project, they may do so until September 13, 2016, and the data collected up to that point will be destroyed. All data collected from participants will be destroyed within two years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions or would like to receive further information about the project, please contact me at [timmovinc@myvuw.ac.nz](mailto:timmovinc@myvuw.ac.nz) or telephone 0273169696, or you may contact my supervisor Dr. Philip Calvert at [philip.calvert@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:philip.calvert@vuw.ac.nz) or telephone 463-6629.

Vince Timmo



## Appendix D: Participant consent form



**SCHOOL OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT**  
TE KURA TIAKI, WHAKAWHITI KŌRERO  
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### Participant Consent Form

**Research Project Title: High school library selection and deselection in context**

**Researcher: Vince Timmo, School of Information Management, Victoria University of Wellington**

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that I am not required to answer any questions with which I am uncomfortable.

I understand that I may withdraw myself (or any information I have provided) from this project, without having to give reasons, by e-mailing [timmovinc@myvuw.ac.nz](mailto:timmovinc@myvuw.ac.nz) by the 13<sup>th</sup> of September 2016.

I understand that any information I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and their supervisor, the published results will not use my name or the name of the organisation I work for, and that no opinions will be attributed to me in any way that will identify me or my organisation.

I understand that the data I provide will not be used for any other purpose or released to others.

I understand that, if this interview is audio recorded, the recording and transcripts of the interviews will be erased within two years after the conclusion of the project. Furthermore, I will have an opportunity to check the transcripts of the interview.

Please indicate (by ticking the boxes below) which of the following apply:

- I would like to receive a summary of the results of this research when it is completed.
- I agree to this interview being audio recorded.

Signed:

Name of participant:

Date:



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# Employer Information and Permission Form for Staff Participation in Interviews

**Research Project Title: High school library selection and deselection in context**

**Researcher: Vince Timmo, School of Information Management, Victoria University of Wellington**

As part of the completion of my Master of Information Studies, I am completing a study designed to analyse and describe factors which affect selection and deselection (i.e. weeding) in New Zealand's high school libraries. Authors and scholars advocate particular best practices for collection management, but there is growing evidence that the impact of some of these is understated. There is a need for this situation to be further explored. Additionally, the ways in which a school library's relationship to its broader community influences selection and deselection decisions is underexplored in a New Zealand context.

The study will involve interviews with school librarians about their own collection management practices, their thoughts and feelings about particular contextual factors and "best practices", and any relationship between the two. Victoria University requires, and has granted, approval from the School's Human Ethics Committee.

The purpose of this form is to ask school principals for formal permission to interview their staff for this project. In cases where the interview is to take place at the school (according to arrangement), I am also requesting permission to access school grounds.

The interviews will be about a half-hour long. Participants and the school they work for will not be identified in any written report produced as a result of this research, including possible publication in academic conferences and journals. All material collected will be kept confidential, and will be viewed only by myself and my supervisor Dr. Philip Calvert. The research report will be submitted for marking to the School of Information Management, and subsequently deposited in the University Library. Should any participant wish to withdraw from the project, they may do so until September 13, 2016, and the data collected up to that point will be destroyed. All data collected from participants will be destroyed within two years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions or would like to receive further information about the project, please contact me at [timmovinc@myvuw.ac.nz](mailto:timmovinc@myvuw.ac.nz) or telephone 0273169696, or you may contact my supervisor Dr. Philip Calvert at [philip.calvert@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:philip.calvert@vuw.ac.nz) or telephone 463-6629.

## Appendix E: Employer information and permission form



### SCHOOL OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

TE KURA TIAKI, WHAKAWHITI KŌRERO

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If you grant permission for the researcher to interview your staff for the purpose of this project, and access your grounds for the interview if necessary, please complete the form below and return it to [timmovinc@myvuw.ac.nz](mailto:timmovinc@myvuw.ac.nz).

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I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that any information provided by my employee will be kept confidential to the researcher and their supervisor, the published results will not use their name or the name of my organisation, and that no opinions will be attributed to them in any way that will identify them or my organisation.

I give permission for my staff to be interviewed for this project, and for the researcher to access school grounds for the purpose of the interview if necessary, according to arrangement between the researcher and my staff.

- I would like to receive a summary of the results of this research when it is completed.

Signed:

Name:

Date: