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Shannon M. Oltmann

ABSTRACT

This research examined the beliefs and actions of US midwestern librarians concerning intellectual freedom and collection development. The results are presented in two complementary articles; the first article provided some background and the results pertaining to intellectual freedom, whereas the second article focuses on the results for collection development questions and concludes with a broader discussion. While the first article focused on intellectual freedom beliefs, the second focuses more on actions that are thought to be influenced by those beliefs. The data were obtained through a survey with a 21.37% response rate. In general, respondents—particularly those with master of library science (MLS) degrees—reported agreement with ALA collection development stances. When asked about purchasing hypothetical items, respondents said they would purchase most of them. This research revealed that the most significant variable across all questions was whether respondents had the MLS degree.

P revious research has examined midwestern librarians' stances on intellectual freedom and censorship (Busha 1972; Oltmann 2016) and reported that a sizeable minority of librarians indicated some tension between their personal and professional beliefs despite professing a strong adherence to official ALA stances (as seen in the Library Bill of Rights [ALA 2006b], the Core Values [ALA 2006a], and the Code of Ethics [ALA 2017]). Some researchers have indicated that between nearly 25% (Moody 2004) and 37% (Harkovitch, Hirst, and Loomis 2003) of surveyed librarians reported conflict between personal and professional values.

Other researchers have also investigated librarians' perspectives on intellectual freedom (e.g., Harkovitch et al. 2003; Moody 2004; Monks, Gaines, and Marineau 2014). Some have reported that relatively few libraries received challenges, but those challenges often resulted in items being removed or relocated (Monks et al. 2014). In Australia, Kim Moody (2004) asked whether librarians would buy hypothetical items (e.g., "a guide to gay parenting") and found

that most items would be purchased by the librarians (other than items that contained instructions for illegal activities, such as bomb making).

Shannon Oltmann (2016) surveyed public librarians in Ohio and nearly 40% reported some tension between personal and professional beliefs. Nonetheless, these librarians indicated that a balanced collection was important for serving their communities. In this study, variables such as the size of a community, the type (rural or urban), and the political leaning of the community were rarely significant across various questions, suggesting that even in small towns and conservative areas, librarians tried to create balanced collections (for a more comprehensive literature review, see Oltmann 2019).

Methods

The survey used in this research project was developed with Qualtrics software and used in Oltmann (2016). By using the same survey, we can better compare the results. The survey was sent out via a recruitment email in fall 2016. This included a link to the online survey, which contained 32 questions, including several open response questions, and took approximately 15–25 minutes to complete. It was designed to not collect IP addresses to ensure confidentiality.

This survey was sent to public library directors in nine midwestern states: Indiana, Iowa, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, North Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas. Of the 3,018 possible respondents, 645 completed at least some portion of the survey, for a response rate of 21.37%. Demographic information for each respondent included gender, age, MLS degree, and work duration. Information about each respondent's community included size of community; whether the community was rural, town, suburb, or city; and the perceived political leaning of the community. These characteristics were used in the analysis of questions for this survey.

Data were analyzed statistically to determine if the findings were the result of mere chance or actual correlations. When statistical significance is reported, it means that the relationship is unlikely to occur due to mere chance; in fact, for statistically significant findings reported in this research, there is a 95% probability that the items are correlated systematically as opposed to by chance (because we use $p = .05$ as the level of significance). Statistics were computed using chi-square tests for nominal variables and *t*-tests for comparing the means of a normally distributed interval dependent variable for two independent groups.

Results

This article describes the results of the survey pertaining to collection development; questions pertaining more to intellectual freedom are discussed in the previous article (Oltmann 2019). In this section, we discuss collection development processes, general statements about collection development, pressure felt by librarians, and the purchasing of hypothetical items.

Collection Development Processes

Respondents explained that they used a variety of tools for material selection for their libraries (see table 1). The most common resources used were library vendor catalogs (78.9%), internet reviews (75.3%), and industry review journals (69.7%). Respondents also indicated they considered independent publishers, either through review journals (30.2%) or direct contact (17.7%). Finally, about a quarter of respondents (25.7%) reported maintaining contact with authors.

More than 200 respondents left comments for the "other" category, indicating that librarians rely on a wide array of methods and tools. The most common response was "patron requests" and "patron suggestions" with 71 respondents. Some respondents mentioned popular culture resources and best-seller lists.

Just over half of the respondents (54.3%) indicated that their library did not have a specific strategy to ensure their collection was balanced. The remaining 45.7% of respondents, however, provided details about the specific strategies used by their libraries, including having collection development policy, weeding practices, and circulation statistics. However, there were several responses that were unusual and unexpected: "We have migrated from a completely balanced collection as our budget is small and our patrons are very specific about their tastes"; "We ensure a balanced collection by asking some of our patrons to assist us in collection development. None of our staff is comfortable with westerns, so we have two patrons who love that genre assist in selection"; and "We strive to order books that are wholesome [and] of interest to our patrons." These perspectives diverge from the standard approach recommended by the ALA. For example, it is highly problematic to "migrate" away from a balanced collection because the most vocal patrons object. This would likely be considered censorship of the collection. Likewise, selecting "wholesome" books introduces moral subjectivity into the collection development process; this, too, would likely be considered censorship by the ALA.

Table 1. Selection Tools Used in Public Libraries

Tool	n^*	%
Library vendor catalogs	463	78.9
Internet reviews	442	75.3
Industry review journals	409	69.7
Review journals for independent publishers	177	30.2
Direct contact with authors	151	25.7
Direct contact with independent publishers	104	17.7
Other (please specify)	213	36.3

* Respondents could select more than one selection tool.

Statements about Collection Development

Respondents were asked whether they agreed with several statements about collection development (see table 2). Overall, respondents showed remarkable consistency on these items, with a majority (62% or higher) on every statement. For example, nearly three-fourths agreed that "local community values should be taken into account when selecting materials for public libraries" (73.4%). However, a majority (62.3%) also said that "local community values" should not be the "most important consideration when selecting materials for public libraries," implying that community values should be one consideration but not the deciding factor. Unexpectedly, 73.4% agreed that "library funding bodies (local, state, or federal governments) should have a say in public library acquisitions." It is unclear what sort of "say" the respondents had in mind, but typically libraries are encouraged to make collection development decisions independent of these funding bodies.

These statements were analyzed with a *t*-test with the basic demographic characteristics (gender, LIS degree, years of experience, library size, community size, and political leaning of community). Significant results are reported (see table 3 for detailed statistics). Younger respondents thought materials in opposition to community values should not be purchased. Those who had longer work duration (more than 10 years) were more likely to disagree that funding bodies should have a say in acquisitions.

Table 2. Agreement with Collection Development Statements

	Agree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Disagree	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Library funding bodies (local, state, or federal governments) should have a say in public library acquisitions.	36	6.6	109	20.0	400	73.4
Local community values should be taken into account when selecting materials for public libraries.	401	73.4	92	16.9	53	9.7
Local community values should be the most important consideration when selecting materials for public libraries.	74	13.6	132	24.2	340	62.3
If certain material is in opposition to local community values, it should not be purchased.	18	3.3	91	16.7	436	80.0
Library materials that may offend should be labeled with a warning.	34	6.2	92	16.9	419	76.9
It is appropriate for professional associations (e.g., American Library Association) to provide guidance in collection development.	405	74.2	124	22.71	17	3.0
All public libraries should have a formal collection development policy.	457	83.9	67	12.3	21	3.9

Table 3. Agreement with Collection Development Statements Correlated with Demographic Information

	Age	Gender	MLS	Work Duration	Community Size	Community Type	Community Political Leaning
Library funding bodies (local, state, or federal governments) should have a say in public library acquisitions:							
t- or F-test	$t(484) = -1.925$	$t(61.29) = .614$	$t(484.94) = .517$	$t(410.27) = -3.119$	$F(2, 483) = .327$	$F(3, 481) = .168$	$F(2, 479) = .711$
p	.055	.541	.606	.002*	.721	.918	.492
Local community values should be taken into account when selecting materials for public libraries:							
t- or F-test	$t(485) = -1.913$	$t(63.10) = -.133$	$t(484.65) = -2.214$	$t(449.13) = .549$	$F(2, 484) = 1.153$	$F(3, 482) = 1.697$	$F(2, 480) = 1.104$
p	.056	.894	.027*	.583	.316	.167	.333
Local community values should be the most important consideration when selecting materials for public libraries:							
t- or F-test	$t(485) = 1.285$	$t(67.37) = -1.516$	$t(466.11) = 2.332$	$t(429.56) = -.777$	$F(2, 484) = 4.499$	$F(3, 482) = 1.447$	$F(2, 480) = .597$
p	.199	.134	.020*	.437	.012*	.228	.551

If certain material is in opposition to local community values, it should not be purchased:							
t- or F-test	$t(430.66) = 4.861$	$t(62.78) = -.653$	$t(460.53) = 5.425$	$t(413.95) = .736$	$F(2, 483) = 16.131$	$F(3, 481) = 3.886$	$F(2, 479) = 1.556$
p	.000*	.516	.000*	.462	.000*	.009*	.212
Library materials that may offend should be labeled with a warning:							
t- or F-test	$t(485) = 2.316$	$t(63.54) = -.510$	$t(436.93) = 6.659$	$t(446.85) = -1.330$	$F(2, 484) = 21.565$	$F(3, 482) = 7.202$	$F(2, 480) = 1.296$
p	.21	.612	.000*	.184	.000*	.000*	.274
It is appropriate for professional associations (e.g., American Library Association) to provide guidance in collection development:							
t- or F-test	$t(485) = -2.253$	$t(480) = .635$	$t(486) = -4.530$	$t(485) = -.901$	$F(2, 484) = 7.701$	$F(3, 482) = 2.968$	$F(2, 480) = .898$
p	.25	.525	.000*	.368	.000*	.032*	.408
All public libraries should have a formal collection development policy:							
t- or F-test	$t(484) = -1.639$	$t(479) = .940$	$t(485) = -9.272$	$t(484) = 3.196$	$F(2, 483) = 28.266$	$F(3, 481) = 9.773$	$F(2, 479) = 1.674$
p	.102	.525	.000*	.241	.000*	.000*	.189

* $p < .05$.

Perhaps most interestingly, having an MLS degree was significant for all but one statement. Those respondents with an MLS degree were more likely to disagree that community values should be the most important consideration when selecting materials, that materials in opposition to community values should not be purchased, and that offensive materials should be labeled. Likewise, those with MLS degrees were more likely to agree that community values should be taken into account, that the ALA should provide collection development guidance, and that public libraries should have a collection development policy. Overall, those with MLS degrees were more likely to be aligned with stances taken by the ALA.

In terms of community characteristics, community size was a significant factor for all but two statements and community type was significant for all but three statements. The political leaning of the community was not significant for any of the statements.

Generally, the significant differences were between small and midsize communities (and sometimes large communities). Respondents from small communities were more likely to disagree that local community values should be the most important consideration, that the ALA should provide guidance on collection development, and that libraries need a collection development policy. Small-town residents were more likely to agree that offensive content should be labeled. Respondents from medium and large towns were more likely to strongly disagree that materials in opposition to community values should not be purchased. Overall, those from small communities were somewhat less likely to support ALA positions, though this was not uniform.

When examining type of community, rural areas were a significant factor for four statements (compared with cities, towns, and suburbs). Respondents from rural areas were more likely to agree that material should be labeled and that material in opposition to community values should not be purchased. Rural residents were more likely to select "neither agree nor disagree" concerning ALA guidance and whether libraries should have collection development policies. In summary, rural respondents were somewhat less likely to endorse statements supported by ALA guidance.

Pressure Felt by Librarians

The respondents were next asked whether they faced pressure from within the library or from the broader community to change their collection development—specifically, whether they felt pressure to acquire, withdraw or restrict, label, or relocate materials (see table 4).

More than a quarter of respondents (28.1%) indicated they felt pressure from within the library—from other staff members or the library board—to acquire certain materials. Approximately 14.1% reported pressure from within the library to relocate materials. Many reported that they felt pressure from library boards to acquire certain materials. Several respondents noted that some acquisitions pressure was centered on self-published books.

Table 4. Pressure Felt by Librarians to Take Action on Certain Materials

	Reporting Pressure	
Type of Pressure	*n*	%
Pressure from within the library to:		
Acquire materials	160	28.1
Withdraw or restrict materials	79	14.1
Label materials	73	13.0
Relocate materials	98	17.5
Pressure from the community to:		
Acquire materials	184	32.9
Withdraw or restrict materials	105	19.1
Label materials	72	12.9
Relocate materials	76	13.9

In addition to facing internal pressure, librarians reported facing a good deal of pressure from their communities, with 32% saying they experienced external pressure to acquire certain materials. Approximately 19.1% reported pressure from their community to withdraw or restrict materials.

Twenty-eight comments were about patron requests to acquire certain materials. Many of the comments noted that patron requests were not necessarily perceived as pressure but more as an indication of interest. One respondent discussed how patron requests must be balanced out: "Patron purchase requests actually are generally a positive as they drive our decision making . . . I try to balance said requests by purchasing additional materials that promote alternative views."

It appears that much of the acquisition pressure comes from booksellers: independent book publishers, vendors, small presses, and authors (especially self-published or local writers). Nearly 10% of the comments addressed this pressure.

As noted above, nearly a fifth of respondents experienced external pressure to withdraw materials. One librarian said, "I had a police officer and resident in my community say that he didn't think that city funds should be used for a book called *50 Years of Queer Cinema*." It is unclear if these requests are carried out.

The responses to the non-open-ended questions about pressure to acquire, withdraw or restrict, label, and relocate materials were cross-tabulated with the basic demographic characteristics (age, gender, LIS degree, years of experience, library size, community size, and political leaning of community; see first article for details). As seen in table 5, several attributes were significant across multiple questions. Gender was significant for two questions; in both cases, male respondents were more likely to report pressure from within the library to withdraw or restrict and label materials ($p = .0009$ and $p = .010$, respectively). Those respondents

Table 5. Agreement with Statements about Experiencing Pressure to Acquire, Withdraw, Restrict, Label, and Relocate Materials

	Age	Gender	MLS	Work Duration	Community Size	Community Type	Community Political Leaning
Pressure from library staff/board of trustees to acquire materials:							
χ^2 test	$\chi^2(1) = .003$	$\chi^2(1) = 1.768$	$\chi^2(1) = 1.427$	$\chi^2(1) = 2.624$	$\chi^2(2) = .947$	$\chi^2(3) = 1.904$	$\chi^2(2) = 4.548$
p	8.653	.184	.232	.105	.623	.593	.103
Pressure from library staff/board of trustees to withdraw or restrict materials:							
χ^2 test	$\chi^2(1) = .027$	$\chi^2(1) = 6.811$	$\chi^2(1) = 1.517$	$\chi^2(1) = 1.431$	$\chi^2(2) = 2.122$	$\chi^2(3) = .692$	$\chi^2(2) = 4.438$
p	4.904	.009*	.218	.232	.346	.875	.109
Pressure from library staff/board of trustees to label materials:							
χ^2 test	$\chi^2(1) = .529$	$\chi^2(1) = 6.569$	$\chi^2(1) = 3.848$	$\chi^2(1) = .520$	$\chi^2(2) = 1.137$	$\chi^2(3) = 1.419$	$\chi^2(2) = 1.058$
p	.397	.010*	.050*	.471	.566	.701	.589
Pressure from library staff/board of trustees to relocate materials:							
χ^2 test	$\chi^2(1) = 6.285$	$\chi^2(1) = 1.082$	$\chi^2(1) = 15.240$	$\chi^2(1) = .073$	$\chi^2(2) = 15.720$	$\chi^2(3) = 16.742$	$\chi^2(2) = 1.512$
p	.120	.298	.000*	.786	.000*	.001*	.469

Pressure from people not associated with the library to acquire materials:							
χ² test	χ²(1) = 29.778	χ²(1) = 1.944	χ²(1) = 14.945	χ²(1) = 7.782	χ²(2) = 14.781	χ²(3) = 22.775	χ²(2) = 2.894
p	.000*	.163	.000*	.005*	.001*	.000*	.235
Pressure from people not associated with the library to withdraw or restrict materials:							
χ² test	χ²(1) = 12.802	χ²(1) = 2.828	χ²(1) = 13.476	χ²(1) = 1.024	χ²(2) = 29.181	χ²(3) = 11.545	χ²(2) = .456
p	.000*	.093	.000*	.312	.000*	.009*	.796
Pressure from people not associated with the library to label materials:							
χ² test	χ²(1) = 5.119	χ²(1) = 1.660	χ²(1) = 13.365	χ²(1) = .276	χ²(2) = 13.135	χ²(3) = 14.494	χ²(2) = .211
p	.240	.198	.000*	.599	.001*	.002*	.900
Pressure from people not associated with the library to relocate materials:							
χ² test	χ²(1) = 7.750	χ²(1) = 3.052	χ²(1) = 10.160	χ²(1) = .220	χ²(2) = 23.221	χ²(3) = 20.506	χ²(2) = 1.602
p	.005*	.081	.001*	.639	.000*	.000*	.449

* $p < .05$.

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who have an MLS degree reported more pressure from within the library to label and to relocate materials ($p = .050$ and $p = .000$, respectively.)

In addition, MLS holders reported a stronger likelihood to experience pressure from the community to acquire materials ($p = .000$), to withdraw or restrict materials ($p = .000$), label materials ($p = .000$), and relocate materials ($p = .001$).

Community size and type were also significant variables related to pressure from the community. Respondents from midsize (population 10,000–100,000) and large cities (population over 100,000) were more likely to report pressure from the community to acquire materials ($p = .001$), withdraw materials ($p = .000$), label materials ($p = .001$), and relocate materials ($p = .000$). Respondents from towns and suburbs were more likely to report pressure from their communities to acquire materials ($p = .000$) and label materials ($p = .002$). Respondents from rural areas were more likely to report pressure to withdraw or restrict materials ($p = .009$), while respondents from both rural areas and cities were more likely to be asked to relocate materials ($p = .000$). The political leaning of the community was not significant for any of these questions.

Purchasing Hypothetical Items

Following Moody (2004), respondents were asked about purchasing specific hypothetical items for a library if there were no space or financial constraints (removing two of the concerns raised by respondents in previous questions). Respondents could choose to purchase an item, purchase and label it, purchase it and place it on closed or restricted access, or not purchase it. As shown in table 6, the majority of librarians indicated they would purchase most of these items. Books were generally more likely to be purchased than videos (except for a documentary on the practice of witchcraft). Topics that may be controversial in some communities, such as atheism, homosexuality, transgenderism, and creationism, were selected by a strong majority of respondents (more than 80% for each). Only four items were rejected by a majority of respondents: a book that offers advice about curing people of homosexual tendencies, a documentary about the manufacture and use of narcotics, a video that contains misleading scientific information about global warming, and a video about the Ku Klux Klan produced by the group.

Fewer than 10 respondents would "purchase and restrict access" to any of the materials except two ("a graphic novel that contained some full frontal male and female nudity," restricted by 10, and "a documentary that provides instruction on the manufacture and use of narcotics," restricted by 12). Relatively few would "purchase and label the item so patrons were forewarned about the content" of the items—less than 10% of respondents selected this for any item. In general, if the item was selected to be purchased, the respondents elected to have it in their general collection unrestricted. Items that were somewhat more likely to be labeled (by more than 5% of respondents) included a young adult novel with descriptions of

Table 6. Purchasing Hypothetical Items by Respondents

Item	Purchase		Purchase and Label		Purchase and Restrict Access		Not Purchase	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
The autobiography of an atheist	413	86.6	18	3.8	1	.2	45	9.43
A book that discusses the "coming out" process for homosexual people	412	86.4	18	3.8	4	.8	43	9.0
A guide to gay parenting	411	86.0	12	2.5	2	.4	53	11.1
A book that offers advice about being transgender or genderqueer	402	84.8	18	3.8	4	.8	50	10.6
A nonfiction book that presents the creationist/intelligent design argument	396	83.5	16	3.4	4	.8	58	12.2
A nonfiction book that criticizes the creationist/intelligent design argument	390	82.5	14	3.0	4	.9	65	13.7
A young adult novel with descriptions of child abuse	377	76.9	38	7.8	6	1.2	69	14.1
The autobiography of an al-Qaeda member	372	78.7	19	4.0	1	.2	81	17.1
A documentary video about the practice of witchcraft (Wicca)	370	75.2	26	5.3	5	1.0	91	18.5
A young adult graphic novel that shows people smoking marijuana	367	75.1	29	5.9	1	.2	92	18.8
A nonfiction book critical of the Catholic Church	360	75.6	12	2.5	3	.6	101	21.2
A nonfiction book critical of Islam	356	75.0	15	3.2	3	.6	101	21.3
A nonfiction book that endorsed Scientology	323	68.1	12	2.5	2	.4	137	28.9
A novel that contains graphic descriptions of violence against women	318	64.9	36	7.4	6	1.2	130	26.5
A novel that contains graphic descriptions of violence against Muslims	311	63.1	34	6.9	6	1.2	142	28.8
A novel that depicts Native Americans in a stereotypical way	280	56.1	24	4.8	2	.4	193	38.7
A graphic novel that contained some full frontal male and female nudity	265	54.2	39	8.0	10	2.0	175	35.8
A nonfiction book critical of the generally accepted information about the Jewish Holocaust	245	51.7	16	3.4	3	.6	210	44.3
A book that offers advice about curing people of homosexual tendencies	202	42.8	17	3.6	3	.6	250	53.0
A documentary that provides instruction on the manufacture and use of narcotics	156	31.7	24	4.9	12	2.4	300	61.0
A video that contains misleading scientific statements about global warming	112	22.8	14	2.6	2	.4	363	73.9
A video on the Ku Klux Klan, produced and sold by the Ku Klux Klan	85	17.1	22	4.4	4	.8	386	77.7

Note.—The totals are not the same across all rows because not every respondent answered every question.

child abuse (to be labeled by 7.8% of respondents), a graphic novel that contains some full frontal male and female nudity (8.0%), a novel that contains graphic depictions of violence against women (7.4%), a novel that contains graphic depictions of violence against Muslims (6.9%), a young adult graphic novel that shows people smoking marijuana (5.9%), and a documentary video about witchcraft (Wicca; 5.3%).

When asked to elaborate on these decisions, more than 270 respondents supplied additional comments. Numerous comments indicated the importance of reviews: "All of these items would depend on reviews, quality of information, etc. . . . This is a great example of why libraries don't focus on a general description of an item—we have a number of tools, standards, and evaluation tools to determine whether certain materials are right for our collections." Other respondents reported that patron demand and community interest would be determining factors.

Discussion

This survey examined public librarians' perspectives on intellectual freedom and collection development in several ways and generally found high levels of support for intellectual freedom, as shown through collection development practices. For example, the majority of librarians indicated they would purchase most of the hypothetical items listed in the survey. Items that dealt with potentially controversial topics (e.g., homosexuality, atheism, transgenderism, and creationism) were selected by more than 80% of respondents.

In addition (as discussed in the first article), more than 90% agreed with the ALA Code of Ethics statement on intellectual freedom and with the ALA's statement: "It is the right of every individual to both seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction." Agreement with these statements was so strong that differences could not be calculated for the various demographic factors. However, for several other questions, these factors were significant; the results across multiple questions and both articles are summarized below.

Age

Age was rarely a significant factor across these questions. It was not a significant variable related to tension between one's personal beliefs and intellectual freedom. For three statements about intellectual freedom, younger respondents were more likely to align with ALA stances.

Gender

Gender, likewise, was not often significant for these questions. Regarding pressure faced to acquire, withdraw, label, or relocate materials, male respondents reported more pressure than females for two categories. For the statements about intellectual freedom, males were more likely to agree with the ALA stance on 3 of 11 different statements. Gender was not significantly

related to experiencing tension between one's personal beliefs and intellectual freedom. Any conclusions about gender should be drawn cautiously, as the number of male respondents was relatively low (11.1%).

MLS Degree

Having an MLS (or equivalent) degree was often significant in this survey (across both articles). Across six of the eight possible categories, MLS degree holders reported experiencing more pressure to acquire, withdraw, label, and relocate materials. Fewer degree holders reported tension between personal and professional beliefs compared with those without the degree. Similarly, those with the degree were significantly more likely to be in alignment with the ALA stances as expressed in the statements on intellectual freedom (for 10 of 11 statements). It is likely that training in an MLS program exposes one to the reasoning and purpose behind the ALA stances and thus makes agreement with them more likely. Specifically, most MLS programs in the United States and Canada are accredited by the ALA, which implies that the ALA core beliefs and principles will be foundational in the program's curriculum.

Work Duration

Similar to age and gender, work duration was rarely significant across multiple questions in this survey. In fact, it was significant for only one statement about intellectual freedom.

Community Size

The size of respondents' community was frequently significant across different questions. For example, it was significant for five questions about experiencing pressure to acquire, withdraw, label, and relocate; midsize and larger cities experienced more pressure. The reasons for this are not clear, but perhaps midsize and larger cities have more diverse collections and more diverse patrons, resulting in more potential conflict. Respondents from large cities were less likely to report tension between personal and professional beliefs, and those from small locales were less likely to be in agreement with ALA stances on intellectual freedom (for all but two statements). A cross-tabulation revealed that respondents from midsize and large cities were significantly more likely to have MLS degrees ($\chi^2[2] = 189.66$, $p = .000$), which likely explains this finding.

Community Type

The type of community (rural, town, suburb, or city) was often significant as well. Pressure faced by respondents varied based on type of community but was significant across four questions. City and suburban respondents were significantly less likely to report tension between personal beliefs and intellectual freedom. For statements about intellectual freedom, type of

community was significant for all but three of the statements; generally, rural respondents were less likely to report alignment with ALA stances. Again, a cross-tabulation showed that those respondents from suburbs and cities were significantly more likely to hold MLS degrees ($\chi^2[3] = 89.70$, $p = .000$). Thus, these variations in responses based on community type can likely be explained by MLS degree.

Community Political Leaning

Respondents were asked about the political leaning of their community and could choose liberal, conservative, or neutral/don't know. However, the community political leaning was not significant across any of the questions. Pressure faced by respondents to acquire, withdraw, label, or relocate items did not vary based on their community's political leaning. Tension between respondents' personal beliefs and professional intellectual freedom stances did not vary based on community political leaning. Agreement with intellectual freedom statements did not vary based on community political leaning. In fact, this is the only variable tested in the survey that proved to be not significant for any of the questions. The reasons for this lack of significance are unclear; it seems counterintuitive based on anecdotal reports of more or less permissive communities and perceptions that conservative areas would be less supportive of intellectual freedom. This survey, however, found that librarians from liberal and conservative areas were equally supportive of intellectual freedom.

Summary of Key Findings

From this overview, we can see two important findings. First, holding an MLS degree has a significant impact on one's stance with respect to intellectual freedom. Those respondents who held the degree were more supportive of intellectual freedom and expressed greater support for ALA principles. Second, despite anecdotal reports and common perceptions, support for intellectual freedom did not vary based on the political leaning of respondents' communities. This confirms the preliminary findings of Oltmann (2016); other empirical research has not addressed this question explicitly.

In addition, a third important finding is that more than a third (39.8%) of respondents indicated some tension between their personal and professional stances with respect to intellectual freedom. This result echoes findings from Oltmann (2016) and Moody (2004). Given the foundational importance of intellectual freedom for the library profession, it seems surprising that nearly 40% of respondents indicated some tension. On one hand, this may be an area in which ALA and educators need to conduct continuing education to better explain intellectual freedom and perhaps win over more support. Further research should be conducted to help explain this finding. On the other hand, perhaps this finding indicates that ALA as a bureaucratic organization is out of touch in some ways with its constituent members (see Knox and Oltmann 2018).

Weaknesses and Limitations

This research project has several limitations. First, it was limited to the US Midwest. It may not be generalizable to the rest of the United States or internationally. Second, participation across the Midwest was uneven, with high levels of participation from some states but low participation from other states. It is not known why participation rates varied so much, but it is possible that librarians who do not know or care much about intellectual freedom opted to not participate; this could skew the results.

Another limitation is that definitions and concepts were left up to the respondents. For example, "pressure" faced by librarians was not defined nor were other terms used in the survey. This was done so that respondents could interpret the questions in the way most relevant to them, but it may mean that some respondents interpreted the questions in different ways. However, this sort of approach is fairly common in survey wording.

Finally, as with all quantitative survey research, another limitation is that we do not hear much of the respondents' own voices. Although there were several free-response open-ended questions, most of the questions had a standardized set of responses.

Conclusion

This research project examined the intellectual freedom beliefs and stances of US midwestern librarians through an extensive survey. In general, high levels of support for intellectual freedom were found across most respondents and across multiple questions. Respondents who have an MLS degree were more likely to be in alignment with ALA stances and to support intellectual freedom compared with those without the degree. Despite anecdotal suggestions that the political leaning of a community was likely to influence support for intellectual freedom, that was not found to be the case in this survey. Respondents from liberal and conservative communities were equally likely to support intellectual freedom and to be in alignment with ALA stances. Finally, nearly 40% of respondents indicated tension between their personal beliefs and professional stances on intellectual freedom, a finding replicated from previous studies. This may indicate that more education on ALA intellectual freedom guidelines is needed, which could increase support for the guidelines, or it may indicate that the ALA is out of step with its members. Further qualitative work would shed additional light on these questions.

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