

PRIOR REVIEW IN THE HIGH SCHOOL NEWSPAPER:  
PERCEPTIONS, PRACTICES, AND EFFECTS

by

JOE DENNIS

(Under the Direction of Kent Middleton)

ABSTRACT

The high school newspaper provides an ideal forum for students to develop critical thinking skills, an essential component of education. However, a 1988 Supreme Court ruling in *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier* legalized the practice of prior review, giving high school administrators the right to review student-produced publications before they are released. Administrators who practice prior review fail to recognize the value of high school journalism and its powerful role in the education and development of the student.

Newspaper advisers were invited to complete an online survey regarding the demographics, perceptions, and practices of the newspaper they advise. The results show a strong correlation between prior review and adviser censorship. The adviser's perception on prior review and the newspaper's mission also affects whether their newspaper is subjected to prior review, and if they are likely to censor student content themselves.

INDEX WORDS: Prior review, Censorship, High school newspaper, Critical thinking, Democratic education, *Hazelwood*, High school journalism, Scholastic Journalism, Student publications

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Carla Ayn Dennis, Ph.D. I could not have accomplished this thesis, and likely would not have even attempted graduate school if it were not for her support and encouragement. She was with me every step of the way throughout my graduate career: first encouraging me to go to graduate school despite my reservations, then helping me balance my education with a full-time career and family despite working on her own career and education, and finally providing honest insight and a fresh outsider perspective on this project. Although not officially credited, Carla was the “fourth member” of my thesis committee.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“The entire school is better for having a vehicle of expression, a means to exchange ideas, to raise issues, and even to promote controversy. These lessons of free expression and of a society based on free flow of information are the essence of democracy in the USA. A high school without a newspaper is a poorer school indeed.”

-Al Neuharth (1994)

As founder of the country’s most read newspaper, *USA Today*, it is not surprising that Al Neuharth recognizes the value high school newspapers have in shaping future citizens. By demonstrating the importance of free speech and investigation of important issues, school newspapers help teach the basic elements of democracy and provide a medium to encourage and develop a student’s critical thinking skills (Dvorack, Laim and Dickson, 1994). It is the role of the newspaper adviser to foster this development, teaching the basic elements of journalism and overseeing the production of the newspaper, while providing students the autonomy to develop stories and investigate issues on their own (Greenman, 1991).

Unfortunately, in many high school newspapers, administrators place barriers to the free flow of ideas. A 1988 Supreme Court ruling has legalized the practice of prior review – an act of the school principal or another administrator reviewing and censoring the newspaper before its publication. Prior review has stifled the development of free thought as students and advisers are discouraged from pursuing stories that may be censored (Goodman 2001). By stifling critical thought, educators are stunting the student’s intellectual, social, and moral development (Kammii, 1994). To build a better democracy and to better educate students, administrators must recognize the value of high school journalism and lift any roadblocks to the free student

newspaper. Likewise, advisers must reflect upon their own practices and perceptions and ensure they are giving students the autonomy needed to develop their critical thinking.

The high school newspaper rose to prominence in the early 1900s as schools – in an effort to promote participation in a cooperative democracy – began developing extracurricular programs to provide community-centered activities for its students. Schools across the country developed newspapers along with other democracy-focused extracurricular activities, including student governments and academic clubs. The rise of extracurricular activities was in response to a 1918 National Education Association (NEA) report, Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education that stated “education in a democracy ... should develop in each individual the knowledge, interests, ideals, habits, and powers whereby he will find his place and use that place to shape both himself and society toward ever nobler ends” (p. 110).

Activities were developed to enhance students’ educational experience by promoting school unification and preparing students for participatory in a democracy. The high school newspaper accomplished all these goals, developing English and writing skills, requiring students to work cooperatively and most importantly to administrators at the time, promoting school unity. Many administrators believed that students would develop a sense of loyalty and pride by reading the school newspaper (Spring, 2006). While teaching English, writing and cooperation, the high school newspaper was essentially a public relations tool for the school.

The rise of educational group activities such as the high school newspaper is often attributed to twentieth Century philosopher, educator and psychologist John Dewey, who promoted cooperative learning and community education. Dewey (1926) believed group activities could help develop students’ critical thinking and problem solving skills. The philosophies of Dewey formed the foundation of democratic pedagogy of public education.

Those who endorse democratic education believe that schools serve not only to educate students in the core subjects, but also to prepare them to be active and participatory citizens in American democracy. Democratic pedagogy relies heavily on encouraging students to think critically about relevant issues and empowering them to contribute to their own education. A democratic education encourages free thought among and between students (Dewey, 1926).

Although the rise of student activities such as the high school newspaper promoted cooperation among students, they often failed at enabling students to think critically and contribute substantially to their own education. The fact that the early high school newspaper was seen as a public relations tool for the school illustrates the failure of educators to allow students to investigate issues and develop the critical thinking skills necessary to thrive in a democracy. Many of Dewey's core principles were lost in translation as group activities, including the school newspaper, focused more on conformity and less on intellectual freedom (Spring, 2006).

Without the barrier of being a public relations tool, the high school newspaper provides an opportunity for students to think critically, consider other viewpoints and come to their own conclusion, meeting many of the goals of democratic pedagogy. While teaching basic journalism principles and the importance of a free press, the newspaper should provide an open forum for student discussion (Gathercoal, 2001). An open discussion of issues in the newspaper, rather than a single viewpoint that conforms to the administration's desires, indicates a strong high school newspaper.

Scholastic journalism organizations recognize and reward high school newspapers that demonstrate critical thinking and open discussion. In newspaper evaluation guidebooks used by judges in recognizing quality journalism, scholastic newspaper press associations call for in-

depth, often controversial coverage that requires critical thinking skills. Student consideration of divisive issues allows students not only to express themselves, but also to learn the responsibility associated with free expression and tolerance of other viewpoints (Gathercoal, 2001).

However, a 1988 Supreme Court ruling upholding censorship of a school newspaper struck a blow against developing critical thought through newspaper writing. The Supreme Court ruling in *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier* (1988) gave secondary education administrators authority to censor high school newspapers and even halt publication with “educational justification,” a term not clearly defined by the Court. The *Hazelwood* decision has made it difficult to maintain an autonomous high school press, opening the door for prior review – a practice in which the high school principal or another top-level administrator reviews the newspaper and approves or does not allow its publication. Student Press Law Center director Mark Goodman claims that requests from high school newspaper staffs for legal assistance has risen three-fold since the *Hazelwood* decision, with prior review by the principal the most common form of censorship (Goodman, 2001). The types of stories that are often censored are the ones in which students engage in significant critical thought, with the vast majority of censorship cases occurring when students write investigative stories that may reflect negatively on the school (Johnstone, 1998).

Research has found that the court decision made advisers and principals more supportive of censorship. Research concludes that press freedom is not a reality in most schools and as a result, students losing opportunities to learn about democracy and free speech (Kopenhaver & Click, 2001). Furthermore, research on principal and adviser perceptions on prior review shows that administrators are willing to curb student criticism by preventing publication of “harmful” articles that are critical of school policies or cover controversial topics (Lomicky, 1999).

Although the high school newspaper offers an ideal opportunity to develop critical thinking skills necessary to the development of a student in a democracy, the effects of *Hazelwood* have reverted many high school newspapers to its original primary purpose – as a public relations tool for the school.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Prior review has inhibited the ability of students to learn about principles of democracy, the free press, and to develop critical thinking skills through the high school newspaper. Administrators who practice prior review fail to recognize the value of high school journalism and its powerful role in the education and development of the student. Although several authors have focused on the effects of *Hazelwood* with regard to the restrictions placed on high school publications and the attitudes of the involved parties, scant empirical research is available on how prior review affects the quality of high school journalism, how the threat of prior review affects the journalism adviser's tendency to censor, and in which environments prior review is most common.

### **Purpose of the Study**

An essential goal of education is to develop a student's critical thinking skills (Dewey 192). Educators in a democratic study are obligated to encourage students to develop their own ideas and consider the viewpoints of others in an effort to help develop critical thinking skills (Beane & Apple, 1995). The high school newspaper presents an opportunity for high school students to further their development by considering important and often controversial issues, and sharing diverse viewpoints with fellow students. However, the *Hazelwood* decision granted principals the authority to regulate content, censoring critical thought and in effect, stifling

student development. Studies have shown that the ruling has diminished the ability of the high school press to act freely, with the most common form of censorship being prior review.

The purposes of this study are to (a) assess the perceptions of high school journalism advisers on the newspaper's purpose and prior review; (b) determine the conditions in which prior review is most common; (c) determine if censorship stopped the production of student articles that required significant critical thought; (d) determine how the act of prior review affects the perceived quality of a newspaper; and (e) determine if adviser perceptions of prior review and the newspaper's purpose affects adviser censorship. This study will provide insight into the prevalence of prior review, the settings in which it is most practiced, the effect it has on adviser censorship, the effect it has on journalistic quality, how adviser perceptions affect prior review and censorship, and how censorship inhibits critical thinking. This study will help administrators recognize how the practice of prior review stunts a student's educational development, and will help advisers self-reflect on their own environments and recognize the conditions in which prior review most likely thrives.

### **Research Questions**

The following are the key research questions (RQ) that guide this study:

- RQ 1: How do the means of prior review among non-top award winning high school newspapers compare with the means of prior review among top award-winning newspapers.
- RQ 2: Is there a relationship between prior review and top award-winning newspapers.
- RQ 3: How do the means of adviser censorship in newspapers where prior review is practiced compare with the means of adviser censorship in newspapers where prior review is not practiced.



RQ 4: Is there a relationship between prior review and adviser censorship?

RQ 5: Are the primary reasons given for administrative and adviser censorship related to critical thinking?

RQ 6: Is prior review more common in certain newspaper demographics?

RQ 7: Is there a difference as to the level of prior review and adviser censorship related to certain adviser perceptions regarding the high school newspaper and the act of prior review?

### **Operational Definitions**

#### **Prior Review**

Prior review is a legal practice in which the high school principal or another top-level administrator reviews the student newspaper before its publication. The administrator has the autonomy to approve the newspaper be published without any changes, or may require that content be changed or deleted if it is “inconsistent with its basic educational mission” (*Hazelwood*, 1998). The term “basic educational mission” is not defined by the Supreme Court, and thus may be loosely interpreted by high school administrators responsible for prior review. For the purposes of this study, a newspaper that has encountered prior review in the last three years is categorized as having prior review.

#### **Censorship**

This term refers to the act of an adviser or principal prohibiting publication of a student-produced piece, or prohibiting students from pursuing a story for possible submission to the student newspaper.

### Critical Thinking

Using educational philosophies espoused by Dewey, Piaget and democratic pedagogy, critical thinking involves stimulating student thought with an authentic problem and encouraging the student to freely develop solutions, test his or her ideas through application and discovering the validity of his or her proposed solution (Dewey 192).

### High School Newspaper

This term refers to a school-sponsored newspaper produced by students with the support of the high school. It may be produced in a class or as an extracurricular activity. Also, it may be funded entirely or partially by the school, with remaining production costs offset by the selling of advertising and other fundraising mechanisms.

### Quality Journalism

The National Scholastic Press Association (NSPA), which issues the annual Pacemaker award to the top high school newspapers in the country, states in its guidebook (2001) that “the best newspapers are the ones that pursue the difficult and often most controversial issues” (p. 3). For the purposes of this study, quality journalism implies that students are responsibly pursuing difficult issues in their newspaper.

### Top Award-winning Newspaper

For the purposes of this study, a top award-winning newspaper is a high school newspaper that has received the highest award from a national or regional press association. Generally, the top award from these organizations requires that a newspaper demonstrate coverage of difficult issues that would require students to engage in critical thinking, demonstrating quality journalism. Because standards for state scholastic press associations vary, newspapers that win state awards will not be considered a top award-winning newspaper.

### Newspaper Adviser

The newspaper adviser is a teacher who is appointed by the school to oversee the production of the high school newspaper. The duties and experiences of the newspaper vary widely: some manage every aspect of the newspaper from staffing to editing, while others only oversee administrative aspects. Some have extensive journalism training and others have none.

### **Initial Limitations of the Study**

There are limitations to this study. First, determining that a newspaper produces quality journalism by winning top awards is arbitrary. Defining quality in itself is subjective. Newspapers that may indeed produce quality journalism may not enter competitions. Although an effort has been made to carefully define quality journalism by limiting top award winners to well-established national and regional organizations, judging in all competitions is subjective and judges may have their own interpretation of quality, newspapers that do not produce quality journalism may still be recognized as an award-winning newspaper. A second limitation is targeting only Journalism Education Association (JEA) members for participation in the study. Typically, JEA members are more experienced and may have more administrative support from their school. Focusing only JEA members reduces the number of inexperienced advisers participating in the study. However, since JEA is the only national teacher organization for newspaper advisers, targeting JEA members remains the most efficient way to conduct an analysis of scholastic journalism.

### **Significance of the Study**

There are many reasons to conduct research on prior review in high school journalism. With the advent of national educational law No Child Left Behind, schools emphasize a standardized curriculum and multiple testing throughout a child's school career (Spring, 2006).

For fear of failing to maintain standardized progress – and federal funding – teachers are now being forced to “teach to the test,” forsaking an emphasis on critical thinking and problem solving (Gentry, 2006). If given autonomy by the administration, the high school newspaper can help fill the gap left in the regular classes and provide students an opportunity to develop their critical thinking and problem solving skills. This study aims to add insight as to whether students are being given that opportunity through their newspaper.

### **Chapter Summary**

Coming to prominence in the 1920s as a public relations tool for schools, the high school newspaper now offers an ideal opportunity for the development of students’ critical thinking skills necessary to a vibrant democracy. However, the practice of prior review may inhibit the student’s ability to think freely through their high school newspaper. This study will focus on five main areas: The purposes of this study are to (a) assess the perceptions of high school journalism advisers regarding the newspaper’s purpose and prior review; (b) determine the environments in which prior review is most common; (c) determine if censorship stopped the production of student articles that required significant critical thought; (d) determine how the act of prior review affects the perceived quality of a newspaper; and (e) determine if adviser perceptions of prior review and the newspaper’s purpose affects adviser censorship. By understanding the prevalence of prior review, the conditions in which it is most practiced, the effect it has on an adviser’s tendency to censor, and how prior review affects journalistic quality, administrators and advisers will be able to reflect upon their own practices and contribute to developing students’ critical thinking skills.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### **The Theory of Democratic Education**

John Dewey (1926) believed that education is the only medium that can create citizens in a thriving democracy. Those who endorse democratic education espouse Dewey's belief that schools have the responsibility not only to educate students in the core subjects, but also to prepare them to be active and participatory citizens. It is in the common interest of all citizens to educate and prepare future citizens, thus justifying subsidizing public education with tax money (Gutmann, 1987).

In his 1926 book Democracy and Education, Dewey listed five essential goals of education: continuous activity of student interest and experience, the development of genuine problems within a situation to stimulate student thought, arming students with the information and observations needed to solve problems, encouraging students to suggest and develop solutions for the problem, and allowing the opportunity for the student to test his ideas by application and discover for himself its validity (p. 192). Democratic pedagogy relies heavily on encouraging students to think critically about relevant issues and empowering them to have input into their own education. A democratic education should "construct a course of studies which makes thought a guide of free practice for all" (Dewey 305). Not only does a democratic education encourage diversity of people and thought, but it embraces diversity as a critical element of education. Dewey notes that a democracy is not just a form of government, it is a community of many people and ideals (p. 101). In order to prepare students to enter that

democracy, diversity in schools should be embraced and students are encouraged to work together. Intellectual freedom utilizing the diverse interests and beliefs of students is promoted (p. 357). While some educational methods encourage competition among students through posting grades or academic events, democratic schools foster cooperation and collaboration (Beane & Apple, 1995).

In a democratic school, individual differences among students are respected and students feel that they have value as citizens (Gathercoal, 2001). Furthermore, school rules should be developed to ensure that all traditions and values are respected. A successful democratic school not only helps students develop their own values, but also teaches them respect for the values of others (Gutmann, 1987). Democratic pedagogy does not ignore the fact that most students come to the classroom with ideals and beliefs likely modeled after the morals of their parents. However, to become truly contributing citizens of democracy, they must be able to develop skills necessary to develop their own ideals. Students must be allowed to think critically about authority and personally evaluate societal norms in order to develop their own ideals (Gutmann, 1987).

Democratic pedagogy mirrors the views of early twentieth Century developmental psychologist Jean Piaget. Piaget's theory states that children respond to their environment in two ways: assimilation and accommodation (Hergenhahn, 1976). Assimilation refers to matching what one sees with one's prior experiences. For instance, a young child sees a stranger's car, remembers his parent's car, and cognitively makes the connection that the stranger's car is a car. Accommodation refers to modifying one's internal structures to make way for new cognitive thought. In the car example, the child makes the connection between the cars (assimilation), but then also recognizes the different shape, color and features of the stranger's car

(accommodation). Accommodation is essential in order for intellectual growth to occur (Hergenhahn, 1976).

Piaget (1952) divides child development into four stages: sensorimotor (birth to 2 years), preoperational thinking (2 to 7 years), concrete operations (7 to 11 years), and formal operations (11 years and older). At the formal operations stage – the age of high school students – the child has the ability to think abstractly. He is able to formulate a perspective and consider other insights to reach a conclusion. At this stage, accommodation is critical. For optimal human development, Piaget promotes learning environments that allow changes in cognitive structures, allowing for accommodation to occur (Hergenhahn, 277).

Since high school-aged children have the ability to think abstractly, the most efficient learning environment for development would be one that allows a myriad of ideas, allowing the student the autonomy to consider differing perspectives to formulate his own opinion. This requires presenting problems to students and allowing them to develop solutions on their own, comparing their findings with fellow students (Dembo, 1977). Piaget (1948) writes that students who acquire knowledge through their own investigation – rather than having lessons imposed on them – are more likely to be able to retain that knowledge and learn to build their own ideas. Like democratic pedagogy, Piaget believes that this type of education requires collaboration and exchange between students.

Piaget was critical of the education system of the early twentieth century. Methods such as rote learning restricted a student “from discovering truth for himself” (p. 107). He also criticized the authoritative role teachers were expected to follow, writing that it inhibited student development. “If the only social exchanges that make up the life of the class are those that bind each student individually to a master holding all power, he will not know how to be intellectually

active” (p. 107). Such authoritative rule based on unilateral respect only isolates the student from the school, authority and his thoughts, instead of promoting individual and community thought. Piaget argued that students should not only have a role in their education, but also a say in school regulations and discipline. Such a two-fold approach to education will further develop a mutual respect between the student and the teacher. Just as through rote memorization a student can remember lessons but not understand them, a student may obey the rules but will not understand its significance. Therefore, students should be given a chance to help develop necessary rules in their education (Piaget, 1973).

Dewey (1926) was critical of the American educational system. Dewey was critical of the over-reliance on textbooks in the classroom. Acknowledging that they have some value, Dewey wrote that for full efficiency, schools should allow opportunities for debate and social activities for students to develop their own social sense of place. Dewey wrote that education is conceived in one of two ways: retrospectively or prospectively. A retrospective education works to accommodate the future (students) to the past norms and ideals, while a prospective education utilizes the past as a resource in developing the future. The goal of education should not be to instill historical ideals in students, but rather to encourage students to build on those ideals through their own thoughts.

### **The Lack of Democratic Principles in Modern-Day American Education**

Nearly a century after Dewey and a half-century after Piaget, not much has changed. Beane and Apple (1995) write that modern-day American schools “have been remarkably undemocratic institutions” (p. 12). Rather than fostering cooperation, education has been fosters competition (such as posting grades). Rather than promoting caring for the common good, education emphasizes self-interest based individuality (such as class rankings). Instead of



embracing diversity, education focuses on society's "gifted" (such as standardized tests). And, instead of striving for equal opportunity, education denies equal opportunity (disparity of funding in different school districts). Furthermore, rather than encourage critical thinking, schools often pass on "official or high-status knowledge as concrete fact" through the use of required textbooks (p. 13).

Another area of American schools that stand in conflict with a democratic education and the pedagogy of Piaget are discipline and the development of school rules. Rather than trying to develop skills necessary to a student's development, discipline often focuses on the management of behavior (Butchart, 1998). Discipline creates a learning opportunity for student development. In a democratic school, students should be given an opportunity to debate issues of principle and justice, become comfortable with argument, disagreement and conflict, test competing truth claims, and engage in moral inquiry. However, modern-day schools "abort those skills and propensities, instilling in their place passivity, irrationality, and a tolerance for manipulation" (p. 7).

Not only do modern-day discipline methods forgo an opportunity to educate, they also stifle student development and cause further disruption. Modern-day classrooms usually equate responsibility with obedience. In doing so, student self-expression and individual thought is repressed, causing a sense of insecurity and vulnerability among students. In order to compensate, students either become disruptive to gain attention or become withdrawn, essentially giving up on their abilities (Gathercoal, 2001). Rather than equating responsibility with obedience, in a democratic classroom "responsibility flows from a principled level of thinking where students learn to balance their human rights with the welfare interests of the school community" (p. 17). Rules should have clear reasons and students should be able to

recognize the logic of rules. But clear-cut rules such as “no street shoes on the gym floor” compromise a student’s respect for authority and destroy the credibility of authority. Instead, Gathercoal writes that the “no street shoes” rule could be rephrased to read, “Wear shoes that will not damage the gym floor” (p. 86). By explaining the logical reasons for rules to students, authorities are showing that they trust students to think for themselves. “Rules that respect students’ rights make sense and have a way of empowering everyone” (p. 78).

Implementing a democratic model of education requires two principles: creating democratic structures by which student life is carried out and creating a curriculum that promotes democratic experiences (Beane & Apple, 1995). In a democratic education, all those involved in education – the administrators, teachers, school board, community and students – should have a say in the development of the curriculum and the educational experience. A key aspect of the democratic model is that students contribute to their education. This does not mean students have free reign over the curriculum. Just as any democracy needs good leadership, educators in a democratic school community must ensure to keep the community’s principles strong and viable. However, student ownership is critical to their education and personal development, and high school presents an opportune arena for students to develop the tools necessary to function responsibly (Gathercoal, 2001).

Butchart (1998) writes that modern-day schools are very far from reaching this point, comparing the schools treatment of children to the way a wage labor system treats workers. Schools deny students “control over the pace, direction and quality of their own learning, rationalizing and technicizing the processes of learning, and treating children like expendable factors of production” (p. 8). The educational process is not only undemocratic, but it suffocates the self-motivation of students.

Although democratic pedagogists paint a grim view of the current educational system, many note that change is feasible. Beane and Apple (1995) detail four examples of schools that implemented democratic procedures with successful results. In one example, administrators at Central Park East Secondary School – an alternative high school in East Harlem, New York with a student population comprising 85 percent minority – required students to produce graduation portfolios, highlighting academic and personal accomplishments in 14 areas including core subjects like English and math, but also specialty areas such as a knowledge of social issues and fulfillment of community service. Portfolios were presented and defended to a panel of teachers, who discussed with the students their educational journey. The results were remarkable. More than 90 percent of the school's students went on to college (Beane and Apple, 1995).

Despite the some demonstrated successes, Beane and Apple acknowledge that change in the modern environment is difficult. Because democratic pedagogy involves empowering students, administrators fearing losing control and those who benefit from the inequities of the current system resist change.

As the critics argue that modern-day education promotes acceptance of thought without demur and through rote learning, the cognitive and democratic approach to education promotes critical thinking. Using Piaget's theories of learning in cognitive instructional environments, students are encouraged to use their knowledge, consider alternatives and formulate their own theories – thus having the ability to achieve full development. The teacher serves as more of a facilitator than an instructor. This democratic approach to education fosters autonomy among students as they critically consider issues together, develops conflict management skills as students learn to understand and handle differences of opinion, and allows children to develop strong moral convictions that they internally constructed (Brown, 1997). In education, critical

thinking is the process through which students can fulfill Piaget's necessary step of accommodation.

Developmental theorist Constance Kamii (1993) criticized six national educational goals formulated by President George H.W. Bush and the National Governors Office for their disregard of teaching critical thinking skills in developing educational autonomy. Kamii is critical of the traditional American classrooms, calling them "heteronymous environments where teachers control children and push them through uninspiring textbooks" (p. 674). Critical thinking is essential in fostering the student's intellectual, social, and moral development. One way to promote critical thinking in the high school classroom is allow student discussion of current issues. Exchanging viewpoints "stimulates critical thinking, which leads to a higher level of reasoning" (p. 674).

In an essay written for the International Reading Association – a professional organization that promotes reading and literacy – Jack Nelson (1994) said discussion should center around important, and often controversial, social issues such as abortion, sex, crime, etc. By tackling these issues in the classroom, students learn to interpret data, engage in interviews and surveys, and critically read different viewpoints — all techniques that require critical thinking. Kamii (1994) even asserts that the existence of such controversial issues are symptoms of the current educational system, and fostering student discussion will help eliminate the social ills.

Teachers should have their students evaluate current issues by collecting their own data — whether that is through a class survey or an interview. Although barriers such as censorship exist to the discussion of controversial issues, "it is in the interests of society, schools, and students to foster and protect (academic) freedom as a prerequisite for critical thinking" (Nelson,

1994, p. 132). Not only will encouraging critical thinking promote cognitive development (accommodation), but it will also produce better prepared, autonomous citizens in the American democracy, the goal of democratic education.

In addition to encouraging discussion of current issues, writing is also vital in the development of critical thinking skills. Through creative writing assignments, students are offered opportunities to think for themselves (Kohn, 1993). Former Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching President Ernest Boyer (1983) called writing an “essential skill for self-expression and the means by which critical thinking will be taught” (p. 176). He encourages high school teachers to be thoroughly educated in critical writing, passing on their knowledge to students. Boyer believes that students who do not learn to write and think clearly cannot prepare themselves well for their roles in society and leadership (Maeroff, 1984).

Writing is seen as the foundation for changing the scope of education to encourage critical thought. In the Carnegie’s Foundation’s four essential goals (1983) to improve American education, the first goal states, “The high school should help all students develop the capacity to think critically and communicate effectively through a mastery of language” (p. 66). In a 1983 interview with *The New York Times*, Boyer said reasoning and organization skills involved in writing “are the foundation blocks for all subjects” (Maeroff, 1984).

### **The High School Newspaper as a Tool for Instilling Democratic Principles**

Requiring writing and consideration of current issues, the high school newspaper provides an ideal forum for students to develop their critical thinking skills. Gathercoal (2001) writes that the goal of a student newspaper “should be to teach and model the importance of a strong press in society” (p. 184). The American press holds a vital role in contemporary society. Fred Siebert (1956) notes that whereas the early press operated under an Authoritarian theory, in

which the power holders of society – mostly government and church leaders – controlled the content of media, the American media operate under the libertarian theory of the press, in which the press operates as a check on government. Rising from the Enlightenment era, the libertarian theory recognizes the ability of human reasoning to evaluate issues and solve societal problems. Humans no longer need to rely on authority figures to shape thought, rather they are empowered to reason for themselves. Furthermore, under the Libertarian theory, reason should be used to serve to question authority figures, ensuring they are doing the proper work to move society forward. A critical element of maintaining a Libertarian press model is a press absolved from governmental oversight. Because the press presents “evidence and arguments” of which members of the public can check on government and develop their own opinions regarding policy, “it is imperative the press be free from government control and influence” (p. 3). With governmental interference, the press cannot perform its most vital function of being a check on government. The concept of a free press is the most widely embraced element of the Libertarian theory among scholars and members of the American press. In fact, the press is specifically cited as a protected form of free expression in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

Since a democratic education is rooted in democratic principles, the rights of high school journalists and the power of high school newspapers should be held in the highest regard. As such, educators should promote and encourage freedom of speech (Gathercoal, 2001). One goal of the high school newspaper is to foster independent thinking (Greenman, 1991). To help develop intellectual autonomy, journalism advisers should persuade and empower their students

to ask questions of the school's authority figures and evaluate the laws governing the school.

"Basically, you are teaching young people to seek the truth. They must learn that the search does not end because someone in authority says something is so" (p. 221). This is not saying that students should not respect or trust authority, but rather that students should learn to critically investigate issues beyond what is said by those in authority. High school newspapers should tackle controversial issues, whether school related — such as attendance policies, dress codes, graduation requirements — or societal problems among their peers — teenage pregnancy, mandatory prayer, drug abuse, and racial problems.

For a "healthy educational environment," administrators should allow students to freely and openly discuss issues (Gathercoal, 2001, p. 184). It is the obligation of educators to promote such a free-flow of ideas (Beane & Apple, 1995). Even if the school does not completely follow the principles espoused by Piaget or democratic theorists, the school newspaper provides an opportunity for students to think critically, consider other viewpoints and come to their own conclusion, meeting the many of the goals of the two pedagogies.

National journalism organizations recognize the importance of critical thinking. Those high school newspapers that demonstrate critical thinking through writing are often the most recognized in national competitions. The National Scholastic Press Association (NSPA), which issues the annual Pacemaker award to the top high school newspapers, notes in its *Newspaper Guidebook* (2001) that the best newspapers in the country are the ones that pursue the difficult and often most controversial issues. The guidebook cites examples of award-winning material, including an editorial on gay Boy Scouts, a news story about teachers protesting their pay (p. 22), an in-depth feature on the emotional effects of rape, and an opinion page featuring personal reflections on drugs, pregnancy, and divorce. Other national and regional scholastic press

associations also promote critical thinking. In its news media evaluation scorebook (2006), Quill and Scroll – the international honorary society for high school journalists – instructs newspapers to include criticism of the school district and explore serious school problems. The Southern Interscholastic Press Association (2004) – which represents journalism programs in Southeastern states – recommends balanced coverage of controversial issues.

Student consideration of such divisive issues allow students the opportunity to not only express themselves, but learn the responsibility associated with free expression and tolerance of other viewpoints – “even the most repugnant ideas” – an important element of democratic education. (Gathercoal, 2001, p. 174). High school newspaper adviser Harry Proudfoot and his principal Alan Weintraub (2001) described Weintraub’s trust of Proudfoot and lack of censorship has allowed the school newspaper to cover controversial issues — such as a story critical of the administration for firing three teachers. All stories were well-researched and written responsibly, causing the publication to win several national awards (Proudfoot, 2001).

For several years the high school newspaper was granted First Amendment protections by the Supreme Court. A 1969 decision in *Tinker v. Des Moines* ruled that three students were allowed to wear black armbands in protest of the Vietnam War, overturning a school policy banning armbands. The policy was set in place when officials learned of the planned silent protest. In the seven-member majority decision, the Court ruled that, “First Amendment rights, applied in the light of special characteristics of the school environment, are available to teachers and students. It can hardly be argued that either students or teachers shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate (p. 506).

Furthermore, the decision required administrators to show “constitutionally valid reasons” to regulate student speech (p. 511). This meant that schools must prove that student



speech would present a significant disruption – such as a school walkout or promoting violence. According to the Court in *Tinker*, student expression cannot be censored simply because administrators disapprove of its content or because it criticizes the school. To the contrary, *Tinker* actually ruled that such critical thought and expression should be fostered (Law of the Student Press, 1994).

### **Barriers to the Modern-Day High School Newspaper**

The *Tinker* decision served as an ally of free expression for the high school newspaper, as lower courts consistently upheld newspaper freedom based on the Supreme Court ruling. However, a 1988 Supreme Court ruling that dealt specifically with a newspaper struck a blow to critical thought through newspaper writing. The Supreme Court ruling in *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier* (1988) gives secondary education administrators authority to censor high school newspapers, even halt publication if the administrator has an educational justification. The case involved a principal at a Missouri school who ordered two high school newspaper articles be pulled from the school-sponsored newspaper: one about pregnant students and another about students with divorced parents. In a 5-3 decision, the Supreme Court ruled that high school principal can censor content in student publications. Justice Byron White wrote for the majority: “Educators are entitled to exercise greater control ... of student expression to assure that participants learn whatever lessons the activity is designed to teach, that readers or listeners are not exposed to material that may be inappropriate for their level of maturity, and that the views of the individual speaker are not erroneously attributed to the school” (2C). In summation, “a school need not tolerate student speech that is inconsistent with its basic educational mission” (II). The Court never clearly defined the “basic educational mission” of schools, leaving high school administrators to interpret their powers of censorship very broadly.

Writing the dissenting opinion, Justice William Brennan expressed concern that the majority usurped the student's First Amendment rights. "Such unthinking contempt for individual rights is intolerable from any state official," Brennan wrote. "It is particularly insidious from one to whom the public entrusts the task of inculcating in its youth an appreciation for the cherished democratic liberties that our Constitution guarantees." (III).

Brennan disagreed with the majority's logic in ruling against the students because of the sensitive material they were covering, suggesting the Court's vague language easily opens the door for censorship of students merely because higher powers disagree with their viewpoint. Government censorship of a speaker's viewpoint is considered the most odious infringement of First Amendment rights. "The case before us aptly illustrates how readily school officials (and courts) can camouflage viewpoint discrimination as the 'mere' protection of students from sensitive topics" (B).

In the *Journal of Law and Education* (2000), legal scholar Scott Andrew Felder echoes Brennan's sentiment and offers a grim view for the future of independent critical thought in high school newspapers. He writes that the *Hazelwood* decision "provides school officials with virtually plenary authority to censor student speech ... giving school officials the right to act as thought police, prohibiting that speech they do not agree with because they do not agree with it" (16).

*Hazelwood* has made it difficult to maintain an autonomous high school press. The ruling led to the widespread use of prior review – the act of the principal reviewing an issue before its publication and determining what content may be published or deleted. Requests from high school newspaper staffs for legal assistance rose dramatically after the *Hazelwood* decision, from

548 in 1988 to more than 1,600 in 1999, with prior review by the principal the most common form of censorship (Goodman, 2001).

Current news reports show that censorship is still commonplace in schools. In October 2006, the Deltona High School (Florida) principal halted the release of the school's newspaper because a story criticized the school's spending practices (Yeh, 2006). In January 2007, the principal of Danbury High School (Texas) stopped the distribution of the school's newspaper due to two separate, potentially controversial, stories that focused on teenage student mothers and sexually-transmitted diseases (Taylor, 2007). In February 2007, a column discussing societal attitudes of homosexuality resulted in prior review (Hudock, 2007).

The types of stories that are often censored are the ones in which students engage in a significant amount of critical thought. Furthermore, many censorship cases are often unreported, as students are not aware they are being censored or do not consider actions such as prior review as censorship (Johnstone, 1998).

Studies have shown that *Hazelwood* has made advisers and principals more supportive of censorship. Furthermore, advisers are much more accepting of prior review and censorship cases since the *Hazelwood* decision. In separate studies conducted before and after the *Hazelwood* decision, Kopenhaver and Click (2001) found that 87 percent of principals and 62 percent of advisers believed the principal has the right to censor, up from 60 percent of advisers and 20 percent of principals who believed they had the right to censor before *Hazelwood*. Also, 96 percent of principals and 90 percent of advisers believe in the right of the principal to request prior review, a similar rate of principals from the 1985 survey, but an increase from 75 percent of advisers. Finally, 94 percent of principals and 81 percent of advisers believe the adviser is obligated to inform the principal of any controversial stories before publication, up from 75

percent and 41 percent, respectively. The authors conclude that press freedom is not a reality in most schools, noting that even before the *Hazelwood* decision, there were still high rates of acceptance of censorship among both advisers and principals. They also express concern in developing future journalists with the ability to think critically, suggesting that their findings raise the question of how “students can learn about press freedom if they are not allowed to practice it” (p. 338).

Principal perceptions of prior review are in contrast with the recommendations of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). NASSP recommends that administrators “hold students accountable for their actions or conduct associated with publication and distribution rather than try to stop their expression” (Eveslage, 1988, 25). The organization discourages prior review, instead allowing students to develop reasonable publication guidelines with their adviser at the beginning of the school year (Eveslage, 1988).

However, evidence shows that administrators are willing to curb student critical thought by preventing publication of “harmful” articles. Gathercoal (2001) recognizes that *Hazelwood* has given administrators authority for prior review, however he encourages the practice to be limited. Instead, Gathercoal recommends that schools establish publication advisory boards. In true democratic education spirit, the board would represent all aspects of the school, ideally containing an administrator, the publication adviser, a school board member, a teacher, a student-body representative, a student editor and a local newspaper editor. In cases where material to be published is questioned, the board would give a fair hearing to students before making a final decision. If the board deems the material should not be published in the school newspaper, it would be required to give a clear and concise reason to newspaper staff why they deemed the material unpublishable.

In one of the few research studies to evaluate *Hazelwood*'s effect on content, Lomicky (1999) compared the editorials of one Midwestern high school with a random sample from newspapers eight years prior and eight years after the court decision. Lomicky found that the pre-*Hazelwood* newspapers contained significantly more editorials (57%) that were critical of the high school administration than the newspapers published after *Hazelwood* (17%). Lomicky also found that 54 percent of the editorials published after *Hazelwood* revolved around "safe" issues such as entertainment, or writings appealing to a non-controversial cause, compared with editorials of the same scope before *Hazelwood* (6%). Lomicky concluded that the student journalists at the examined high school "seem much less willing to criticize school policies or tackle controversial subject matter in their writing since the *Hazelwood* decision" (p. 15).

Lomicky's findings demonstrate that high school journalism has suffered post-*Hazelwood* in covering topics deemed essential to quality journalism. A reluctance to tackle controversial issues in high school robs the student of an opportunity to develop critical thinking skills, necessary to the overall development of an individual. By stifling student expression – either directly or indirectly – high schools are inhibiting the student's intellectual, social and moral development (Kamii, 1994) and producing a generation of Americans who will not be optimal contributors to a democratic society.

### **Chapter Summary**

Based on the philosophies of Dewey and Piaget, the democratic theory of education emphasizes personal investigation, experimentation, critical thinking, working collaboratively and sharing a diversity of ideas. When granted full autonomy, the high school newspaper offers an ideal forum to fulfill all these goals. However, the *Hazelwood* Supreme Court decision has

allowed the practice of prior review, stifling student development when applied by administrators.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter will outline the methodology of this study, including identifying participants, explaining the data collection process, summarizing the survey instrument, and describing the methods used for data analysis.

#### **Participants**

The target population for this study was high school newspaper advisers across the nation. The most efficient and least-intrusive way to reach the target audience was through the e-mail listserv of the Journalism Education Association (JEA), “the only independent national scholastic journalism organization for teachers and advisers” (<http://www.jea.org/about/index.html>). Each member pays annual dues to JEA. The organization’s 2,300 members include newspaper, yearbook, literary magazine and broadcast advisers, as well as other people affiliated with scholastic journalism. As of February 16, 2007, the organization had 1,198 newspaper advisers as members, roughly 52 percent of the organization’s membership.

When joining JEA, members are asked if they wish to be included on the JEA listserv to communicate to other JEA members. As of February 22, 2007, there were 825 JEA members subscribed to the listserv, approximately 36 percent of the entire JEA membership. Although exact statistics of how many newspaper advisers subscribe to the listserv was not available, the JEA listserv manager stated that the listserv membership is proportionate to JEA membership.

Assuming this is true, roughly 36 percent of the organization's 1,198 newspaper advisers are listserv subscribers for an estimated total of 431 (N=431).

### **Data Collection**

An electronic message was sent to the members of the listserv on February 15, 2007, inviting newspaper advisers to participate in the web survey (Appendix A). The invitation explained the purpose of the study, the benefits of completing the survey, consent information, and a link to the web survey. The e-mail indicated that data collection will begin on February 28, 2007, and all surveys must be completed by this time. A similar follow-up letter was e-mailed on February 25, 2007, inviting newspaper advisers to participate in the survey (Appendix B).

Data collection began after the first invitation was sent on February 15, 2007, using the subscription-based survey service Survey Monkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>). Participants linked to the web survey directly from the text of the listserv e-mail. The survey service collected the user's IP address, allowing the survey to be completed only once from each IP address. The survey was closed to participants after February 28, 2007. The closed survey was saved in the researcher's private Survey Monkey account and placed in an Excel file for analysis. Closed-ended data sets were imported into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 14.0 and the values were labeled.

### **Survey Instrument**

Because there is no previous research similar to this study, the instrument was an original design. Prior to distribution of the survey, the instrument was formally reviewed by the researcher's three faculty thesis committee members and professional colleagues. The feedback provided led to the clarification of some questions and the inclusion of new questions. In addition, answers to certain questions were also clarified.



The questions in the study were generated from the researcher's research on prior review, critical thinking pedagogy and censorship. In addition, the researcher – also director of the Georgia Scholastic Press Association (GSPA) and a state representative of JEA – used his professional knowledge of high school newspapers to assist in the development of the survey. Following the general guidelines of survey questions offered by Wimmer and Dominick (2006), questions were designed to be clear, short, and appropriate to the research, and double-barreled, biased, highly detailed and embarrassing questions were avoided (p. 183-185).

During this study, participants were asked to complete a 24-question, web-based survey called *How Prior Review in High School Journalism Impacts Critical Thought and Quality Journalism* (Appendix C). The survey was created using the subscriber-provided tools of Survey Monkey. With the exception of one completely open-ended question, all questions were closed-ended and respondents were asked to mark the appropriate box or boxes in response to the question. Most of the questions offered the respondent the chance to select “other” and explain their response. Where appropriate, answers options were randomized by the survey program to help control bias. Certain questions were asked only if appropriate, based on the respondent's answer to a previous, related question.

The first six questions sought basic demographic information about the adviser and his or her newspaper. Question 7 asked participants to note any overall excellence awards from various scholastic press organizations. Question 8 provided a definition of a public forum and asked respondents if their newspaper was legally designated a public forum. Question 9 asked advisers to rank-order what they believe is the core mission of their high school newspaper. Question 10 asked respondents to characterize the relationship with their newspaper and their school's administration. Question 11 provided a definition of a publications review board and asked

advisers if their school has a publications review board. Those who answered “yes” were asked question 12, which asked about the makeup of the publications review board. Questions 13-16 asked about the practice of prior review in the respondent’s school. Those who indicated in question 16 that an article was pulled by an administrator before publication were asked question 17 to determine the reason or reasons the article was pulled. Question 18 asked if advisers, independent of the school administration, ever pulled an article. Those who answered “yes” were asked question 19 to determine the reason or reasons the article was pulled. Question 20 asked advisers if they ever suggested a story not be pursued by a student. Those who answered “yes” were asked questions 21 and 22 to determine the reason or reasons the adviser suggested the story not be pursued, and what was the topic of the story (open-ended). Question 23 asked respondents who they believed should give the final approval of newspaper content, and question 24 asked advisers about their opinion of prior review.

The answers in all closed-ended, single-answer questions were rated on a scale. In the coding process, numbers were assigned to responses. For the purposes of data analysis, some answers were combined into specific categories. For instance, those who indicated they had won a NSPA, national and/or regional top award in question 7 were coded as “1-yes” in a “top award” category, and those who indicated they won a state award or have not won an award (neither) were coded as a “2-no” in the “top award” category. In all questions, the researcher evaluated those who marked “other” and determined which category was most appropriate based on the respondent’s explanation. All values that were not answered were coded as missing so not to skew the results.

Because the survey instrument was an original design, reliability needed to be examined. Reliability is “the property of a measure that consistently gives the same answer at different

times” (Wimmer and Dominick 450). On a range of 0.00 to 1.00, instruments scoring closer to a 1.00 indicate strong reliability (p. 60). A common reliability coefficient is Cronbach’s alpha.

This instrument’s level of reliability was .720 (see Table 1). This number accounts for all items that all participants were asked to answer, excluding demographic information.

Table 1

*Survey Reliability*

<u>Cases</u>				
Items	Valid	Excluded	Total	Cronbach’s alpha
115	125	1	126	.720

### **Question Exclusion**

The survey asked respondents 24 questions. After data collection, it was evident to the researcher that some of the results would not be of assistance for the purposes of this study.

There was insufficient variance in the answers to questions 2, 3, 5 and 11, so any data analysis would be skewed. Question 12 was omitted because it was an offshoot of question 11. The high amount of “other” responses and the impending explanations to question 4 indicated that the researcher should have offered different options to respondents. Questions 8, 14, 20, 21 and 22 were omitted from analysis because they would not be of assistance to this study, however they would be beneficial for future research.

### **Data Analysis**

Data was collected and analyzed for each research question according to the following statistical analysis:

RQ 1: How do the means of prior review among non-top award winning high school

newspapers compare with the means of prior review among top award-winning newspapers.

A cross-tab was conducted to determine the respondent's indication of the frequency of prior review among non-top award winning newspapers and top-award winning newspapers. An independent-samples  $t$  test was used to examine differences in the frequency of prior review based on whether the newspaper won top awards or did not win top awards.

RQ 2: Is there a relationship between prior review and top award-winning newspapers.

A chi-square analysis was conducted to determine if the distribution was significant.

RQ 3: How do the means of adviser censorship in newspapers where prior review is practiced compare with the means of adviser censorship in newspapers where prior review is not practiced.

A cross-tab was conducted to determine the respondent's indication of the frequency of adviser censorship among non-top award winning newspapers and top-award winning newspapers. An independent samples  $t$  test was used to examine the differences in the frequency of adviser censorship based on whether the newspaper won top awards or did not win top awards.

RQ 4: Is there a relationship between prior review and adviser censorship?

A chi-square analysis was conducted to determine if the distribution was significant.

RQ 5: Are the primary reasons given for administrative and adviser censorship related to critical thinking?

Descriptive statistics were used to examine the percentages of the reasons given for prior review.

RQ 6: Is prior review more common in certain newspaper demographics?

A cross-tab was conducted to determine the respondent's indication of prior review within the following demographics: adviser experience, primary source of newspaper funding, and relationship between the newspaper staff and the school's administration. An independent-samples *t* test was used to examine the differences of prior review based on adviser experience, the primary source of newspaper funding, and the relationship between the newspaper staff and the school's administration.

RQ 7: Is there a difference as to the level of prior review and adviser censorship related to certain adviser perceptions regarding the high school newspaper and the act of prior review?

A cross-tab was conducted to determine the respondent's indication of prior review and adviser censorship within the following adviser perceptions: opinion on prior review and opinion on the most important mission of the high school newspaper. An independent-samples *t* test was used to examine the differences of prior review and adviser censorship based on opinion of prior review and the opinion on the most important mission of the high school newspaper.

Descriptive analysis, crosstabs, and independent-samples *t* tests were conducted using SPSS 14.0. Chi-square analysis was conducted using the Georgetown University calculator ([http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/ballc/webtools/web\\_chi.html](http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/ballc/webtools/web_chi.html)). Data was evaluated on a significance level of  $p < .05$ . Any values that were not answered were coded as "no answer."

### **Chapter summary**

In February 2007, high school newspaper advisers across the nation were asked to participate in a 24-question, online survey regarding their demographics, perceptions and practices within their high school newspaper. The data was analyzed for each research question utilizing the following methods: independent-samples *t* test and chi-square.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The 825 JEA members who subscribe to the JEA listserv received an e-mail message inviting newspaper advisers to complete the web-based survey. Of those 825, it is estimated that 431 are newspaper advisers and therefore, qualified to participate in the study. Wimmer and Dominick state that a satisfactory response rate for Internet surveys is 1 to 30 percent (p. 205). This survey demonstrated a satisfactory response rate of 29.2 percent, with 126 advisers completing the survey.

#### **Respondent Demographic Information**

The majority of the respondents were experienced advisers, with 95 (75.4%) indicating they had at least three years of experience as adviser of their school's high school newspaper. Thirty-five advisers (27.8%) had significant experience, indicating they had more than 10 years experience. The lowest response came from new advisers, with 15 (11.9%) indicating they had 0-1 years experience. Table 2 represents the respondent's number of years as adviser of their high school's newspaper.

Table 2

*Years as adviser of your school's newspaper*

Years Experience	Frequency N=126	Percent
0-1 years	15	11.9%
1-2 years	16	12.7%

Table 2 (continued)

Years Experience	Frequency N=126	Percent
3-5 years	33	26.2%
6-10 years	27	21.4%
10+ years	35	27.8%

The high number of experienced advisers is not surprising, considering the survey targeted JEA members. Typically, the more experience an adviser attains, the more likely they are to be aware of and join organizations like JEA.

Seventy-four advisers (58.7%) indicated their newspaper was primarily staff-funded through advertising or fundraising. Twenty-eight (22.2%) respondents said they were approximately 50 percent staff-funded and 50 percent funded through school system support. Twenty-four (19%) of advisers said their newspaper was funded primarily through the school system. These results include 12 respondents who marked “other” and provided an explanation. Explanations for those who marked “other” were: (1) “all news staff members are required to purchase a student activity card since we receive funds from the school. Largely, we sell ads, subscriptions, or sponsorships;” (2) “technology by school district and printing through advertising;” (3) “about 30 percent staff-funded and 70 percent through school-system funding;” (4) “about 1/3 ads, 2/3 sale of publications package (portion of yearbook sales;” (5) “we have no real funding; our local paper prints it for free in their Wednesday edition once a month;” (6) “the district pays for me as a teacher and I get a stipend as an adviser. The students raise money through ad sales and candy sales to publish the paper/purchase equipment. District gives equipment as well;” (7) “100 percent through the administration;” (8) “1/3 ads, 1/3 money I

siphon off yearbook profits, 1/3 student government;” (9) “advertising, subscriptions;” (10) “25% school fund; 75% advertising;” (11) “totally staff-funded through advertising and subscriptions only;” and (12) “completely staff-funded through advertising.”

Because the question was asking how their newspaper was *primarily* funded, the researcher was able to place all respondents into one of the three categories based on their explanations in the “other” category. Table 3 represents how the adviser indicated their newspaper is funded.

Table 3

*How respondent’s newspapers are funded*

Type of Funding	Frequency (N=126)	Percent
Primarily staff-funded through advertising/fundraising	74	58.7%
Primarily through school system funding	24	19.0%
Approximately 50 percent staff-funded and 50 percent through school system funding	28	22.2%

In question 7, Respondents were asked to list the number of awards for overall excellence their newspaper has won in the last three years from a variety of scholastic press associations. Respondents were allowed to check all that apply. Table 4A lists those responses.



Table 4A

*Overall Excellence Awards won in the last three year (respondents selected all that applied)*

Type of Award	Frequency (N=122)	Percent
Pacemaker Award from NSPA	19	15.6%
Other national organization award	36	29.5%
Regional scholastic press association award	30	24.6%
State scholastic press association award	65	53.3%
Neither	34	27.9%
Other	21	17.2%

Explanations for those who marked “other” were: (1) “none. I haven’t been sufficiently proud of it yet to submit it on contests. I’m building our program in that direction;” (2) “haven’t submitted for awards;” (3) “best of show, top ten;” (4) “Dallas Morning News award;” (5) “local college competition;” (6) “Syracuse Press Day Awards;” (7) “Quill and Scroll International First Place Award;” (8) “Q&S First Place;” (9) “local community college, plus state college north of our city;” (10) “JEA Best of Show;” (11) “Too new;” (12) “Pacemaker finalist four times since 1999, winner once;” (13) “NSPA, CSPA individual awards;” (14) “have not submitted for evaluation” (15) “CSPA Gold Medal;” (16) “local newspaper/county awards;” (17) “CSPA second class, NSPA bronze medal;” (18) “ASPA;” (19) “State champion, 5A schools Texas Association of Private and Parochial Schools; national scholastic press association two first class marks of distinction; Freedoms Foundation of Valley Forge;” (20) “Don’t know;” and (21) “Best in Show at national conventions.”

For the purposes of this study, the researcher further broke down the data into two categories: “top awards” and “non-top awards.” Top awards included those who indicated they won the NSPA Pacemaker Award, an award from other national organizations, and/or an award from regional scholastic press associations. Non-top awards included those who indicated they won only a state scholastic press association award and/or neither. If a respondent indicated they won an award from the first three categories, and also indicated they won a state scholastic press association award or “other,” they were included in the “top awards” category. Because the researcher was specific in the type of award won, those who marked “other” and did not mark another category were placed into the appropriate category of “top award” or “no top award” based on their explanations. Table 4A lists the breakdown for “top award” and “no top award.”

Table 4B

*Researcher breakdown of “top award” and “no top award”*

Type of Award	Frequency (N=122)	Percent
Top award	49	40.2%
No top award	73	59.8%

The final demographic question considered for this study asked advisers to characterize the relationship between their newspaper and their school’s administration. All but two respondents answered this question, with the majority – 104 (83.9%) – indicating an “excellent” or “good” relationship. Twenty respondents (16.1%) indicated a “fair” or “poor” relationship. Table 5 lists how advisers characterized the relationship between their newspaper and their school’s administration. So as not to skew results, the two respondents who did not answer were coded as “no answer.”

Table 5

*Relationship between respondent's newspaper and their school administration*

Strength of relationship	Frequency (N=124)	Percent
Excellent	57	46.0%
Good	47	37.9%
Fair	19	15.3%
Poor	1	0.81%

### **Respondent Perceptions**

Three questions in the survey asked advisers about their perceptions of the role of the high school newspaper, the practice of prior review and who have final authority over the publication of the newspaper. These perceptions will be compared to prior review and censorship practices in this study. However, they also add insight when evaluated alone.

Question 9 listed five missions of the high school newspaper and asked respondents to rank each item on a five-point scale from “most important” to “least important.” The five missions were: (1) “a forum for student expression;” (2) “an informational publication for the student body;” (3) “a public relations tool for the school;” (4) “a venue for developing students’ writing skills; and (5) “a venue for developing students’ critical thinking skills.” Table 6 lists the ranked-order of importance respondents assigned the five missions. A mean score closer to “1.00” indicates that the mission is closest to being ranked overall as the most important mission. Likewise, a mean score closer to “5.00” indicates the mission is closest to being ranked overall as the least important mission.

Table 6

*Missions of the high school newspaper (with approximate percentage)*

Mission	Most Important	Second Most Important	Third Most Important	Fourth Most Important	Fifth Most Important	Rank Mean
Forum for student expression (N=124)	57 (46%)	37 (30%)	12 (10%)	15 (12%)	3 (2%)	1.95
Informational publication for the student body (N=122)	40 (33%)	34 (28%)	18 (15%)	29 (24%)	1 (1%)	2.32
Public relations tool for the school (N=122)	0	1 (1%)	7 (6%)	4 (3%)	110 (90%)	4.83
Develop students' writing skills (N=124)	12 (10%)	26 (21%)	39 (31%)	47 (38%)	0	2.98
Develop students' critical thinking skills (N=122)	16 (13%)	26 (21%)	46 (38%)	26 (21%)	8 (7%)	2.87

The responses indicate that advisers find the most important priorities of the high school newspaper to be a forum for student expression or an informational publication for the student body, with advisers ranking them as the top two most important missions at 76 percent and 61 percent, respectively. With 90 percent ranking it as the fifth most important mission, advisers overwhelmingly believe the newspaper's least important mission is to be a public relations tool for the school. The mean score indicates the overall response would rank the missions in the following order: (1) a forum for student expression; (2) an informational publication for the

student body; (3) a venue for developing students' critical thinking skills; (4) a venue to develop students' writing skills; and (5) a public relations tool for the school.

Another perception question asked advisers who they believe should have the authority to give final approval of the newspaper's content before it goes to press. Respondents were asked to select one of the following choices: principal or some other administrator, adviser, students, publications review board, and other. In the original response, four (3.2%) selected principal or some other administrator, 42 (33.3%) selected adviser, 55 (43.7%) selected students, three (2.4%) selected publications review board, and 20 (15.9%) selected other. Two (1.6%) did not respond to the question, and were categorized as "no answer."

The 20 that selected other gave the following explanations: (1) "student editorial board;" (2) "students with adviser input;" (3) "adviser and students;" (4) "student editor-in-chief;" (5) "mostly the students. I don't know if I would ever pull a story, but I might strongly argue against it, hoping they would listen to me;" (6) "student editors;" (7) "students, but after discussion with adviser; if adviser sees libel or some other reason, discussion process starts over;" (8) "editor with adviser's input;" (9) "students and adviser;" (10) "editors;" (11) "students and a trained, experienced adviser;" (12) "editorial board of the student newspaper;" (13) "student editor;" (14) "adviser and students;" (15) "adviser with support of the principal;" (16) "combination students, adviser, and administrators. Students mostly if good judgment is used;" (17) "adviser and students;" (18) "trained student editors;" (19) "student editor-in-chief in Massachusetts who is ultimately responsible for all content;" and (20) "editor-in-chief."

All the responses indicated in "other" could be categorized into one of the four answer categories provided in the survey. In instances where respondents suggested a combination of people should be included in the final decision, the researcher chose the highest-ranking official

because they would have the ultimate final authority in determining publication. Table 7 represents the results.

Table 7

*Opinion on final approval*

Final approval	Frequency (N=124)	Percent
Principal / other administrator	5	4.0%
Adviser	48	38.7%
Students	68	54.8%
Publications Review Board	3	2.4%

The responses indicate the majority of advisers believe students should be given the final authority in the newspaper's content. Only four percent believe the principal or some other school administrator should be given the final authority, the practice defined as prior review.

The final question of the survey asked advisers about their opinion of the right for a school administrator to review the student newspaper before it goes to press – in other words, the practice of prior review. Respondents were asked to provide their responses on a five-point Likert scale. Two respondents did not answer the question. The results are indicated in Table 8.

Table 8

*Opinion on Prior Review*

Degree of support	Frequency (N=124)	Percent
Strongly support	2	1.6%
Somewhat support	10	8.1%
Neither support nor against	5	4.0%

Table 8 (continued)

Degree of support	Frequency (N=124)	Percent
Somewhat against	13	10.5%
Strongly against	94	75.8%

The responses indicate that advisers are overwhelmingly against the right of a school administrator to view the student newspaper before it goes to press, with more than 75 percent strongly against prior review and roughly 87 percent either strongly against or somewhat against the practice. In comparison, roughly 10 percent of respondents somewhat or strongly support prior review.

### Research Question 1

Research Question 1 called for the comparison of how the means of prior review among non-top award winning high school newspapers compare with the means of prior review among top award-winning newspapers. The researcher used data obtained from survey questions 7 and 13. In question 7, respondents were asked to indicate if their newspaper had been ever recognized with an award for overall excellence from scholastic press organizations. The data from question 7 were collected and coded into two categories: “top awards” and “non-top awards.” “Top awards” represented newspapers that won NSPA, national and/or regional scholastic press association awards and were coded as “1.” “Non-top awards” represented newspapers who had not received top awards at the national and/or regional level (see Tables 4A and 4B) and were coded as “2.” Question 13 asked respondents to rate on a four-point Likert scale the frequency of prior review in the past three years: always, often, sometimes, or never. Those who answered “always,” “often,” or “sometimes” were coded as “prior review.” Those who answered “never” were coded as “no prior review.”

A cross-tab was conducted to determine the respondent's indication of the frequency of prior review among non-top award winning newspapers and top-award winning newspapers. Table 9A illustrates those results. An independent-samples  $t$  test is used to evaluate the means of two independent groups to determine if the mean for one group differs significantly from the mean of another group (Green and Salkind, 2005). In this analysis, the independent-samples  $t$  test was used to examine differences in the frequency of prior review based on whether the newspaper won top awards or did not win top awards. A mean score closer to "1.00" indicates newspapers are more likely top award-winning newspapers, while a mean score closer to "2.00" indicates newspapers are more likely not top-award winning products. Table 9B illustrates those results.

Table 9A

*Cross-tab for Awards Status and Prior Review*

	Prior Review	No Prior Review	Total
Top Award	10	39	49
No Top Award	22	49	71
Total	32	88	120

Table 9B

*Independent-samples  $t$  Test for Awards Status and Prior Review*

	Prior Review M	No Prior Review M	df	T	p
Award-winning status	1.69	1.56	58.10	1.32	.191



The independent-samples  $t$  test as illustrated in Table 9B was not significant,  $t(58.1) = 1.32, p = .191$ , thus showing that there is no significant difference in prior review among top award-winning newspapers and non-top award winning newspapers.

## Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asks if there is a relationship between prior review and top award-winning newspapers. This question used the same coding as RQ 1 for a newspaper's award status and prior review. A chi-square analysis was conducted to determine if there was a significant relationship between prior review and top-award winning newspapers. Chi-square is the measure of how far the observed counts are from expected counts and is an appropriate test statistic when information is classified according to two categorical variables (Moore, 2007). The chi-square test used an alpha level of .05 and one degree of freedom. A two-by-two table was constructed to perform the analysis. Table 10 lists the parameters and the results of the chi-square analysis.

Table 10

*Chi-square test of prior review and top award-winning journalism*

	Top Awards	No Top Award	Total
Prior Review	10	22	32
No Prior Review	39	49	88
Total	49	71	(N) 120

Degrees of freedom: 1

Chi-square = 1.66

For significance at the .05 level, chi-square should be  $\geq 3.84$ .

The distribution is not significant.

$p \leq 0.20$ .

The chi-square test shows that there is no significant relationship between instances of prior review and top award-winning journalism. Therefore, based on the results of this analysis,

it cannot be scientifically assumed that the practice of prior review has any effect – positive or negative – on newspapers winning top journalism awards.

### Research Question 3

Research Question 3 called for the comparison of how the means of adviser censorship in newspapers where prior review is practiced compare with the means of adviser censorship in newspapers where prior review is not practiced. Advisers were also asked to rate on a four-point Likert scale the frequency of prior review in the past three years: always, often, sometimes, or never. Advisers were also asked if in the last three years, independent of the school administration, they ever pulled an article from the newspaper before its publication. Doing so is defined as censorship in this study. Advisers answered either “yes” or “no.” A “yes” was coded as a “1” and a “no” was coded as a “2.”

Table 11A illustrates a cross-tab conducted to determine the respondent’s indication of adviser censorship among the frequency of prior review. An independent-samples  $t$  test was used to examine differences in the frequency of adviser censorship based on whether the newspaper is subjected to prior review. A mean score closer to “1.00” indicates a higher rate of prior review, while a mean score closer to “4.00” indicates a low rate of prior review. Table 11B illustrates those results.

Table 11A

#### *Cross-tab for Review and Adviser Censorship*

Level of Prior Review	Adviser Censorship	No Adviser Censorship	Total
Always	10	7	17
Often	3	1	4

Table 11A (continued)

Level of Prior Review	Adviser Censorship	No Adviser Censorship	Total
Sometimes	6	7	13
Never	27	61	88
Total	46	76	122

Table 11B

*Independent-samples t Test for Prior Review and Adviser Censorship*

	Adviser Censorship M	No Adviser Censorship M	df	t	p
Level of prior review	3.09	3.61	73.22	-2.46	.016

The independent-samples  $t$  test as illustrated in Table 11B was significant,  $t(73.2) = -2.46$ ,  $p = .016$ . The negative  $t$  value indicates that the mean amount of adviser censorship for advisers who never undertake prior review is significantly less than the mean amount of adviser censorship for advisers who always undertake prior review. Advisers with a more frequent level of prior review ( $M = 3.09$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ) are more likely to censor student content than advisers who are less frequently subjected to prior review ( $M = 3.61$ ,  $SD = .910$ ).

#### Research Question 4

Research Question 4 asks if there is a relationship between prior review and adviser censorship. In coding adviser censorship, the researcher split the answers to survey question 18 into two categories: “censorship” and “no censorship.” Respondents who indicated that in the last three years, independent of the school administration, they pulled an article from the

newspaper “always,” “often,” or “sometimes” were coded into the “censorship” category.

Respondents who indicated they “never” pulled an article before publication independent of the school administration were coded into the “no censorship” category. The researcher used the same coding from RQ 2 for “prior review” and “no prior review.” A chi-square analysis was conducted to determine if there was a significant relationship between prior review and adviser censorship. The chi-square test used an alpha level of .05 and one degree of freedom. A two-by-two table was constructed to perform the analysis. Table 12 lists the parameters and the results of the chi-square analysis.

Table 12

*Chi-square test of prior review and adviser censorship*

	Prior Review	No Prior Review	Total
Adviser Censorship	19	27	46
No Adviser Censorship	15	61	76
Total	34	88	122

Degrees of freedom: 1

Chi-square = 6.63

For significance at the .05 level, chi-square should be  $\geq 3.84$ .

The distribution is significant.

$p \leq 0.025$ .

The chi-square test indicates that there is a significant relationship between adviser censorship and instances of prior review. Based on the independent-samples  $t$  test conducted in RQ 3, the relationship can be defined that when an adviser is subjected to prior review, they are more likely to censor student content independent of the school administration. Likewise, when an adviser is not subjected to prior review, they are less likely to censor student content independent of the school administration.

### Research Question 5

Research Question 5 asks if the primary reasons given for administrative and adviser censorship are related to critical thinking. In survey question 16, advisers were asked if in the last three years an administrator ever requested an article be pulled from the newspaper before publication. In this study, such an act is defined as censorship. Twenty-eight respondents (22.6%) answered “yes” and 96 (77.4%) answered “no.” In survey question 18, advisers were asked if in the last three years they, independent of the school administration, ever pulled an article from publication. Forty-six respondents (37.7%) answered “yes” and 76 (62.3%) answered “no.”

Those who answered “yes” in either case were prompted to a follow-up question (survey questions 17 and 19) which asked in the latest instance, what was the reason or reasons for the article being pulled. There were 11 answer choices: *content of article deemed too mature for students, content of article deemed too critical of administration, content of article deemed too critical of students, article deemed disruptive to the school’s educational mission, article likely to be perceived as embarrassing to the school, article likely to generate bad publicity for the school, article not well researched/contained factual omissions, grammatical errors contained in article, public will mistakenly interpret article as a school endorsement, no reason given, and other.*

Nine advisers selected “other” in cases of administrative censorship with the following explanations: (1) “a student wanted to publish an article about how the former cheerleading adviser stole several thousand dollars. The principal and AD said it was a ‘personnel issue,’ wouldn’t comment and pulled it;” (2) “piece was embarrassing to a single individual of the administration; (3) “it was an editorial and the administration wanted a chance to respond. We

did not have an objective story in that issue on that topic;” (4) “Principal feared publication would lead to violence against gay students;” (5) “Content would not be of interest to student body;” (6) “Article might hurt someone’s feelings;” (7) “Only one paragraph was pulled; it did not identify a student in a violent situation only two students took part in and therefore violated libel issue of identification – no way to disguise a subject;” (8) “didn’t agree with the opinion;” and (9) “lawsuit pending on school district.”

Twelve advisers selected “other” in cases of adviser censorship with the following explanations: (1) “assistant principal asked us to hold the article for one issue; we obliged;” (2) “review of bowl game was biased;” (3) “article missed deadline;” (4) “content of column seemed too personal, and I was worried the student would regret it after printing;” (5) “article was blatantly racist/biased;” (6) “I censored the word ‘shit’;” (7) “he made up quotes;” (8) “the content of the article was plagiarized;” (9) “did not follow professional standards (biased, used language offensive to community mores);” (10) “author seemed not to have full control of her intended effect in column dealing with sex;” (11) “a personal attack on a student/family;” and (12) “plagiarism.”

Table 13 illustrates the reasons for administrative and adviser censorship.

Table 13

*Reasons for administrative and adviser censorship\**

(respondents could select all that apply, so results will not equal N and % will not equal 100)

Reason for Censorship	Administrative Censorship N=28	Adviser Censorship N=46
Content of article deemed too mature for students	7 (25%)	4 (8.7%)

Table 13 (continued)

Reason for Censorship	Administrative Censorship N=28	Adviser Censorship N=46
Content of article deemed too critical of administration	4 (14.3%)	1 (2.2%)
Content of article deemed too critical of students	1 (3.6%)	1 (2.2%)
Article deemed disruptive to the school's educational mission	4 (14.3%)	5 (10.9%)
Article likely to be perceived embarrassing to the school	5 (17.9%)	2 (4.3%)
Article likely to generate bad publicity for the school	10 (35.7%)	3 (6.5%)
Article not well-researched/contained factual omissions	6 (21.4%)	35 (76.1%)
Grammatical errors contained in the article	0	12 (26.1%)
Public will mistakenly interpret article as a school endorsement	5 (17.9%)	1 (2.2%)
No reason given	0	0
Other	9 (32.1%)	12 (26.1%)

An analysis of the results, including evaluating the explanations given by those who selected “other,” shows a distinct difference in the reasons given for censorship by administrators and censorship by advisers. More than three-quarters of advisers (76.1%) indicated that one of the reasons they pulled an article from publication due to the article containing factual omissions or not being well-researched. The next biggest reason given for adviser censorship was an article

containing grammatical errors (26.1%). In contrast, although reasons for administrative censorship were varied, the reason that generated the most response was that the article was likely to generate bad publicity for the school (35.7%). Similar public relations reasons: article likely to generate bad publicity for the school and the public will mistakenly interpret article as a school endorsement also scored relatively high at 17.9 percent. The next highest-scoring reason for administrative censorship was that the content of the article was deemed too mature for students (25%).

### Research Question 6

Research Question 6 asks if prior review is more common in certain newspaper demographics. Advisers were asked about their experience, the primary source of their newspaper's funding, and the level of relationship they and their newspaper has with the school's administration. They were also asked to rank the level of prior review they have experienced in the last three years: always, often, sometimes or never. The researcher used the same coding from RQ 2 for prior review, grouping "always," "often," and "sometimes" as prior review, and "never" as no prior review. The survey's first question asked advisers to indicate how many years they have been the adviser of their school's newspaper: 0-1 years, 1-2 years, 3-5 years, 5-10 years, or more than 10 years. Table 14 illustrates the results of a cross-tab conducted to determine the respondent's indication of the frequency of prior review among experience levels.

Table 14

*Cross-tab for Adviser Experience and Prior Review*

Adviser Experience	Prior Review	No Prior Review	Total
0-1 years	6	9	15



Table 14 (continued)

Adviser Experience	Prior Review	No Prior Review	Total
1-2 years	6	10	16
3-5 years	10	21	31
6-10 years	3	24	27
More than 10 years	9	26	35
Total	34	90	124

Survey question 6 asked respondents how their newspaper is primarily funded: staff-funded through advertising/fundraising, approximately 50 percent staff-funded and 50 percent through the school system, or entirely through the school system. Those who responded “other” were prompted to explain their response. Based on those responses, the researcher was able to code the 12 “other” answers into one of the three stated categories. Table 15 illustrates the results of a cross-tab conducted to determine the respondent’s indication of the frequency of prior review among the primary source of newspaper funding.

Table 15

*Cross-tab for Source of Funding and Prior Review*

Primary source of funding	Prior Review	No Prior Review	Total
Staff-funded	12	57	74
50/50	9	18	27
School-funded	8	15	23
Total	34	90	124

Survey question 10 asked advisers to characterize their perceived relationship with the school administration: “excellent,” “good,” “fair,” or “poor.” Table 16 illustrates the results of a cross-tab conducted to determine the respondent’s indication of the frequency of prior review among the relationship with the school’s administration.

Table 16

*Cross-tab for Perceived Relationship with Administration and Prior Review*

Relationship with Administration	Prior Review	No Prior Review	Total
Excellent	12	44	56
Good	13	34	47
Fair	8	11	19
Poor	1	0	1
Total	34	89	123

An independent-samples  $t$  test was used to examine differences in the frequency of prior review based on the three demographic characteristics: adviser experience, primary source of funding, and perceived relationship with the administration. The mean score for each demographic represents a different measurement. In gauging adviser experience, a mean score closer to “1.00” indicates less experience, while a mean score closer to “5.00” indicates more experience. For primary source of funding, a mean score closer to “1.00” indicates primarily staff-funded, while a mean score closer to “3.00” indicates primarily school-funded. Finally, in gauging the relationship with the administration, a mean score closer to “1.00” indicates an excellent relationship, while a mean score closer to “4.00” represents a poor relationship. Table 17 illustrates the results.

Table 17

*Independent-samples t Test for Prior Review and Certain Demographics*

	Prior Review M	No Prior Review M	Df	T	p
Adviser Experience	3.09	3.53	54.14	-1.57	.121
Source of funding	1.74	1.53	55.72	1.24	.222
Relationship with administration	1.94	1.63	50.85	1.91	.062

In this sample, prior review occurred more with advisers who had less experience ( $M = 3.09$ ), with a mean score closer to 3-5 years of experience. Meanwhile, prior review occurred less often with advisers who had a mean score ( $M = 3.53$ ) closer to 6-10 years of experience. In terms of funding, prior review occurred more in newspapers with a mean score closer to 50/50 funding ( $M = 1.74$ ), while less prior review occurred in schools who were more likely to rely on their own funding ( $M = 1.53$ ). Finally, administrators who perceived an excellent relationship with the administration had less prior review ( $M = 1.63$ ) than those with a mean score closer to a good relationship ( $M = 1.94$ ).

However, the independent-samples  $t$  test yielded no significant results for the three newspaper demographics: adviser experience  $t(54.1) = -1.57$ ,  $p = .121$ , source of funding  $t(56.6) = 1.17$ ,  $p = .248$ , and relationship with administration  $t(50.9) = 1.91$ ,  $p = .062$ . This shows that there is no significant difference in prior review among adviser experience, source of funding, and the relationship with the administration.

### Research Question 7

Research Question 7 asks if there is a difference in the level of prior review and adviser censorship with certain adviser perceptions regarding the high school newspaper and prior review. Respondents were asked their opinion on the right of a high school administrator to review the student newspaper before it goes to press. The answer options were provided on a 5-point Likert scale: strongly support, somewhat support, neither support nor against, somewhat against, and strongly against. Table 18 illustrates those responses compared with the instances of prior review.

Table 18

*Cross-tab for Opinion on Prior Review and Prior Review*

Opinion on Prior Review	Prior Review	No Prior Review	Total
Strongly support	2	0	2
Somewhat support	6	4	10
Neither	2	3	5
Somewhat against	8	5	13
Strongly against	16	78	94
Total	34	90	124

Tables 19 illustrate the responses given about the adviser's opinion or prior review compared with instances of adviser censorship.

Table 19

*Cross-tab for Opinion on Prior Review and Adviser Censorship*

Opinion on Prior Review	Adviser Censorship	Adviser Censorship	Total
Strongly support	1	1	2
Somewhat support	5	4	9
Neither	3	2	5
Somewhat against	8	5	13
Strongly against	29	64	93
Total	46	76	122

An independent-samples  $t$  test was used to examine differences in prior review and adviser censorship based on the adviser's opinion of prior review. A mean score closer to "1.00" indicates the adviser is more likely to strongly support prior review, while a mean score closer to "5.00" indicates the adviser is more likely to be strongly against prior review. Tables 20 and 21 illustrate the results.

Table 20

*Independent-samples  $t$  Test for Prior Review and Opinion of Prior Review*

	Prior Review M	No Prior Review M	df	T	p
Opinion on Prior Review	3.88	4.74	40.54	-3.55	.001

Table 21

*Independent-samples t Test for Adviser Censorship and Opinion of Prior Review*

	Adviser Censorship M	No Adviser Censorship M	df	T	p
Opinion on Prior Review	4.28	4.67	77.20	-2.00	.049

The independent-samples  $t$  test illustrated in Tables 20 and 21 were significant. In examining prior review and the adviser's opinion of prior review (Table 20), the negative  $t$  value,  $t(40.5) = -3.55, p = .001$ , indicates that the mean amount of prior review is significantly less for advisers who are strongly against prior review. Those who do not experience prior review have a mean score of 4.74, closest to being "strongly against" prior review. Meanwhile, advisers who undertake prior review have a mean score of 3.88, closest to being "somewhat against" prior review. Although they may be against prior review, the results indicate that prior review is more likely to occur if the level of their opposition is not strong.

Measuring adviser censorship against the adviser's opinion of prior review yielded similar results. The independent-samples  $t$  test illustrated in Table 21 shows a negative  $t$  value,  $t(77.2) = -2.00, p = .049$ , indicating that the mean amount of adviser censorship is significantly less for advisers who are strongly against prior review. Those who do not practice adviser censorship have a mean score of 4.67, closest to being "strongly against" prior review. Meanwhile, advisers who practice censorship have a mean score of 4.28, closest to being "somewhat against" prior review. Again, although they may be against prior review, the results indicate that adviser censorship is more likely to occur if the level of their opposition to prior review is not strong.

On another survey question, advisers were provided five missions of the newspaper and asked to rank them from “most important” to “least important.” The five missions were: *a forum for student expression, an informational publication for the student body, a public relations tool for the school, a venue for developing students’ writing skills, and a venue for developing students’ critical thinking skills*. For the purposes of this analysis, what advisers identified as the most important mission of their high school newspaper will be evaluated. Table 22 illustrates a cross-tab conducted to determine the respondent’s indication of the frequency of prior review as related to their opinion on the most important mission of the high school newspaper.

Table 22

*Cross-tab for Opinion on Top Mission of the Newspaper and Prior Review*

Most Important Mission of the high school newspaper	Prior Review	No Prior Review	Total
Forum for student expression	9	47	56
Informational publication for student body	15	25	40
Public relations tool for the school	0	0	0
Venue for developing writing skills	6	6	12
Venue for developing critical thinking skills	4	12	16
Total	34	90	124

An independent-samples *t* test was used to examine differences in prior review based on the adviser’s opinion of the most important mission of the newspaper. In this analysis, a mean

score closer to “1.00” indicates a likelihood of more prior review while a mean score closer to “2.00” indicates a likelihood of less prior review.

Table 24

*Independent-samples  $t$  Test for Prior Review and Top Mission of the Newspaper*

Most Important Mission of the high school newspaper	Prior Review M	df	t	p
Forum for student expression	1.83	74.95	4.70	.000
Informational publication for student body	1.63	91.84	-1.59	.117
Public relations tool for school	---	---	---	---
Venue for developing students' writing skills	1.50	88.22	-2.74	.008
Venue for developing students' critical thinking skills	1.75	86.86	1.36	.177

The independent-samples  $t$  test as illustrated in Table 24 yielded two significant results. Advisers who believe the most important mission of the high school newspaper is to serve as a forum for student expression,  $t(75.0) = 4.67, p = .000$ , have a mean amount of prior review significantly less ( $M = 1.83$ ) than advisers who picked any other criteria as the most important mission. In contrast, advisers who believed the most important mission of the high school newspaper is to serve as a venue for developing students' writing skills,  $t(88.2) = -2.74, p = .008$ ,



have a mean amount of prior review ( $M = 1.50$ ) significantly higher than advisers who picked other criteria as the most important mission.

Table 25 illustrates a cross-tab conducted to determine the respondent's indication of the frequency of adviser censorship as related to their opinion on the most important mission of the high school newspaper.

Table 25

*Cross-tab for Opinion on Top Mission of the Newspaper and Adviser Censorship*

Most Important Mission of the high school newspaper	Adviser Censorship	No Adviser Censorship	Total
Forum for student expression	11	45	56
Informational publication for student body	21	19	40
Public relations tool for the school	0	0	0
Venue for developing writing skills	7	4	11
Venue for developing critical thinking skills	7	8	15
Total	46	76	123

An independent-samples  $t$  test was used to examine differences in adviser censorship based on the adviser's opinion of the most important mission of the newspaper. In this analysis, a mean score closer to "1.00" indicates a likelihood of more prior review while a mean score closer to "2.00" indicates a likelihood of less prior review.

Table 26

*Independent-samples  $t$  Test for Adviser Censorship and Top Mission of the Newspaper*

Most Important Mission of the high school newspaper	Prior Review M	df	t	p
Forum for student expression	1.77	46.41	2.88	.006
Informational publication for student body	1.48	60.41	-1.28	.205
Public relations tool for school	---	---	---	---
Venue for developing students' writing skills	1.38	55.06	-2.13	.038
Venue for developing students' critical thinking skills	1.54	61.02	.841	.404

The independent-samples  $t$  test as illustrated in table 26 yielded two significant results. Advisers who believe the most important mission of the high school newspaper is to serve as a forum for student expression,  $t(46.4) = 2.88$ ,  $p = .006$ , have a mean amount of adviser censorship significantly less ( $M = 1.77$ ) than advisers who picked any other criteria as the most important mission. In contrast, advisers who believed the most important mission of the high school newspaper is to serve as a venue for developing students' writing skills,  $t(55.1) = -2.13$ ,  $p = .038$ , have a mean amount of adviser censorship ( $M = 1.38$ ) significantly higher than advisers who picked other criteria as the most important mission.

### Chapter Summary

A survey was taken by 126 high school newspaper advisers (29.6% response rate) asking about adviser demographics, practices and perceptions of various topics related to the high school newspaper. The results were analyzed to answer seven research questions utilizing descriptive statistics, means-score, and chi-square. A descriptive analysis yielded several interesting discoveries about adviser perceptions and practices as related to prior review and adviser censorship. The chi-square and independent-samples *t* tests yielded several significant findings: (1) there is a relationship between prior review and adviser censorship, (2) advisers with a more frequent level of prior review are more likely to censor student content than advisers who are less frequently subjected to prior review, (3) advisers who strongly disagree with the practice of prior review are less likely to undertake prior review or (4) practice adviser censorship than advisers who do not strongly disagree with the practice of prior review, (5) advisers who believe the most important mission of the newspaper is to be a forum for student expression are less likely to undertake prior review or (6) practice adviser censorship than their peers who believed other missions to be more important, and (7) advisers who believe the most important mission of the newspaper is to be a venue to developing students' writing skills are more likely to undertake prior review or (8) practice adviser censorship than their peers who believe other missions to be more important.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a summary of the research study as well as its findings and limitations. Future research suggestions on the topic of prior review and the high school newspaper are also provided.

#### **Summary of the Study**

This study was designed to provide insight as to the prevalence of prior review, the settings in which it is most practiced, the effect it has on adviser censorship, the effect it has on journalistic quality, how adviser perceptions affect prior review and censorship, and if practiced censorship inhibits critical thinking. In addition, this study encourages high school newspaper advisers to reflect on their own perceptions and practices in order to ensure that they are positively impacting the development of their students through the medium of the high school newspaper.

The purposes of this study were to (a) assess the perceptions of high school journalism advisers regarding the newspaper's purpose and prior review; (b) determine the environments in which prior review is most common; (c) determine if censorship stopped the production of student articles that required significant critical thought; (d) determine how the act of prior review affects the perceived quality of a newspaper; and (e) determine if adviser perceptions of prior review and the newspaper's purpose affects adviser censorship. Seven research questions and the survey *How Prior Review in High School Journalism Impacts Critical Thought and Quality Journalism* were developed to guide this study and fulfill its purposes.

The survey instrument was created using the subscriber-provided tools of Survey Monkey. Survey questions were generated from the researcher's professional knowledge on the topic, research on prior review, critical thinking pedagogy, and high school newspaper censorship. The web-based survey asked 24 questions relating to the demographics of the high school newspaper adviser and his or her newspaper, the adviser's perceptions of issues relating to the high school newspaper, and current practices within his or her newspaper.

With the permission of JEA officials, the researcher sent an e-mail to 825 members who subscribe to the JEA listserv inviting them to participate in the study. Of the approximate 431 newspaper advisers on the listserv, 126 surveys were completed by the February 28, 2007 deadline for a successful response rate of 29.6 percent.

The survey responses were collected and analyzed to answer each of the eight research questions. An independent-samples *t* test was conducted to evaluate the means of two independent groups to determine if the mean for one group differs significantly from the mean of another group. A chi-square analysis was used to determine significant relationships between two variables.

### **Additional Limitations of the Study**

In addition to the study's limitations listed in Chapter 1, other limitations to the study became evident after data collection and analysis. First, due to a limited amount of recent research in the topic area, an original instrument was developed based on the researcher's professional knowledge on the topic, research on prior review, critical thinking pedagogy, and high school newspaper censorship. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was .720, and could be improved with a revised survey instrument and coding process. This survey yielded a high amount of "other" responses that, for the most part, would fit into one of the answer

categories provided in the survey. The researcher omitted one question from analysis due to a high volume of “other” responses. In addition, four questions were omitted due to insufficient variance in the responses. The researcher also spent a significant amount of time recoding responses for data analysis. For future studies, it may be better to provide a consistent 5-point Likert scale – as well as a 2-point “yes/no” scale where appropriate – for all questions regarding perception and practice. Clearer questioning and explanation of the answer choices would likely help eliminate the tendency for respondents to select “other.”

Another limitation was relying on self-reporting. Although this is a limitation in any survey, a significant amount of prestige bias was evident in at least one question of this study. Prestige bias is when a respondent provides “prestigious” answers due to a feeling of inadequacy or lack of knowledge on a particular subject (Wimmer and Dominick, 2006). Survey question 7 asked advisers about awards, if any, their publication has received for overall excellence in the last three years. The 21 “other” responses indicated that many advisers were embarrassed by this question – some explaining that they do not enter awards competitions and others listing awards they have won that were unrelated to the question. Furthermore, advisers that did not submit their newspaper for awards may very well have been of the quality required to win awards. Overall, there was a satisfactory amount of variance in the answers provided in the survey, so one can conclude that most participants were honest with their answers. However, future researchers should consider finding ways to eliminate prestige bias in sensitive demographic questions. For instance, options such as, “I haven’t entered an awards competition;” and, “awards from another entity not listed here,” may have helped eliminate prestige bias in survey question 7.

Although the 29.6 percent response rate for the survey was satisfactory, future researchers should try to obtain a more balanced representation of respondents in the key areas of analysis. There was a large imbalance of respondents who indicated they were subjected to prior review (N = 34) compared with those who did not have prior review (N = 90). This caused a limitation because these results were used multiple times in analysis. A better balance of responses in this question would have provided data that was more sound to analyze, and may have resulted in more significant distributions.

Finally, although it did not affect the outcome of this study, future researchers should consider obtaining more demographic data from respondents. For instance, more insight could be provided for the environments in which prior review and adviser censorship occurs if we knew the adviser's level of journalistic training, the school's population, or if the school is in a state that has specific laws against prior review.

Despite these limitations, this study adds a significant amount of insight in the topic area.

### **Discussion of Significant Findings**

The literature review focused on the importance of critical thinking in the development of the student, how the newspaper can help develop critical thinking skills, and how modern-day schools exercise prior review and censorship, thus limiting the ability of students to exercise critical thinking skills. This study explored high school newspaper adviser perceptions and school practices in the following categories: the role of the high school newspaper, prior review, and censorship. The data were analyzed to determine in what settings prior review and adviser censorship are most likely to take place, and its effect on quality journalism and critical thinking.

As a graduate student and a professional scholastic journalism organization director, the researcher is uniquely qualified to present and discuss the significant findings. As director of the

Georgia Scholastic Press Association, a state representative for JEA, and a board member of the Southern Interscholastic Press Association, the researcher often works with high school newspaper advisers and students. The researcher has organized and taught high school newspaper workshops, evaluated student-produced newspapers, and advised newspaper advisers in crisis situations.

In addition to the data analyzed for the research questions, the aggregate survey responses provided significant insight as to the status of the high school newspaper and newspaper adviser perceptions. Among the most significant findings is that the majority of respondents feel that their newspaper has a strong relationship with their school administration, with 82.5 percent calling the relationship either “excellent” or “good.” This contradicts many perceptions that the newspaper is often at odds with the administration – a perception fueled by widespread news reports of administrative censorship. The news media are more likely to report about such tense relationships, rather than running stories about positive relationships between the school newspaper and the administration. Despite the news reports, the overall relationship between the advisers and students involved in high school newspapers and the school administration is strong.

Another survey result worthy of note was that 46 percent said the newspaper’s most important mission is to be a forum for student expression, followed by an informational publication for the student body (33%), a forum for developing students’ critical thinking skills (13%), and a forum to develop students’ writing skills (10%). Of the 125 people who provided a most important mission, not a single respondent selected that the most important mission of the newspaper is to serve as a public relations tool for the school. In fact, an overwhelming 90% of respondents ranked it as the least important mission. This is in stark contrast to the reason the



high school newspaper rose to prominence in the 1920s, when its main purpose was to serve as a public relations medium for the school (Spring, 2005). Advisers clearly disagree with that notion.

On the topic of prior review, advisers are largely against the right of the administrator to see the newspaper before its publication, with 85.1 percent either “strongly against” or “somewhat against,” while only 9.7 percent either “strongly” or “somewhat” support the practice. This mirrors adviser opinion on who should give final approval of the newspaper before it goes to publication – 92.1 percent believe final approval should be in the hands of the student (44.4 percent) or adviser (33.9 percent), while only 4 percent said the principal should give final approval. All these responses indicate that advisers are overwhelmingly against the practice of administrative prior review, a striking contrast from the Kopenhaver and Click (2001) study that found 90 percent of advisers believed that if asked, they should allow the principal to read copy before publication. The contrast is striking – yielding almost completely opposite results. Some of the difference can be explained in the phrasing of the question. Kopenhaver and Click specifically asked, “If the principal asks the adviser to read copy prior to publication, the adviser should do so.” This is very different from the question in this study, “What is your personal opinion of the right for a school administrator to review the student newspaper before it goes to press?” The question asked by Kopenhaver and Click placed the adviser directly in the situation of a principal asking to see the newspaper, while this study simply asked for the adviser’s opinion. Also, the method of collecting data was quite different. Kopenhaver and Click mailed surveys to 472 advisers and principals from a random sample of schools across the nation. This study invited only JEA listserv members to participate – a targeted group of newspaper advisers who, based on their membership in JEA, are more likely to be support high school newspaper

causes. Despite the differences in questioning and data collection, the contrast remains unexplainable and is certainly an area that can benefit from further research.

*Research Question 1: Comparison of how the means of prior review among non-top award-winning high school newspapers compare with the means of prior review among top award-winning newspapers*

*Research Question 2: Relationship between prior review and top award-winning newspapers*

Because Research Questions 1 and 2 are evaluating the same variables, they will be discussed simultaneously. The research questions were seeking to answer the question, “Does prior review affect quality journalism?” Quality was defined as a newspaper that has won an overall award for excellence from NSPA, other national scholastic press associations, and/or a regional scholastic press association. An independent-samples  $t$  test was not significant,  $t(58.1) = 1.32, p = .191$ , and a chi-square did not show a significant distribution (chi-square = 2.00,  $p \leq 0.20$ ), thus showing there is no significant difference in prior review and quality journalism as measured in this study.

The results should not be interpreted to mean prior review does not affect quality journalism. As mentioned in this study’s limitations section, quality is a difficult variable to measure, and top awards won may not be the best indicator of a newspaper quality. Even though the distribution was not significant, the mean score in this sample for newspapers that undertake prior review ( $M = 1.69$ ) was closer to “no top awards” than the mean score for newspapers that do not undertake prior review ( $M = 1.56$ ). Future research in this area could help clarify if there is a relationship.

*Research Question 3: Comparison of Means Between Adviser Censorship and Prior Review*

*Research Question 4: Relationship Between Prior Review and Adviser Censorship*

Because Research Questions 3 and 4 are evaluating the same variables, they will be discussed simultaneously. The research questions are seeking to answer the basic question, “Are advisers who are subjected to prior review more likely to censor themselves?” The results say “yes.” Adviser censorship was defined as a respondent who indicated they pulled an article from the newspaper before its publication. The chi-square analysis conducted for RQ 4 shows a significant relationship (chi-square = 6.63,  $p \leq .025$ ) between prior review and adviser censorship. An independent-samples *t* test conducted for RQ 3 shows a significant negative relationship,  $t(73.2) = -2.46, p = .016$ , indicating that the mean amount of adviser censorship for advisers who never undertake prior review is significantly less than the mean amount of adviser censorship for advisers who always undertake prior review. With a mean score closer to “1.00” indicating a high amount of prior review and a mean score of “4.00” indicating a low amount of prior review, advisers who censor student content posted a mean score of 3.09 while advisers who do not censor student content posted a mean score of 3.61.

From the results, one can assume that adviser censorship is more likely to occur in environments where prior review is practiced than in environments where prior review is not practiced. This significant finding is not surprising. In schools where prior review is the norm, advisers might be more inclined to censor a controversial student article they know will not be approved by the principal. The reasons may be due to time constraints. For instance, because of the production process, newspapers operate on a tight deadline. The adviser may simply be trying to save time by pulling the article before it gets caught up in a wave of discussion at the principal’s office, thus halting production of the newspaper. Advisers also may be censoring for fear of their job. It would certainly be an uncomfortable situation if the principal frequently received questionable articles – thinking that the adviser’s educational and moral convictions are

lower than the norm. There are also sound reasons for censorship – such as articles that may libel another person or articles that are just poorly researched and reported. Whatever the reason, this finding should cause advisers to self-reflect and recognize the reasons they are participating censorship.

*Research Question 5: Primary reasons for administrative and adviser censorship*

Research Question 5 was seeking to determine the primary reasons for censorship, and if the reasons differed among administrators and advisers. Censorship was defined as an article being pulled from the newspaper before it was published. One survey question asked respondents if, in the last three years, an administrator ever pulled an article from publication. If they answered “yes,” they were directed to another question that asked them to check one or more of 11 reasons why the article was censored. Another survey question asked respondents if in the last three years they, independent of the school administration, ever pulled an article from the newspaper before it was published. Those who answered “yes” were directed to a question listing the same 11 reasons as to why they censored the article. Twenty-eight respondents (22.6%) indicated an instance of administrative censorship, while 46 advisers (37.7%) indicated that they have censored an article independent of the school administration.

The reasons for the censorship were quite different. The top reason advisers said their administrative gave for censorship was, “*article likely to generate bad publicity for the school*” (35.7%). Not including those who selected “other,” the second reason that generated the most response was “*content of article deemed too mature for students*” (25%). Furthermore, eight of the nine (32.1%) “other” explanations indicated a reason that would fit into the category off “bad publicity” or “content too mature for students.” Advisers, on the other hand, were more likely to censor for sound academic reasons. Overwhelmingly, the top reason (76.1%) advisers gave for

censoring was because the article was “*not well researched/contained factual omissions.*”

Although it was a huge drop-off from the first reason, the second most popular reason (26.1%) for adviser censorship was due to “grammatical errors contained in the article.” Also, nine of the 12 respondents who selected “other” (26.1%) explained they censored due to reasons that dealt with plagiarism or sound reporting.

The reasons for administrator censorship supports the assertions by the SPLC that the majority of administrator censorship cases occur when students are writing articles that may reflect negatively on the school (Johnstone, 1998). This also indicates that many administrators who censor still see the primary goal of the newspaper to be a public relations tool for the school, one of the primary reasons school newspapers came to prominence in the 1920s. Furthermore, the second most popular reason for administrative censorship – “*content of article was too mature for students*” – seemingly erects a barrier to the development of student critical thinking. This reasoning falls in line with the autonomy given administrators in *Hazelwood*. Although the subject of the articles is not known, it is likely the articles focused on the kind of controversial issues that foster critical thinking. To foster critical thinking, administrators should allow “an open and above-board discourse of student opinion” (Gathercoal, 2001, p. 184). By censoring student content due to controversial content, administrators are inhibiting critical thinking.

Meanwhile, advisers seem to be censoring mostly in the name of sound journalism. Violating the basic journalism principles of fairness and accuracy led to the overwhelming majority of adviser censorship cases, with the second most popular reason due to poor grammar – an obvious component of teaching journalism.

No statistical analysis was conducted on these results due to the disparity of reasons given and the relatively small number of results (N = 28 for administrator censorship). However,

this study indicates that among the survey sample, administrators and advisers censor for different reasons. While advisers are more concerned with maintaining journalistic principles, administrators are more concerned with preventing bad publicity and/or controversy.

*Research Question 6: Prior Review and Newspaper Demographics*

Essentially, this question is asking, “Is prior review more common in certain environments?” Advisers were asked, “How often, if at all, in the last three years has an administrator required you or your students to show him/her the newspaper before publication?” The answer choices were “always,” “often,” “sometimes,” or “never.” The 34 advisers who choose “always,” “often,” or “sometimes” were placed into the category of “prior review.” The 90 advisers who answered “never” were placed into the category of “no prior review.” These results were compared with the answers advisers provided in three demographic categories: years of experience, primary source of newspaper funding, and perceived relationship with the school’s administration.

An independent-samples *t* test yielded no significant results for prior review and the three newspaper demographics: adviser experience  $t(54.1) = -1.57$ ,  $p = .121$ , source of funding  $t(56.6) = 1.17$ ,  $p = .248$ , and relationship with administration  $t(50.9) = 1.91$ ,  $p = .062$ . This shows that there is no significant difference in prior review among adviser experience, source of funding, and the relationship with the administration.

These results show that prior review is less dependent on certain demographic information. Experienced advisers are as likely to undertake prior review as inexperienced advisers, self-funded newspapers are as likely to undertake prior review as school-funded newspapers, and strong administrative relationships are as likely to undertake prior review as weak administrative relationships. Perhaps prior review is institutional – adviser or newspaper

demographics do not matter. If a school or administrator will enact prior review, or if an adviser is willing to accept prior review (as examined in RQ 7), then prior review will likely happen regardless of the newspaper's demographics.

*Research Question 7: Difference of the level of prior review and adviser censorship with adviser perceptions*

The question asked in research question 7 is, "Do certain adviser perceptions influence prior review and/or adviser censorship?" The survey asked advisers their opinions on two topics: prior review and the mission of the high school newspaper's mission. The final question of the survey asked advisers their personal opinion of the right for a school administrator to review the student newspaper before it goes to press. The options were: "strongly support," "somewhat support," "neither support nor against," "somewhat against," or "strongly against." Separate independent-samples  $t$  tests were conducted to examine differences in prior review and adviser censorship based on the adviser's opinion of prior review. A mean score closer to "1.00" indicates the adviser is more likely to strongly support prior review, while a mean score closer to "5.00" indicates the adviser is more likely to be strongly against prior review.

The independent-samples  $t$  test yielded significant results in both instances: prior review  $t(40.5) = -3.55, p = .001$ , and adviser censorship  $t(77.2) = -2.00, p = .049$ . In the case of prior review, the results indicate that the mean amount of prior review is significantly less for advisers who are strongly against prior review. Advisers who do not undertake prior review have a mean score of 4.74, while those who do undertake prior review have a mean score of 3.88. The results for adviser censorship were similar. Those who do not practice adviser censorship have a mean score of 4.67, while advisers who do practice adviser censorship have a mean score of 4.28.

Although the majority of advisers in the survey disagree with prior review, with 86.3 percent saying they are either “somewhat against,” or “strongly against” the practice, this study indicates that the strength of disagreement plays a factor in whether an adviser undertakes prior review or practices adviser censorship. Advisers who are strongly against prior review will likely practice what they preach. They will avoid prior review situations with their administration and will give students full autonomy in producing the student newspaper. In contrast, advisers who only have a slight reservation of prior review, or no reservation at all, are more likely to be subjected to the prior review and censor student content themselves.

This can be explained because advisers who are strongly against prior review have likely placed themselves in situations where prior review and adviser censorship will not occur, building an understanding with their administration and students. They are more likely to fight prior review, or find a new job if a new administrator requires prior review. It is not surprising that advisers who do not have a strong reservation against prior review are more likely to undertake prior review or practice censorship. If prior review is not a huge concern to them, they are likely to be reluctant to fight the practice. This supports the assertion made by Kopenhaver and Click that some advisers are reluctant to fight censorship for fear of their jobs (p. 327). Even though an adviser may be somewhat against the practice of prior review, they are likely to suppress their personal beliefs, and censor student content and accept prior review, for the sake of their jobs.

Advisers were also asked to rank what they believed was the most important mission of the newspaper. The choices were: *a forum for student expression, an informational publication for the student body, a public relations tool for the school, a venue for developing students' writing skills, and a venue for developing students' writing skills*. No respondents selected a



public relations tool as the most important mission of the newspaper. An independent-samples *t* test yielded significant results in four areas: advisers who believe the most important mission of the newspaper is to be a forum for student expression are less likely to undertake prior review [ $t(75.0) = 4.67, p = .000$ ] and practice adviser censorship [ $t(46.4) = 2.88, p = .006$ ] than their peers, and advisers who believe the top mission of the newspaper is to be a venue for developing students' writing skills are more likely to undertake prior review [ $t(88.2) = -2.74, p = .008$ ] and practice adviser censorship [ $t(55.1) = -2.13, p = .038$ ] than their peers.

In this analysis, a mean score closer to "1.00" indicates prior review and a mean score closer to "2.00" indicates no prior review. Advisers who believe the newspaper's primary goal is to be a forum for student expression have a mean score of 1.83 for prior review, and 1.77 for adviser censorship. In contrast, advisers who believe the primary goal of the newspaper is to be a venue for developing writing skills have a mean score of 1.50 for prior review, and 1.38 for adviser censorship.

This is good news for those who espouse democratic pedagogy and/or support the free high school press. Free expression and critical thinking compliment each other. In order to have optimum critical thinking, students must be allowed to think freely. Likewise, free expression encourages students to think critically, since they do not have the fear of being censored or reprimanded. This study shows that advisers who believed the most important mission of the newspaper – and therefore their primary goal as a newspaper adviser and teacher – is to promote student expression and critical thinking are the least likely to censor and accept prior review. Rather, they adopt the democratic principles of Dewey and promote Piaget's concept of accommodation – allowing the students to pose questions, seek answers, and compare findings (Dembo, 1977) through the high school newspaper. For these advisers, the newspaper has

evolved from its original purpose in the 1920s as a public relations tool into a tool where students can freely practice democratic principles, with little interference from school officials. These advisers are in environments where the autonomy given principals in *Hazelwood* is not widely used, and instead students are entrusted with the responsibilities of the school press.

In contrast, those advisers who view the newspaper as merely a venue to develop writing skills – essentially another cog in the modern-day educational curriculum – are more likely to accept prior review and censor student content. Since they do not recognize the democratic values of free expression as the most important mission of the newspaper, it is not surprising that in practice they are less likely to give the students the autonomy to think freely.

### **Suggested Future Research**

This study provides a starting point for future studies looking at prior review, censorship, and critical thinking as related to the high school newspaper. It was the first known study to try to determine if there is a relationship between: prior review and quality journalism, prior review and adviser censorship, prior review and certain newspaper demographics, adviser perceptions and prior review, and adviser perceptions and adviser censorship. It also is the first known study to compare the reasons for administrative and adviser censorship, and thus attempting to determine if critical thinking was discouraged by censorship. Although this research provided insight into several areas, future research should attempt to provide a more in-depth look into one or two of these areas. Doing so will allow the researcher to better obtain a proportionate sample population, ask more focused questions, and perhaps generate more scientific significance in data analysis.

In looking at prior review, future researchers should try to obtain a sample size that has equal amounts of respondents who have prior review and do not have prior review. This would

provide better insight into several of the questions asked in this study. Also, a study that had a better representation of “quality journalism” would have provided more insight. A future study could focus on only one award – for instance the NSPA Pacemaker Award – and survey an equal amount of award winners and non-award winners from the past three years. Again, better representation may have provided more scientifically significant insight.

Another study could be done focusing on the newspaper’s role in developing critical thinking skills. A content analysis of student newspapers could be conducted by the researcher to determine if articles that fit the definition of critical thinking were present. Then, a follow-up survey to those newspaper advisers – and newspaper advisers whose newspapers did not demonstrate critical thinking – could be conducted regarding adviser perceptions and practices. Such a study would show which academic environments foster critical thinking.

### **Chapter Summary**

This study was sought to provide insight as to the prevalence of prior review, the settings in which it is most practiced, the effect it has on adviser censorship, the effect it has on journalistic quality, how adviser perceptions affect prior review and censorship, and if practiced censorship inhibits critical thinking. The study yielded eight scientifically significant results, showing a strong correlation between prior review and adviser censorship. Advisers who undertake prior review are more likely to censor student content themselves. Also, prior review and adviser censorship are most likely to occur among advisers are not strongly against prior review and among advisers who view the primary mission of the newspaper to be a venue for developing writing skills. In contrast, prior review and adviser censorship are less likely to occur among adviser who are strongly against prior review and among advisers who view the primary

mission of the newspaper to be a forum for student expression. Newspaper demographics, however, have no effect on prior review.

Other interesting findings from the survey conducted for the study show that advisers in the sample overwhelmingly oppose the practice of prior review, and are more likely to censor content for sound journalistic reasons, while administrators are likely to censor for public relations reasons.

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## APPENDIX A1

February 15, 2007

Dear High School Newspaper Adviser:

Some people think free high school newspapers are essential to the high school curriculum, training critical thinkers and democratic citizens, while others think free student newspapers leave students too much autonomy for irresponsible publications that serve neither educational nor community values. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study, supported by the Journalism Education Association (JEA), seeking your opinion on the proper role of the student press and contemporary high schools.

My name is Joe Dennis, graduate student at the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia. This study, titled "How Prior Review in High School Journalism Impacts Critical Thought and Quality Journalism," will determine if prior review of the high school newspaper by an administrator diminishes or enhances the quality of journalism consistently produced by students. The study also seeks to gauge adviser sentiment about prior review, and its current use among American high schools. While this study will provide an opportunity for advisers to reflect on their attitudes and practices in producing the high school newspaper, it is hoped that information gathered from this study will better inform educators about current prior review practices and the effect on quality high school journalism.

You have received this e-mail because you are a subscriber to the JEA listserve, identifying you as a journalism educator. If you are not a current high school newspaper adviser, please disregard this e-mail.

Completing this survey should take no more than 15 minutes. To participate in the study, please access the survey at the following link:

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=674253278973>

I plan to begin data analysis on February 28, 2007, so completion of the survey by then would be much appreciated.

**CONSENT INFORMATION:**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. In addition, you may skip any question you do not wish to answer.

Completion of the survey instrument will be considered for participation. There are no foreseeable risks or discomfort associated with this research study. However, please note I can ensure confidentiality of the participant by utilizing standard confidentiality procedures during the completion of the final report, but technology limits the degree of confidentiality that can be guaranteed. The web site and its associated server have been secured for privacy. However, Internet communications are insecure, thus prohibiting a "guarantee."

## APPENDIX A2

If you have any questions about this research, please do not hesitate to ask me. You may contact me at (706) 542-5022 or [jodennis@uga.edu](mailto:jodennis@uga.edu). Additional questions about the rights of individuals who participate in this research study may also be addressed to the chairperson of the Institutional Review Board at the University of Georgia at (706) 542-3199 or [irb@uga.edu](mailto:irb@uga.edu).

Thank you for your valuable help that you are providing through your participation in this study.

Sincerely,  
Joe Dennis  
Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication  
The University of Georgia  
120 Hooper Street  
Athens, GA 30602-3018  
(706) 542-5022  
[jodennis@uga.edu](mailto:jodennis@uga.edu)

## APPENDIX B1

February 25, 2007

Dear High School Newspaper Adviser:

This is a follow-up e-mail to the one previously sent from me last week. I wanted to remind you of an opportunity to participate in a research study being supported by the Journalism Education Association, seeking your opinion on the proper role of the student press and contemporary high schools.

Some people think free high school newspapers are essential to the high school curriculum, training critical thinkers and democratic citizens, while others think free student newspapers leave students too much autonomy for irresponsible publications that serve neither educational nor community values.

My name is Joe Dennis, graduate student at the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Georgia. This study, titled "How Prior Review in High School Journalism Impacts Critical Thought and Quality Journalism," will determine if prior review of the high school newspaper by an administrator diminishes or enhances the quality of journalism consistently produced by students. The study also seeks to gauge adviser sentiment about prior review, and its current use among American high schools. While this study will provide an opportunity for advisers to reflect on their attitudes and practices in producing the high school newspaper, it is hoped that information gathered from this study will better inform educators about current prior review practices and the effect on quality high school journalism.

You have received this e-mail because you are a subscriber to the JEA listserve, identifying you as a journalism educator. If you are not a current high school newspaper adviser, please disregard this e-mail.

Completing this survey should take no more than 15 minutes. To participate in the study, please access the survey at the following link:

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=674253278973>

I plan to begin data analysis on February 28, 2007, so completion of the survey by then would be much appreciated.

**CONSENT INFORMATION:**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. In addition, you may skip any question you do not wish to answer.

Completion of the survey instrument will be considered for participation. There are no foreseeable risks or discomfort associated with this research study. However, please note I can ensure confidentiality of the participant by utilizing standard confidentiality procedures during

## APPENDIX B2

the completion of the final report, but technology limits the degree of confidentiality that can be guaranteed. The web site and its associated server have been secured for privacy. However, Internet communications are insecure, thus prohibiting a “guarantee.”

If you have any questions about this research, please do not hesitate to ask me. You may contact me at (706) 542-5022 or [jodennis@uga.edu](mailto:jodennis@uga.edu). Additional questions about the rights of individuals who participate in this research study may also be addressed to the chairperson of the Institutional Review Board at the University of Georgia at (706) 542-3199 or [irb@uga.edu](mailto:irb@uga.edu).

Thank you for your valuable help that you are providing through your participation in this study.

Sincerely,  
Joe Dennis  
Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication  
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120 Hooper Street  
Athens, GA 30602-3018  
(706) 542-5022  
[jodennis@uga.edu](mailto:jodennis@uga.edu)

## APPENDIX C1

For the following questions, please indicate your response.

**First, I'm going to ask you some questions about you and your school's newspaper.**

1. How many years have you been the adviser of your school's newspaper?
  - A. 0-1 years
  - B. 1-2 years
  - C. 3-5 years
  - D. 5-10 years
  - E. More than 10 years
  
2. When you first arrived at your school, did you take over an existing newspaper or start one from the "ground up?"
  - A. Took over newspaper
  - B. Started newspaper
  
3. Is your school a public or private school?
  - A. Public
  - B. Private
  
4. How often is your newspaper published?
  - A. Once per semester
  - B. Once per month
  - C. Bi-weekly
  - D. Other. Please explain \_\_\_\_\_.
  
5. Is your newspaper produced primarily in a journalism class or as an extra-curricular activity?
  - A. In a class
  - B. Extra-curricular activity
  - C. Other
  
6. How is your newspaper funded?
  - A. Primarily staff-funded through advertising/fundraising
  - B. Primarily through school system funding
  - C. Approximately 50 percent staff-funded and 50 percent through school system funding
  - D. Other. Please explain \_\_\_\_\_.
  
7. In the last three years, has your newspaper ever been recognized with the following awards for overall excellence?
 

*Check all that apply*

  - A. Pacemaker Award from the National Scholastic Press Association (NSPA)
  - B. Other national organization award such as the Quill and Scroll Gallup Award or the Columbia Scholastic Press Association (CSPA) Crown Award
  - C. Regional scholastic press association awards such as the Southern Interscholastic Press Association (SIPA) All-Southern Award
  - D. State scholastic press association award
  - E. Other. Please explain \_\_\_\_\_.
  - F. Neither

## APPENDIX C2

8. Is your school newspaper designated a “public forum?” If so, how?

*Check all that apply*

- A. It’s legally designated as a public forum by the school board
- B. A public forum statement is included in the newspaper
- C. The newspaper is not designated as a “public forum”
- D. I don’t know

9. What do you believe is/are the mission(s) of your high school newspaper?

*Check all that apply*

- A. A forum for student expression
- B. An informational publication for the student body
- C. A public relations tool for the school
- D. A venue for developing students’ writing skills
- E. A venue for developing students’ critical thinking skills
- F. Other. Please explain \_\_\_\_\_.

**Now I’m going to ask some questions about your publication and its relationship with your school’s administrators.**

10. How would you characterize the relationship between your newspaper and your school’s administration?

- A. Excellent
- B. Good
- C. Fair
- D. Poor

11. Does your school have a publications review board that has the final authority in deciding the content to be published?

- A. Yes
- B. No (if no, skip to question 14)

12. Who makes up the publications review board?

*Check all that apply*

- A. School administrators
- B. Faculty
- C. Students
- D. Community members
- E. Local media members
- F. Other. Please explain \_\_\_\_\_.

13. In the last three years, how often, if at all, has an administrator required you or your students to show him/her the newspaper *before* publication?

- A. Always
- B. Often
- C. Sometimes
- D. Never (if never, skip to question 17)

14. Does an administrator currently require you or your student to show him/her the newspaper *before* publication?

- A. Always
- B. Often
- C. Sometimes
- D. Never (go to question #17)

## APPENDIX C3

15. What administrator views the newspaper before publication?
- A. Principal
  - B. Assistant Principal
  - C. Superintendent or other school district official
  - D. Other. Please explain \_\_\_\_\_
16. In the last three years, has an administrator ever requested an article be pulled from the newspaper before publication?
- A. Yes
  - B. No (if no, go to question #19)
17. In the latest instance, what was/were the reason(s) the administrator cited for the article being pulled?
- Check all that apply*
- A. Content of article deemed too mature for students
  - B. Content of article deemed too critical of administration
  - C. Content of article deemed too critical of students
  - D. Article deemed disruptive to the school's educational mission
  - E. Article likely to be perceived as embarrassing to the school
  - F. Article likely to generate bad publicity for the school
  - G. Article not well-researched/contained factual omissions
  - H. Grammatical errors contained in article
  - I. Public will mistakenly interpret article as a school endorsement
  - J. No reason given
  - K. Other Please explain \_\_\_\_\_
18. In your role as adviser, independent of the school administration, have you ever pulled an article from the newspaper before publication?
- A. Yes
  - B. No (if no, go to question #21)
19. In the latest instance, what was/were the reason(s) you pulled the article?
- Check all that apply*
- A. Content of article deemed too mature for students
  - B. Content of article deemed too critical of administration
  - C. Content of article deemed too critical of students
  - D. Article deemed disruptive to the school's educational mission
  - E. Article likely to be perceived as embarrassing to the school
  - F. Article likely to generate bad publicity for the school
  - G. Article not well-researched/contained factual omissions
  - H. Grammatical errors contained in article
  - I. Public will mistakenly interpret article as a school endorsement
  - J. No reason given
  - K. Other Please explain \_\_\_\_\_
20. In your role as adviser, have you ever suggested your students not pursue a story they proposed?
- A. Yes
  - B. No (if no, go to question 23)
21. In the most significant instance, what were the reasons you suggested a story not be pursued?
- (Check all that apply)
- A. Story not relevant to audience
  - B. Story subject too mature for students
  - C. Story may upset the administration
  - D. Story may upset other teachers or students

## APPENDIX C4

- E. Story may offend parents
- F. Story disruptive of the school's educational mission
- G. Story likely to generate bad press for the school
- H. Story topic too broadly defined
- I. Other Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

22. In a few words, what was the topic of the rejected story?

- A. Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

23. In your opinion, who should give the final approval of the content of the newspaper before it goes to press?

- A. Principal or some other administrator
- B. Adviser
- C. Students
- D. Publication Review Board
- E. Other. Please explain \_\_\_\_\_.

24. What is your personal opinion of the right for a school administrator to review the student newspaper before it goes to press?

- A. Strongly support
- B. Somewhat support
- C. Neither support or nor oppose
- D. Somewhat against
- E. Strongly against

*Survey complete!*