

Public Abstract

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Title:On parents, peers, administrators, and advisers: Developing a system to understand self-censorship of controversial topics in the high school press

This dissertation explores self-censorship among young people, specifically former high school student journalists. This was done to better understand the free speech environment in which school journalists operate.

In carrying out the research, the author also explored how students' perceptions of their parents, their peers, their high school principals, and their journalism teachers affected how they would have felt about publishing stories about controversial topics in the school paper. This was done through a web survey of former high school journalists.

In general, the author found that parents, peers, and advisers influence the degree to which former high school journalists would have been comfortable with publishing about controversial topics. Contrary to what many in the scholastic journalism community tend to believe, there was little evidence of the effect of perceptions of principals on comfort levels.

This research provides academic significance as it furthers theory in communications, First Amendment legal studies, psychology, and newsroom sociology. It also has practical implications in that it can help high school journalism teachers better understand their own influence on their students. It has the potential to provide actionable strategies for scholastic press organizations to further support student free expression.