Public Abstract

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A Critical Examination of Censorship Practices

Institutionally, public libraries should be dedicated to protecting and promoting intellectual freedom and thereby be fiercely critical of censorship in their institutions. Unfortunately, the Republic of Koreaâ€™s (ROK: also known as South Korea) public libraries are an exception. Despite the international directives of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in their "Public Library Manifesto" and the tenets espoused in the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) "Core Values" proscribing censorship in public libraries, the ROKâ€™s public libraries still restrict the inclusion of certain materials in their collections, limit access to information online via filters and staff monitoring, and restrict assemblage in their institutions' meeting rooms based on ideological purpose.

This study was conducted at a ROK public library. It focused on addressing what censorship was occurring, why censorship occurred, and who was responsible for propagating and implementing the censoring practices.

The findings indicate that (1) the ROKâ€™s public libraries censor various subjects - including but not limited to: sexuality (educational and otherwise), homosexuality, information about North Korea (the DPRK), violence, anti-governmental materials, and political discourse; (2) There are a myriad of reasons why censorship occurs: established ROK law requires it, local governmental entities institute their own restrictive directives upon the public libraries, individual librarian preferences dictate the exclusions, and cultural norms facilitate censorship in public libraries; (3) Adult library users are limited in their ability to participate and sustain the ROKâ€™s democracy because of the censorship in public libraries.