

ON PARENTS, PEERS, ADMINISTRATORS, AND ADVISERS:
DEVELOPING A SYSTEM TO UNDERSTAND SELF-CENSORSHIP OF
CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS IN THE HIGH SCHOOL PRESS

Adam M. Maksl

Dr. Charles N. Davis, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

Two surveys of young college students ($N_1=134$; $N_2=372$) were used to examine what perceived familial and educational factors influenced former high school journalism students' comfort levels with controversial stories running in the student newspaper. Using theory from developmental psychology, newsroom sociology, communications, and legal studies, this dissertation develops a model for understanding both direct and indirect influences on freedom of expression in the scholastic press. Specifically, results suggest that perceptions of peers' and advisers' comfort with publishing controversial stories influences individual comfort levels. Contrary to suggestions from other scholastic journalism research, former scholastic journalists' perceptions of their principals' opinions were not predictive of individual comfort levels with running controversial stories. Both theoretical and practical implications are discussed.