

KING, OLIVIA G. M.A. *We Race as One: The Competing Rhetorics Surrounding Activism in Formula One*. (2024)
Directed by Dr. Heather Adams. 24 pp.

“We Race as One: The Competing Rhetorics Surrounding Activism in Formula One” assesses the introduction of Article 12.2.1.n, also called “Guidance on the Principle of Neutrality,” into the sport. The article attempts to regulate the political landscape of Formula One, an international sport, which at its foundation is political. Through an analysis of the rhetorical situation and its anti-procedural rhetoric, this essay highlights the discrepancies of the article and the competing existence of a mandate of neutrality and politics and activism in Formula One. I argue that the policy functions as a response to an unidentified exigence and provides little procedural clarification as to how it is to be implemented. The sport and the exigence are impacted by the constraints of the situation: viewership, social media, investors, and the teams, as well as the rhetor and the audience. Formula One, as a rhetorical situation, is currently at odds with the audience and constraints impacting the situation, due to the neutrality mandate and its influence on activism within the sport. The performative and political nature of the sport is shown through its activism, and cannot be hindered if the rhetor, through anti-procedural rhetoric, cannot successfully connect with its audience, and navigate the constraints.

KING, OLIVIA G. M.A. *Banning the Page: The Opposing Rhetorics in Contemporary Literary Censorship*. (2024)
Directed by Dr. Risa Applegarth. 43 pp.

“Banning the Page: The Opposing Rhetorics in Contemporary Literary Censorship” analyzes the opposing arguments surrounding the contemporary Book Banning movement. Book banning has been on the rise in the past few years and has garnered the attention of both the press and the government. This essay contextualizes the book banning movement in relation to the organizations targeting subject LGBTQ+ and POC subject matter and authors. Through engaging in rhetorical listening and framing theory, this essay aims to find an understanding of the dominant tropes of agency and childhood, and facilitate a conversation across the two polarized positions. Rhetorical listening provides the tools to identify the motivations of each argument. While framing theory provides categories to identify the arguments and understand the actions taken by each side of the movement. Through this understanding, a possible compromise that acknowledges the voices on each side and bridges the divide can be achieved.

WE RACE AS ONE: THE COMPETING RHETORICS SURROUNDING
ACTIVISM IN FORMULA ONE
AND
BANNING THE PAGE: THE OPPOSING RHETORICS IN
CONTEMPORARY LITERARY CENSORSHIP

by

Olivia G. King

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Approved by

Dr. Heather Adams
Committee Co-Chair

Dr. Risa Applegarth
Committee Co-Chair

DEDICATION

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This thesis written by Olivia G. King has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Co-Chair

Dr. Heather Adams

Committee Co-Chair

Dr. Risa Applegarth

Committee Members

Dr. Jennifer Keith

April 25, 2024

Date of Acceptance by Committee

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This master's thesis is a combination of two essays: "We Race as One: The Competing Rhetorics Surrounding Activism in Formula One" and "Banning the Page: The Opposing Rhetorics in Contemporary Literary Censorship." Both essays use rhetorical approaches to analyze the given situation in relation to its changing political landscape.

The aim of the first essay, "We Race as One: The Competing Rhetorics Surrounding Activism in Formula One," is to analyze the current policy changes, specifically the introduction of Article 12.2.1.n, in Formula One in relation to activism and the political landscape surrounding the sport. This analysis is performed through an exploration of the rhetorical situations and its encompassing anti-procedural rhetoric. The rhetorical situation of the sport can be broken up by the exigence, rhetor, audience, and the constraints placed on the situation. Through this the exigence's influence on the rhetorical situation can be analyzed by anti-procedural rhetoric. Formula One, as a rhetorical situation, is currently at odds with the audience and constraints impacting the situation, due to the exigence and its influence on activism within the sport. Activism is part of the performative nature of sports, and in an international sport, activism plays a large role in the perception of the sport in regard to the investors and the sport's viewership.

The aim of the second essay, "Banning the Page: The Opposing Rhetorics in Contemporary Literary Censorship," is to analyze, through rhetorical listening and framing theory, the opposing arguments surrounding the Book Banning movement in order to find a common understanding. Rhetorical listening provides the tools to identify the motivations of each argument. While framing theory provides categories to identify the arguments and understand the actions taken by each side of the movement. Book banning is not a new

movement, it occurs in cycles every few decades. The current movement has become more organized due to social media and has therefore garnered the attention of the national press and government. This essay seeks to establish a compromise that targets the main arguments proposed by each side.

Both essays center around malleable rhetorical situations that are constantly changing given the internal and external influences. While neither essay establishes a singular set solution, both aim to provide an understanding of each situation or argument, and rhetorical ways in which the acknowledged actors can progress.

CHAPTER II: WE RACE AS ONE: THE OPPOSING RHETORICS SURROUNDING

ACTIVISM IN FORMULA ONE

Formula One (commonly referred to as Formula 1 or F1) is the “highest class of international racing for single-seater formula racing cars” (“What is Formula 1”). The term “Formula” comes from the set of rules, consisting of but not limited to “car design, engine size, and component usage,” that all teams must adhere to (“Drivers, Teams, Cars, Circuits”). And the “One” signifies that it is the leading tier in this category of motorsport (“Drivers, Teams, Cars, Circuits”). Currently there are ten teams, and each team consists of two drivers (“Drivers, Teams, Cars, Circuits”). The Formula One World Championship, which began in 1950 at the Silverstone racetrack in the United Kingdom, is “widely recognized as the world’s most prestigious motor racing competition” (FIA). All ten teams compete across the world with this season consisting of twenty-three races on five out of seven continents (“Drivers, Teams, Cars, Circuits”).

Over the past four years global events—the COVID-19 Pandemic, the killing of George Floyd and subsequent protests in support of the Black Lives Matter movement, and unprecedented wildfires in the United States and Australia—have consumed the attention of the international community. And given the sport’s international participants and audience, these globalized events have impacted the teams and drivers of F1. Many teams and drivers have spoken out about global issues important to them. German driver Sebastian Vettel, who finished his career with Aston Martin Aramco Cognizant F1 team (referred to simply as Aston Martin) used his platform and the races to show his support for environmentalism and LGBTQ+ rights. In 2022 he wore multiple bracelets and shirts, such as a Pride rainbow shirt for the Hungarian Grand Prix, to show his support. Since 2019 he has been active in getting Aston Martin involved

in showing support for LGBTQ+ rights. Aston Martin partnered with Racing Pride, a LGBTQ+ inclusivity movement within motorsport. The organization, co-founded by Formula Ford driver Richard Morris in 2019, aims to “raise the visibility of LGBTQ+ participants across motorsport and help allies support their LGBTQ+ colleagues” (Beer). Aston Martin has brought in consultants from Racing Pride to analyze their policies, work with their “HR department, with [their] management all the way up to the most senior level, to make sure the team itself is making progress towards inclusion” (Beer). In 2021 Aston Martin incorporated the Racing Pride logo onto their cars.

In 2020, the sport implemented the “We Race as One” initiative—using the slogan and stickers visible (e.g., on race cars) during races to demonstrate solidarity. The initiative was launched to “[tackle] the biggest issues facing [the] sport global communities,” specifically racism and all forms of inequality (“Formula 1 Launches We Race as One”). This move to rhetorically enact a collective sporting response—one that was clearly directed to fans—has not, however, remained. In February of 2023, the *Federation Internationale De L’Automobile* (FIA), the governing body of international motorsport, added article 12.2.1.n: “Guidance on the Principal of Neutrality,” to the International Sporting Code (ISC). The article (which is analyzed in depth in a later section) followed a surge in the sport’s viewership and a change in presidency within the FIA. The aim of “We Race as One: The Competing Rhetorics Surrounding Activism in Formula One” is to analyze, through an exploration of the rhetorical situation and its anti-procedural rhetoric, the connection between activism and politics within Formula One as it relates to the incorporation of Article 12.2.1.n. I argue that the policy functions as a response to an unidentified exigence and provides little procedural clarification as to how it is to be implemented. A shifting political context, a broader and more diverse fanbase, and some drivers’

and teams' desire to respond with political messages seems to have prompted the policy, which aims to curb drivers being rhetorical agents. As the sport responds to the new policy, it is clear that some drivers are resisting this rhetorical censure and that the widening reach of the sport limits the control the F1 leadership is trying to enact through article 12.2.1.n. This analysis suggests, then, the limits of policies that demand political neutrality in realms, like sports, that are, as rhetorical situations, never fully controllable.

Situational Constraints

Rhetor Lloyd F. Bitzer defines situational rhetoric as a “complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence” that can bring about change or action in relation to the exigence (6). An exigence, within this context, is “an obstacle” that can only be changed by discourse (6). He establishes that a rhetorical situation contains three constituents: exigence, audience, and constraints (8). The audience in a rhetorical situation identifies the “persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse” and can enact change (8). Rhetorical constraints consist of “persons, events, objects, and relations” that influence and limit the exigence and the discourse surrounding it. Keith Grant-Davie elaborates on the work of Bitzer by claiming that the rhetor is another constituent in a rhetorical situation and that the rhetor and the audience can be plural (266). He also argues the importance of constraints on the rhetorical situation. To Grant-Davie, constraints work “either for or against the rhetor’s objectives” and can either positively or negatively influence the audiences’ view and response to the argument being presented by the rhetor (272). Because of the two-fold nature of the constraints, he categorizes them as assets (positive constraints) and liabilities (negative constraints) (272).

Looking at Formula 1 within the context of the new policy change, many see the rhetor as being the sport, but I am arguing that the rhetor is only the governing body (both, the F1 president and board of directors, and the FIA). Those being impacted by and influencing the implementation of the policy change are the teams (employees and drivers), the press, and the spectators, therefore they fit into the category of audience. The exigence within this situation is the unidentified need for the new policy change, which is being impacted by the rhetor, audience, and constraints. Within Formula 1, the constraints consist of the investors and track owners, the globalization of the sport, the shifting demographics of the spectators, and the surge in digital notoriety.

The investors and track owners connect to one key constraint: the globalization of the sport. As previously stated, there are currently 23 races over five continents. Each track must fulfill criteria set by the FIA to be granted a Grade 1 license that is valid for three years and become an F1 track (“FIA Track Grades”). There can be more tracks with licenses than tracks on the racing calendar, and tracks can choose to not renew their racing licenses (“FIA Track Grades”). Not renewing can happen for multiple reasons: scheduling difficulties, financial issues, or sometimes the races get canceled. In 2022 the FIA decided to cancel the race in Sochi, Russia after Russia invaded Ukraine (“FIA Announces World Motor Sport”). While the track still fulfills the requirements for a Grade 1 license, F1 has not raced in Russia since. Some countries only have one track, some have multiple, and some have none; currently, the United States has three tracks, and Italy has two tracks. The sport is confined to qualifying tracks and the tracks have their own set of constraints like money and political issues.

Over the past few years, the demographics of the sport—another constraint—have changed. Every few years in conjunction with F1 leadership, the Motorsport Network conducts

the Global F1 Fan Survey to assess changes to the fanbase, such as demographics and viewership. The most recent data available is from the survey conducted in 2021. The survey assessed the feedback from fans in 187 different countries and saw an increase from 2017—when the previous survey was conducted—in the female fanbase and the younger demographic (“Global F1 Fan Survey 2021” 10). Female participation in the survey has increased by 10 percent (Global F1 Fan Survey 2021” 10). Of all the respondents, 34 percent were under 24 years old, and 63 percent were under the age of 36, bringing the average age of F1 fans to 32 years old (“Global F1 Fan Survey 2021” 10). This survey represents a best-faith effort to capture an accurate representation of the sport’s fanbase; nevertheless, the numbers cannot accurately reflect the entire fanbase. It could be that the numbers of younger fans and female fans are higher. Regardless of the actual number, there has been a growing female fanbase and, importantly, some pushback to this change.

In 2022, when asked about this growing demographic, Oracle Red Bull Racing (usually shortened to Red Bull) team principal Christian Horner said, “It’s bringing in a lot of young girls because of all these great-looking young drivers” (Hall). Horner has since clarified his statement by saying that F1 needs more women in every aspect of the sport (Hall). That same year, at the Austrian Grand Prix, many women in the stands spoke out about being harassed by other fans during the racing weekend. One fan of Lewis Hamilton, a multi-year driver for the Mercedes AMG Patronas F1 Team (referred to as Mercedes), was brought into the Mercedes garage in the paddock after the team learned that she was assaulted in the stands (Collantine and Cottingham). The behavior of the fans was publicly criticized by drivers Hamilton and Sebastian Vettel. Mercedes team principal Toto Wolff released a statement saying, “If you’re a Formula 1 fan, whatever team, whatever driver, you can’t be racist, [sexist], and you can’t be homophobic

because then you don't fit Formula 1 and we don't want you" (Collantine and Cottingham). He undercut his message, though, by adding that the majority of fans should not be condemned because of the actions of a few. These incidents add another layer to the current constraints in Formula 1 and raise questions about the rhetor's goal: enforcing Article 12.2.1.n. How can a televised sport, currently impacted by constraints concerning racism and sexism, effectively enforce a mandate of neutrality? The enforcement of the article will not resolve these current constraints existing within the sport.

Additionally, the prevalence of social media highlights the constraints surrounding this rhetorical situation. The younger demographic creates a stronger push towards social media mentions and interactions; every team is on X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok. As the fanbase shifts, the perception and understanding of the sport will change—the performance will change. The sport needs to adapt to the changing fanbase; it is constrained by the wants and interests of its audience if it hopes to retain a following. However, recent reports show a decrease in social media mentions by US fans, suggesting that F1's current performance is not effectively sustaining current fans or bringing in new fans. Social intelligence company Buzz Radar published a case study analyzing F1 mentions and fan engagement from 2021 to 2023 (Noble). The company used a combination of human analysis and AI to sort through social media messages and posts relating to F1, as well as looking at the follower count of each team (Noble). The data revealed that from the months of January to May of 2022 and 2023 social media mentions were down 70.2%, new followers had dropped by 46.29%, and that the social reach had dropped by 64.10% (Noble). The study also found an increase in negative terms to describe the sport, such as "boring" and "annoying" (Noble). Analysts at the company associated this shift in social media with "a single-team domination" (Noble). The 2023 season saw Red Bull

dominance, with Dutch driver Max Verstappen winning nearly every race, a feat not even accomplished by long-time top performers, such as Lewis Hamilton or Michael Schumacher.

Part of the shifting demographics over the past few years can also be attributed to the televised nature of the sport. One cause of the increase in viewership can be attributed to the Netflix docuseries *Drive to Survive* which gives fans an inside look at the teams and drivers. The show began streaming in 2019 and has steadily increased viewership over the five seasons—the most recent season had a viewership of 570,000 within the first week (Shea). The show is said to “provide a halo effect that’s boosted live race viewership on ABC and ESPN” (Shea). An increase in viewership provides the sporting body with additional funds. Due to the growing popularity of the sport over the past few years, US network ABC was given the rights to broadcast the racing weekend alongside ESPN (Mee).

ABC has seen a drop in F1 viewership this year. The number of US viewers from last season to this season has dropped by “a staggering 25%” (Mee). Some have made the argument that this is because the new US driver, Logan Sargeant, has not performed as well as hoped, but the increase in popularity occurred prior to Sargeant joining the grid—and before the addition of more U.S. races. This suggests that the decrease is caused by another factor. Sports journalist Lydia Mee (and many others in her field) reported that this drop in viewership is because fans view this season as boring, a sentiment shared by other individuals and studies assessing this racing season. Again, this was attributed to the dominance of Red Bull and their driver Max Verstappen. F1 is a sporting event, and therefore, is reliant on not just investors but on the fans. The fans are the strongest constraint within the rhetorical situation that is Formula 1. If fans do not engage with the sport and show an interest in the sport, then investors and track owners have no financial incentive to invest in the sport or offer to host a race.

All the aforementioned constraints impact and are impacted by the exigence: an assumed need for a Guidance on the Principle of Neutrality document. Considering the context of recent world-wide political activism and the more race-specific shifts in viewership, one can infer that the policy, which focuses on restricting the activism and political nature of F1, responds to F1 leadership's sense that such changes call for response and management. Rather than embracing change as part of a living sport, the policy seems to rectify what is considered to be a problematic or untenable situation. The demographic of the fanbase and the popularization of the sport—through social media and television broadcasts—should influence the reception of the sport and any changes the governing body makes. The exigence pushes against the constraints: since the implementation of policy, while there has been an increase in the female and younger demographics, overall, the viewership of the sport has declined. This decline cannot be entirely attributed to the policy change, but the policy cannot be ignored when analyzing the shift in viewership. A study done by Harvard University found that the number of young adults active in politics and political change has risen in the past decade by over 12 percent, suggesting that current young adults are much more cognizant of political situations and their impact, than previous generations (Lauter). Even though the study focused solely on people from the US, F1 is focused on garnering a large fanbase in the United States, and the younger viewers are aware of the politics surrounding the sport. It can be inferred that because of the political and demographic shift, Article 12.2.1.n is at odds with a cross-section of the new, younger viewers. Activism and politics cannot be taken out of sports, they inherently exist within the rhetorical situation that is Formula 1. F1's move to "fix" the "imperfect" shifts in the sport demonstrates a willful disregard for how, typically, sports rhetorically function on the international stage. In the introduction to his book *Sporting Rhetoric: Performance, Games, and Politics*, Barry Brummett

asserts that sports, especially international sporting events, and the performances they create are “explicitly connected to rhetorical effects in politics” (2). The event itself can be politicized or directly connected to politics, like the Olympics. Or a sport can become politicized by the actors participating in the event. In Formula 1 this occurs through the audience and the constraints of the rhetorical situation.

Both sporting events promote international collaboration, but the Olympics focus specifically on each country competing against each other, while F1 showcases the competing of teams—which can be made up of people from different countries. Because of the configuration of the sport, these specific constraints influence the global impact and response the rhetor’s message has on the audience and the situation; the reach of the message exists beyond the sport. Brummett notes that “performances within the [sporting event], and counter-performances by observers around the world” have a global impact on politics and society (2). Brummett argues that regardless of the particulars, all sporting is performative and will have an impact on international conversations relating to politics and social issues (11). While Article 12.2.1.n focuses on remaining neutral on what it deems to be political issues, according to Brummett that is impossible. A sport, especially one that is international, cannot exist without producing a political message. The performance of the sport itself creates its own message, one that competes with the new message created by the rhetor.

Guidance on the Principle of Neutrality

One of the challenges of analyzing this policy and the context surrounding it comes from the speculative nature of what has happened within the governing body. The public is not privy to all of the decisions, penalties, and conversations that happen between drivers, teams, and the governing body. With the surge of popularity comes a surge of rumors. Viewers are only given

part of the information, there are paid services that fans can join that provide them with more information about teams and the conversations that happen in the garage. But even with this, fans and spectators do not know why certain decisions were made or penalties were (or sometimes were not) given. The increase in social media usage by fans has also led to the spread of unsupported assertions about rulings or biases within the sport. And even though these beliefs may be true, the public does not have access to the information to determine if that is the case.

In December of 2021 Mohammed Ben Sulayem became president of the FIA after previous FIA President Jean Todt stepped down. Sulayem was not the only person to be hired or promoted around this time. In January of 2021 Stefano Domenicali was internally promoted to President and CEO of Formula 1. And following the divisive ruling that saw Max Verstappen receive his first World Drivers Championship win at the end of the 2021 racing season (an event that is still brought up two years later), then-race director Michael Masi was replaced by Eduardo Freitas and Niels Wittich, both of whom still currently occupy this role. These changes in the sport's governing body preceded a shift in regulation prioritization and the creation of regulations and addendums, one of which is Article 12.2.1.n.

Article 12.2.1.n (also referred to as Guidance on the Principle of Neutrality) regulates the social causes and organizations that are given a platform by drivers, race employees, and teams. The new regulation was created to “cement the FIA’s longstanding commitment to protecting motor sport’s neutrality” (1). The rationalization behind this rhetorical move is that the international nature of F1 must be understood, and relationships must be maintained. The sport is constrained by international politics and investors/sponsors when it comes to where teams can race, who can race, and what networks races will be broadcast on. Participants—everyone involved in a racing event—are not “permitted to make political, religious, and/or personal

statements in violation of the general principle of neutrality” (2). This rule only goes into effect during the International Competition, which includes press conferences, any event on the track—drivers’ parade, track walk, and race—and the end of race celebrations (2).

The introduction of this neutrality article has divided the paddock. While many drivers and teams have spoken out in opposition, some are supportive of the decision. Mercedes—the drivers and the team principal—has been an outspoken critic of the new ruling, and Red Bull team principal Christian Horner also came out against the ruling when it was first introduced. In an interview, Horner stated that he does not think sports should be a political tool, but that drivers should have “the freedom of their opinions, or the ability to speak their minds” (Cooper).

While Horner may disagree with the ruling, Red Bull driver Max Verstappen had previously voiced an a-political sentiment. In 2022, when many prominent drivers were focusing on raising awareness about social issues, Verstappen said “I am constantly being asked to answer questions about politics. But I’m just a Formula 1 driver” (“F1 Divided”). McLaren Formula 1 (referred to as McLaren) CEO Zak Brown has voiced his support for the message presented by the new article. Brown made similar remarks as Verstappen and Horner. He made comments about how sports should not be used for politics, but that “Everyone is allowed freedom of speech. [Even though] It did get out of control at times with so much messaging going on” (“Zak Brown”). Brown, like Horner, talks about finding a balance between the sport as entertainment and doing good as an entity, however, unlike Horner, Brown believes this rule does just that. While Brown may find the ruling to be the answer, many teams, spectators, and members of the press have raised questions over the details and meaning of the article. While the *spirit* of the article promotes commentary, the details remain opaque.

The vague language used in the regulation necessitates clarification from the ruling body. Many teams and drivers were questioning the article when it was first introduced. Clarifying statements regarding when drivers and team employees can speak or post about their personal beliefs were added to the document after the article was incorporated into the International Sporting Code (Baldwin). They also provided examples and made clear that any statements regarding “any military conflict or political dispute between nations, regions, religions, or communities” would not be allowed without prior approval by the governing body (“Guidance on the Principle of Neutrality” 2). While these additions do provide some clarification, since only a few examples are provided not every situation has been covered—the document makes it clear that the listed examples are “illustrative” and “non-exhaustive” (2). However, the document does not list requirements or the criteria to establish what does and does not count. Each team must make a judgement call about what is and is not allowed or exempt from this ruling, unless they wish to receive approval from the FIA in advance. But in order to do so the team must submit a request “at least four weeks before the event concerned” and if they receive approval, the granted request only lasts for the duration of that one sporting event (3).

Furthermore, the article plainly states that “there shall be no right of appeal against the FIA’s decision to approve or reject an Article 12.2.1.n request” (3). The document does not provide any information as to the governing body’s criteria for judging an appeal. This implies that whoever is overseeing the appeals process will keep their biases out of their ruling, but also that the teams do not have much input on the decisions made that impact their livelihoods. While there is a governing body, the teams and drivers are the face of the sport. They are the ones in the public eye, and therefore tend to invoke most of the anger and opinions from the public. The governing body, as the rhetor, has the authority to influence the situation and act as the leading

voice in the discourse. While the teams and drivers are part of the audience. They can have an influence on the discourse and in this case, whether or not the article is upheld for years to come, but they are restricted by more situational constraints such as public perception, financial support, and licensure.

The vague language and minimal clarification within in the document suggest that the new policy is anti-procedural. Procedural rhetoric can be defined as “the practice of persuading through processes in general and computational processes in particular” (Bogost 3). What this means is that when a rhetor is constructing an argument, a process is created for the audience to navigate with the sole goal of persuading them to agree with the rhetor or to act in a particular way. The “Guidance on the Principle of Neutrality” document does not explicitly outline the steps needed to enforce the policy or inform the agents impacted by the policy on how they should conduct themselves to abide by the policy. Furthermore, the creation of this policy breaks the procedures set in place prior to the ruling.

For instance, when Russia invaded Ukraine, the FIA put out a statement which contradicts the “Guidance on the Principle of Neutrality.” In 2022, FIA President Mohammed Ben Sulayem released a statement on behalf of all International Motorsport: “We condemn the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and our thoughts are with all those suffering as a result of the events in Ukraine” (“FIA Announces World Motorsport”). In conjunction with this statement, the FIA decided that “No international/zone competition to take place in Russia and Belarus, until further notice,” “No flag/symbol or anthem of Russia/Belarus to be used in international/zone competitions, until further notice,” and no Russian or Belarusian team or driver may compete until further notice (“FIA Announces World Motorsport”). A caveat to this ruling was that Russian and Belarusian drivers could still compete, so long as they competed

under a neutral flag (“Nikita Mazepin”). At the time this occurred Haas F1 Team, a smaller US team, had Russian driver Nikita Mazepin on their team, and his father’s company, Uralkali, was a sponsor for the team. After the FIA released the statement of solidarity with Ukraine, Haas terminated their contract with both Nikita Mazepin and Uralkali (“Nikita Mazepin”). He was replaced with Danish driver Kevin Magnussen—who had previously driven for Haas—for the 2022 racing season. Mazepin claims that “he had agreed to accept the conditions” proposed by the FIA about racing under a neutral flag but was ignored (“Nikita Mazepin”). The FIA did not respond to his claims, and Haas released a statement of support for Ukraine.

The decision to end the F1 race in Sochi, Russia for the foreseeable future is the first time in F1 history that a race has been officially retired due to a political event. Other large-scale events, such as the Iraq War, did not result in such a restrictive practice. The official dates of the Iraq War are 2003 to 2011. From 2000 to 2007 the Indianapolis Motor-Speedway was the location for the only Formula 1 race in the United States. The official statement provided to the press stated that the “two parties could not agree on terms that pleased both parties” (Burgess). In 2003, while there were no racetracks in the Middle East, many drivers were asked about the war in Iraq. There was a difference in opinion amongst the drivers regarding the conflict, but no one explicitly voiced the opinion that a race should be canceled. German driver Michael Schumacher asserted his support that the sport’s leadership assessed the situation and made the best choice, while also wishing that drivers had more of voice (“Grand Prix Stars React to War in Iraq”). His rival, Colombian driver Juan Pablo Montoya, stated that he was used to going about his day during a war (likely a reference to the ongoing civil war in his home country) and took a more “relaxed attitude” about racing while a war was occurring (“Grand Prix Stars React to War in Iraq”). Schumacher also raised the question “about whether it [was] safe to go on” and hold the

United States Grand Prix after 9/11 (“Grand Prix Stars React to War in Iraq”). Even with questions of safety raised, the FIA and F1 leadership did not cancel the US race in 2001.

In 2022, Houthi rebels from Yemen attacked an oil depot in Saudi Arabia. The attack occurred towards the end of the week and was “about 11 kilometers” from the racetrack in Jeddah (Pugmire). Regardless of the proximity of the attack, those in charge of Formula 1 decided to proceed with the racing weekend. While the drivers were able to voice their opinions on the matter, they were not the ones to make the official decision about whether or not to proceed with the race (Pugmire). Then-Ferrari team principle Mattia Binotto stated that attacks have happened in this area before and “Leaving the country simply would not have been the right choice” (Pugmire). This ruling, in conjunction with the aforementioned rulings over the past decade, establishes a specific pattern in the FIA’s directives in relation to politics.

These rulings suggest that Formula 1 will continue to race at a track so long as the governing body has deemed the area safe. Although it is unclear how those in charge decide what safe racing conditions are, given that within the past four years two drivers (Antoine Hubert and Dilano Van’t Hoff) have died at the exact same turn on the Spa-Francorchamps racetrack in Belgium and even with drivers like Lance Stroll voicing their concerns no changes have been made (“Lance Stroll Calls for Changes”). It is decisions like these that make the retirement of the Russian racetrack significant. The decision to retire the track for the foreseeable future marks the start of the governing body directly tying the sport to politics.

While the invasion of Ukraine occurred prior to the implementation of Article 12.2.1.n, it contradicts the terms of the ruling. Both the statement in support of Ukraine and the “Guidance on the Principle of Neutrality” were made public by FIA President Mohammed Ben Sulayem. Not only is he in the highest position within international motorsport, but he is the most

prominent and public official in the governing body. The contradictory statements convey either a disagreement among those in power or the need to take action to reassert and maintain control. Article 12.2.1.n was not preceded by a world-altering international event like an invasion. It followed a rise in drivers speaking out on causes and movements important to them, influential drivers leaving the sport, and preceded the reveal that Red Bull broke the cost cap (which caused another scandal in the media).

The contradictory statements and the connecting actions, or lack thereof, solidify the classification of the policy change as anti-procedural. The governing body has not been clear as to the specific exigence prompting the policy, nor has it created an effective procedure to enforce and follow Article 12.2.1.n. The lack of procedure, especially when the change is preceded and followed by two differing actions—getting rid of the race in Russia, while choosing to keep racing in Saudi Arabia—suggests instability and lack of clarity from the governing body. It does not provide the audience with a clear understanding of the importance of the exigence, thereby harming the rhetor’s (in this case the governing body) argument regarding the significance of the exigence. Because the lack of a process creates an ineffective argument, the policy and its enforcement—which cannot effectively occur due to the lack of a process and the ambiguity of the language used—is anti-procedural.

Assessing the language used by the governing body, the statements about Ukraine, and the “Guidance on the Principle of Neutrality” both focus on the idea of neutrality—which here, is being used as a euphemism that asserts that racing should only engage in acontextual competition and consumption. The statement in support of Ukraine theoretically allows all athletes from Russia and Belarus to compete so long as they are not officially attached to their home country. However, given the claim by Mazepin, it appears that it is either up to the team

whether an athlete can compete or not—this in itself completely contradicts the new regulations proposed by article 12.2.1.n—or it was a blanket statement to appease everyone. Article 12.2.1.n uses neutrality as a way to restrict what teams and drivers can and cannot do. The Ukraine statement conveys that neutrality and appeasement must be used to recognize the horrors that Ukraine is experiencing, while the “Guidance on the Principle of Neutrality” implies that neutrality and appeasement must be taken to keep everyone happy and continue to provide the sport with the financial support they want. These differing statements suggest ignoring or silencing those that oppose a ruling is F1 leadership’s chosen approach to governing the sport.

Contextualizing Activism in the Sport and Audience Response

Prior to the addition of the new policy many drivers used the races, their social media accounts, and the press to talk about issues and organizations they are passionate about. The most outspoken drivers on the grid last year were Lewis Hamilton, Sebastian Vettel, and Mick Schumacher. Of those three, only one is still driving this year: Lewis Hamilton. Other drivers like Lando Norris and Lance Stroll have become more outspoken this year.

In 2022 F1 got rid of their “We Race as One” initiative which they implemented in 2020 (Coleman). The phrase was on every car and in advertisements. In response, F1 CEO Stefano Domenicali stated that “We have to not have to do politics. But I think now it’s a matter from gesture to action. Now the action is the focus on the diversity of our community. And this is the first step” (Coleman). While getting rid of the sticker is in line with Article 12.2.1.n— “whether in the form of an image, symbol, gesture, words, or actions – is in breach of Article 12.2.1.n of the ISC” —Domenicali’s comment about turning to action contradicts the newly incorporated ruling. If drivers and teams are unable to show support for the causes and social issues that are important to them, how can they take action?

After this change was made, four-time World Drivers Champion Sebastian Vettel conveyed that the drivers were not informed of this change, and the governing body had made this decision on their own (Coleman). The German driver said that “I hope that as drivers, we can find a way to get together and find a slot of still expressing topics that are important to us” (Coleman). At the end of 2022 racing season, Vettel retired. Besides Lewis Hamilton, he was one of the most outspoken drivers on the grid, and he was popular and had garnered respect amongst those in the sport. Currently F1 has not taken any response that would expand upon the initiative that was created by the “We Race as One” slogan; their words have not been replaced with action.

In relation to the neutrality mandate, drivers and teams are deciding how they respond to the new policy. Aston Martin has continued to speak out on social media, they have shown their support for their openly queer ex-W series driver Jessica Hawkins. Since the disbandment of the W series, Aston Martin has promoted Hawkins to the status of Driver Ambassador and as their Head of Racing for the F1 Academy—an all-female Formula championship that intends to act as a feeder series into F1 (“Jessica on F1 Academy”). The team has also extended their relationship with Racing Pride, however the logo does not appear on the current 2023 cars.

Aston Martin is not the only team to join Racing Pride, BWT Alpine F1 team (referred to as Alpine) and Red Bull have also joined in support. While Mercedes has been outspoken on their social media about LGBTQ+ rights, as of December 2023 they have not yet partnered with Racing Pride. Every June Mercedes adds a rainbow version of their logo to the cars to show support, they continued this tradition this year, despite article 12.2.1.n. Sir Lewis Hamilton has also been spotted wearing his rainbow helmet multiple times this season, but it is unclear whether the team got permission from the FIA. Although, prior to the start of the racing season

Hamilton told the press that he “will continue to use his global platform to promote his wide-ranging interests, which include social justice and race, human rights and protection of the LBGTQ community” regardless of the new regulation (Fryer). Mercedes could be serving the penalty, as stated in Article 12.2.1.n and the International Sporting Code, rather than asking for approval.

Unlike smaller teams, such as Alfa Romeo and Haas, Mercedes (and also Red Bull) have the financial freedom to break the regulations that are punishable with a fine. A speculation among the fans is that Mercedes has paid the fine for Hamilton to keep his nose piercings in for each race. While this has not been officially stated, until October 2023 the International Sporting Code restricted drivers from wearing any jewelry that was not a “single band-style ring,” such as a wedding ring (“Article 5: Wearing of Jewellery”). However, every race day, Hamilton was shown wearing his nose piercing, and was called up to the stewards after many races because of this. At the start of the 2023 season, possibly in an act of defiance, he showed up with a new nose piercing. While body piercings are no longer a violation of the International Sporting Code, it brings up the question of the effectiveness of financial penalties for larger teams.

The teams and drivers pushing against the boundaries put in place by the governing body showcases a lack of procedure, which is a positive constraint of the rhetorical situation. The teams, not the governing body, are deciding what they believe to be acceptable consequences or penalties for the actions of their drivers. Article 12.2.1.n does not explicitly state the penalties for breaking or being found in violation of the ruling, it states that the “Stewards may impose any of the penalties listed under article 12.4.1 of the [International Sporting Code]” (3). Article 12.4, which is then divided into mini subsections, can be found on page 57 of the International Sporting Code. This article outlines the types of penalties that a team or driver can be subjected

to. However, much like Article 12.2.1.n, this article provides no information pertaining to how the governing body determines which penalty to apply. The penalties range from a fine to being excluded or suspended, the suspension or exclusion can apply to individual or multiple races, or the championship for that season. The lack of clarification surrounding the penalties reinforces the questions raised by drivers and teams in regard to the “Guidance on the Principle of Neutrality.”

The 2023 Sporting Regulations for Formula 1 (an additional set of regulations established by the FIA specifically for F1) also note that if the governing body find that “a Competitor fails to operate his team in a manner compatible with the standards of the Championship or in any way bring the Championship into disrepute, the FIA may exclude such competitor from the Championship forthwith” (8). Again, as in the case of Articles 12.4.1 and 12.2.1.n, this regulation does not provide the criteria or clarification surrounding the term “disrepute.” What is disrepute to the FIA? The assumption, which can be drawn from Article 12.2.1.n, is that this can occur both on and off the track—whether it is a racing incident, or something said during an interview. In 2021 Sebastian Vettel received a non-sporting reprimand for wearing his “Same Love” shirt at the Hungarian Grand Prix (Micallef). With the addition of 12.2.1.n, would this now be considered bringing disrepute to the sport, or would he (or any driver) now receive a more substantial penalty?

The impacted actors are still experimenting with how they incorporate and push back against the policy. Even though Article 12.2.1.n appears to be its own separate statement, it comes with its own set of constraints both within the sport and within the regulations attached to the sport. New constraints are continuing to emerge, changing the rhetorical situation and how the teams interact with the new ruling. For this reason, the “Guidance on the Principle of

Neutrality” cannot be analyzed on its own. The rhetorical situation surrounding this new addition to the regulations as well as the sport’s positionality within the industry and its international audience is ongoing. Many of the on-going issues persist and new ones have begun to surface. The increase in popularity in the sport has created a heightened awareness and focus on the actions and decisions of the governing body and the actors involved in the sport. The dissonance between the rhetors and the audience (drivers, teams, and fans) led to noteworthy press coverage focusing on the “divisiveness” of the ruling. The press coverage further emphasizes the disagreement between the rhetors and their audience. While the governing body does represent the rhetor, the situational constraints created predominantly by the fans and drivers and teams should determine the success of the sport and the enforcement of the rules.

Since the implementation of the “Guidance on the Principle of Neutrality” the FIA has not released any statements regarding the lifespan of the new article. While the surge in popularity has brought in more money through the addition of new tracks and investors, as the Buzz Radar study suggests, if the FIA does not listen to the fanbase, that popularity and, therefore, money will disappear (Noble). Many of the decisions made by the governing body have been viewed as contradictory due to the increase of social media and press coverage, which occurred from rising attention on Formula 1.

Formula 1 cannot exist or be sustained by limiting the influence of politics in the sport. Sport and political issues cannot be separated. Brummett states that sports are “major ways in which people form personal and social identity” and our identities are attached to social and political issues (11). All sports create a message and an identity for spectators to engage with; whether intentional or not, they create a space for discourse around a multitude of topics. Regardless of the assertions made by representatives of sporting events or by the media, how we

interact with a sport “symbolizes [our] social and political ideology surrounding race, gender, and citizenship” (Brummett 12). Because of the divisiveness of Article 12.2.1.n, many prominent media outlets have reflected the positions of the drivers and the younger fans. By highlighting these specific voices, the press is conveying to the governing body what the rhetor’s audience deems as important.

Even though the policy change has divided the rhetor and their audience—suggesting that the rhetor has unsuccessfully conveyed their message—no information currently available to the public supports the possibility of Article 12.2.1.n being reviewed, reformed, or revoked. The current rhetorical situation is still ongoing and adapting to arising constraints. The sport cannot remove itself from the political situations it becomes part of. Formula 1 is an international sport made up of teams, drivers, sponsors, and employees from multiple countries; at its essence, the sport is political, and a mandate of neutrality is not compatible with the activism embedded in the sport.

CHAPTER III: BANNING THE PAGE: THE OPPOSING RHETORICS IN CONTEMPORARY LITERARY CENSORSHIP

Book banning is a practice that turns into a movement every few decades. As politics and trends shift, there are times where book banning comes to the forefront of our legal and social systems. Since 2020 there has been a rise in book bans and challenges. The use of social media has enabled the movement to organize on a nation-wide scale and garner both national press and governmental interest. Because of this the two opposing arguments have risen to the forefront of the conversation surrounding what is considered appropriate content in children’s literature. The arguments center around the agency and the protection of children. Through rhetorical listening and framing theory, this essay analyzes the arguments presented by both proponents and opponents of book banning to assess their drawbacks and overlap, to find an area of agreement.

While the overall movement is usually referred to as book banning, book challenging is the more frequent practice. When an individual, group, or organization believes a book to be unfit for consumption for a specific demographic—usually school-age children—they may bring a case to the school board or to a higher legal entity (mayor, governor, state court, federal court, etc.) that the book should be restricted in some capacity—this is “challenging” a book. A single challenge can include more than one literary title, the American Library Association found that in 2022 11 states had documented challenges to “100 or more books” (“Preliminary Data on 2023 Book Challenges”). When a legal entity has ruled in favor of the challenge, then the book becomes banned. Given that this is a long process, and many books can stay challenged for a while, both terms are used within this paper and refer to the overall restricting of certain books.

Historical Context

As previously stated, book banning is not a new concept, it comes in waves. Lee Burress's *Battle of the Books: Literary Censorship in the Public Schools, 1950-1985*, published in 1989, chronicles book banning trends during the latter half of the 20th Century. Each cycle of banning or challenging includes many of the same books (titles we would now refer to as classics) while also evolving with the times' current political landscape and technological improvements. Burress starts with the 1950's because of the paperback revolution. He cites this revolution as bringing into "the public schools a wide variety of the realistic literature of the twentieth century" (29). Burress correlates the increase in literature available to students to the increase in book challenges and bans in the 1950's. From the '50s to the '80s, many of the complaints were made by individual parents to schools, librarians, and sometimes local governments (32).

National surveys were used to determine which books were being challenged and banned, and by whom (individuals or organizations). The parents are the ones who have direct access to their child's books, therefore they are the "most likely [person] to confront a teacher or librarian with a request that a book be removed from use in the library" (32). By the 1980's however, "17 percent of the [national] surveys returned" found that an organization was responsible for challenging a book. The cycle of banning in the '80s also saw an increase in censorship pressure from school employees: administrators, teachers, and librarians (33). However, the number of staff members contributing to book challenges decreased once the American Library Association created the Office for Intellectual Freedom to educate the educators and the public (34).

Many of the books that were challenged or banned in the 1950's and the 1980's make a reappearance on the challenged and banned lists currently in circulation. Books like *Catcher in*

the Rye by JD Salinger, *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, and *The Diary of Anne Frank* are consistently challenged or banned every few years. These are not the only books on the lists, as many modern novels have also been deemed as inappropriate by different parties. The most banned or challenged book in 2022 was *Gender Queer: A Memoir* by Maia Kobabe. The graphic memoir about the author's experience transitioning from adolescence to adulthood and understanding their sexuality was published in 2019. Most of the current novels being challenged or banned focus on race and sexuality.

Current Data

In April of every year the American Library Association (ALA) releases "The State of America's Libraries" report. When writing this essay, while preliminary data was released, the official report for 2023 was not made public. The information reflected in this section is in line with the report published in April of 2023, concerning the data collected from January 1st to August 31st of 2022. The focus is not just on public community libraries but also school and carceral libraries. The report found that many libraries (and their staff) had to overcome funding and staffing cuts, as well as "threats to personal safety" and the possibility of being criminally charged (2). Regardless of these obstacles many librarians and their supporters continued to fight against the book bans.

The data provided by the ALA looks at both the national level and by individual states. In 2022 the ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF) reported 1,269 book challenges for that year alone (4). This is nearly double the number of challenges from the previous year, which had 729 challenges (4). Of these challenges, 90 percent of them included multiple titles, and "40% sought to remove or restrict over 100 books at once" (4). This section of the report does not give the total number of individual books challenged, but from the data it can be inferred that the

amount far exceeds 1,000 titles. Deborah Caldwell-Stone, a contributor to the ALA report, connected the rise in challenges to social media and the organization of proponents of book banning. Prior to social media, most challenges were brought to the attention of local governments by individual parents. Caldwell-Stone argues that social media has enabled groups, who she refers to as conservative, to be more coordinated and united, which has led to the mass challenges being documented (4).

Recently, legislators and other political officials have begun to focus on amending their obscenity laws (4). The focus on obscenity laws, as well as the organization of groups supporting book bans, enables the movement to shift from solely targeting books, to also targeting librarians, teachers, and anyone who has control over the books available in both public and school libraries. These attacks have led to the obstacles addressed earlier in this section: funding cuts, staffing cuts, possible incarceration, and threats to the safety of employees.

Another organization collecting and analyzing data surrounding book challenges and bans in schools is PEN America. They collected data from July 2021 to June of 2022. Because the period of data collection occurred over a longer time than the data from the ALA, the numbers differ. PEN America found that during this eleven-month period, there were “2,532 instances of individual books being banned, affecting 1,648 unique book titles.” The organization acknowledges that the total number of unique titles challenged or banned may not be accurate because their data comes solely from titles reported to them directly, or titles that end up in the news; many challenges may not have been reported or were in areas that would not garner large news coverage.

The report found that bans occurred in “138 school districts in 32 states.” The bans impacted nearly “4 million students” (“Banned in the USA”). The state with the most bans was

Texas, followed closely by Florida. Like the ALA report, PEN America found that a majority of the books banned focused on LGBTQ+ characters and characters of color: 41 percent and 40 percent, respectively. The report also found that “at least 40 percent of bans listed in the Index (1,109 bans) are connected to either proposed or enacted legislation.”

The argument of what is deemed appropriate for students—and who determines that—is happening all over the country. Many of the books that have been challenged, as previously stated, relate to race and sexuality. It is a combination of classic and contemporary books. The classic novels being challenged have been challenged and/or banned in the past. *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, *How To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, and *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison, to name a few, keep being challenged and banned every few years. These novels keep being challenged for the same reasons: sexually explicit, and offensive language (both profanity and the use of racial slurs) (Karolides et al.). Novels like *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky, *Looking for Alaska* by John Green, and *The Hunger Games* series by Suzanne Collins have joined that list of repeated challenges throughout the past few decades. Chbosky and Green’s novels have both been challenged due to being “sexually explicit” and “LGBTQ+ content” (“Top 13 Most Challenged Books of 2022”). *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* has also been challenged on the grounds of “depicting sexual abuse,” “drug use,” and “profanity” (“Top 13 Most Challenged Books of 2022”).

While many of the previously used reasons for challenging a book are still used today, many books, specifically the contemporary books, are being challenged due to “LGBTQ+ content” and being “sexually explicit” (“Top 13 Most Challenged Books in 2022”). The change in the reasons for challenging a book suggests a shift in social beliefs and what society views as

dangerous to younger generations. Such novels currently being challenged include but are not limited to *All Boys Aren't Blue* by George M. Johnson, *Lawn Boy* by Jonathan Evison, and *Flamer* by Mark Curato. Many challenged books have both reasons listed; it is not either they have “LGBTQ+ content” or are “sexually explicit” but that both reasons are used in conjunction with one another. This suggests that the two categories are related to one another: when a book has LGBTQ+ content does that automatically make it sexually explicit? Based on the data from the ALA, not every book that was listed as “sexually explicit” had “LGBTQ+ content,” but every book that included “LGBTQ+ content” was listed as also being “sexually explicit” (“Top 13 Most Challenged Books in 2022”). Of the most challenged books in 2022, according to the ALA data, six of the books included “LGBTQ+ content” and nearly half of the books were written by or featured people of color as the main character (“Top 13 Most challenged Books in 2022”).

Contemporary Arguments

While there are many arguments surrounding book banning, the arguments center around agency and the protection of minors. Proponents of book bans have focused their argument on what they determine to be protecting children and giving parents the right to choose what their children read. While these are their official arguments, many of the books being challenged or banned are about characters who are part of the LGBTQ+ population or are characters of color or are written by LGBTQ+ authors and authors of color. Because of this, the reasons for banning the books must be examined. When an individual or group wishes to challenge a book in the hopes of getting it banned, there must be a substantial reason as to why the book should be taken out of the library. The most frequent terms or reasons assigned to banned or challenged books are “sexual content,” “violence,” “offensive language” (sometimes listed as “profanity”), and “LGBTQ+ content”—this is sometimes included in the terms “sexual content” and “not suited

for age group” (“How Do Books Get Banned?”). The broadness of these terms allows for them to overlap with others and be applied in multiple situations. The organizations leading the challenges have combined many of these terms together under what they are defining as pornographic content.

Social media has enabled the organization of book banning by providing parents and citizens with the tools to easily connect with others who share their beliefs. A large portion of book bans or challenges are currently being pushed by groups or organizations rather than individual parents. Social media has provided groups with a platform to voice their opinions and concerns, but also make headlines (both positively and negatively). It has also provided opponents of book banning a place to give their rebuttals and fight back on book bans in the eyes of the public.

The main organization supporting book banning and leading the charge against “pornography given to minor[s]” is the conservative group Moms for Liberty (M4L) (Riley). Moms for Liberty is an organization, started in 2021, that focuses on “parents' rights” (Valant et al.). “Parents’ rights” holds different meanings to the groups that use the term. These differential meanings relate to Ratcliffe and Jensen’s concept of rhetorical listening—specifically the terms dominant and key tropes. Rhetorical listening focuses on cultural logics and understanding different arguments. Ratcliffe and Jensen define dominant tropes as “terms that name cultural logics” (23). These tropes can take on “different meanings within different cultural logics” (23). Key tropes are “additional key words or phrases associated with a cultural logic” that can be either stated or implied; they are used in conjunction with dominant tropes (23). In this situation the dominant trope is authority; the group’s argument focuses on who can determine what is read

in school. The connecting key tropes, both implicit and explicit, are agency and political frameworks.

While Mom's for Liberty's argument suggests agency is given to the parent, that is not entirely the case. Agency is being taken away from teachers, students, and the parents who are not part of or do not support the organization. Political frameworks, as a key trope, is not explicitly connected to the official argument being made. However, many of the books that the organization has brought to the public's attention focuses on topics that many groups believe should be determined by an individual's personal and religious beliefs, such as gay marriage. The term political frameworks is drawn from linguist and philosopher, George Lakoff's concept of framing theory. In Lakoff's "Framing 101: How to Take Back Public Discourse," he defines framing as "getting language that fits your worldview" (2). He clarifies that language—specifically the words used—is not the basis of creating a framework, but rather the ideas and concepts attached to the words being used (2). Through language and experience everyone creates a framework that they use to understand and respond to situations. These frameworks help determine how we view concepts like religion, morals, politics and our sense of identity. Because of this, frameworks overlap between individuals and organizations. The frameworks of political parties can extend to the frameworks used by social groups or organizations.

Lakoff assessed the values and beliefs of the political parties, as they operated in 2004, and established the following categories: the "strict father model" for the Republican party, and the "nurturant parent model" for the Democratic party (4). The strict father model focuses on moral authority bestowed by a parent (usually the father), obedience of the child which is established through strict rules and discipline, and the protection of the parent (4-5). The nurturant parent model focuses on freedom of discovery for the child, both the parent and the

child taking responsibility for themselves, fairness for everyone, and community building (8-10). Lakoff argues that both models can be applied to the platforms of each political party and what they deem as the job of the government—which represents the parent in the model. The aim of this passage is not to assign political affiliation or beliefs to any organization, but to provide a framework of values that can be applied to the arguments surrounding book banning.

Regarding Moms for Liberty and the book banning movement, the term parents' rights refers to the parent's ability to choose what their children read in school. The parents want to be able to control what concepts and materials their child is exposed to at school. This concern and want of control by the parents restrict the agency of the teachers, librarians, school officials, and the students. The “parents' rights” argument does not give every parent the right to choose what their child reads. Organizations like Moms for Liberty would control what every child reads, not just their own child; it gives the organization agency but inhibits the agency afforded to each individual parent. Moms for Liberty has been able to curate and promote their message via social media platforms like *X*, formerly known as *Twitter*, and *Facebook*. Through social media they have garnered a large following and now “278 chapters across 45 states” (Valant et al.). Given that the state of Florida is where the organization was founded, it has the most chapters. Their main platform used is Facebook, which shows a following of over 100,000 members (Valant et al.). Although the group has a large social media presence, little information is now about the leaders of the Moms for Liberty.

In the past few years since its formation, the organization has become a key figure in educational politics in the United States (Valant et al.). They have started to join local school boards and run for local government positions (Dalbey). Two Florida members of Moms for Liberty went to their local sheriff’s station and “asked cops to investigate librarians for alleged

violations of Florida law” —in this case, they alleged a book in a school’s public library should be considered as “pornography given to minors” (Dalbey). The book in question, the young adult fantasy novel *Storm and Fury* by Jennifer L. Armentrout, was checked out by a high school senior (Dalbey). The argument here is that the book, which deals with ghosts and sexual themes, but has no explicit sexual situations, should not be available in a school library to a student under the age of 18. However, Florida is not the only state discussing these arguments.

Many contemporary novels that have previously been challenged or banned are being brought into the current arguments surrounding book banning due to their supposed inappropriate content—specifically their LGBTQ+ and sexual content. *Looking For Alaska* has become “a regular feature on lists of most challenged books” in the US since it was released in 2005 (Michallon). The novel focuses on understanding your grief, finding forgiveness, and overcoming uncertainty (Michallon). In an interview, Green remarks that the excerpts that get highlighted by proponents of book bans are taken out of context and make those scenes seem like “the exact opposite of what it is” (Michallon). The main scene in question centers around a brief sexual encounter between the main character, Miles, and his friend Laura. This scene is immediately juxtaposed by an emotional and less explicit scene between the leads, Miles and Alaska. Green’s argument for these scenes is to show teenagers that “physical intimacy can never stand in for emotional closeness” (Michallon). The individuals and groups challenging this book leave out the emotional scene between Miles and Alaska during their argument. By taking the first scene out of context, the message attached to both that specific scene, and the novel is lost. The scene labeled “sexually explicit” takes on a new meaning, while simultaneously becoming unnecessary for the novel when the accompanying scene is detached from it.

The series that has become frequently challenged—the Hunger Games—is an outlier compared to the rest of the books previously mentioned. While one reason provided during a challenge was due to offensive language and sexual content (vague discussion of forced underage prostitution in the third novel, and plastic surgery in the first and second novels), overwhelmingly the reasons given relate to “violence,” “anti-family,” and “the occult/satanism” (Woodbury). The series focuses on teenage Katniss Everdeen, who challenges an oppressive regime which annually forces 24 children (between the ages of 12 and 18) to fight to the death until only one is left (Woodbury).

Given the plot of the series it can be understood why many parents found it to be violent. Collins has stated that her reason for writing this series is to generate a discussion around the “themes such as severe poverty, starvation, oppression, and the effects of war” (Woodbury). For the world building and character arcs, she also drew inspiration from war theory and the writings of philosophers John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Thomas Hobbes (Collins). From the synopsis, a parent could infer that the book might be too violent for younger children—the argument can be made that with today’s media (television, movies, and video games) teenagers have been exposed and possibly desensitized to fictional violence, and therefore this series is suitable for this demographic of readers—and that a book that kills children does destroy the family unit. However, when the novels are read in their entirety and no context is omitted, the reader can understand that the books support and emphasize familial bonds, and that there is no gratuitous violence—it serves a specific purpose in the main character’s arc and the novel’s message.

The current arguments surrounding challenging and banning books, as previously mentioned, center on the control of the parent under the guise of protecting children. Similarly,

to Moms for Liberty, the dominant trope surrounding the arguments in favor of book banning is protection. The focus of this argument centers around who dictates what books are read in the classroom and available in the school library, to shield children from certain concepts. The argument highlights parents protecting their children by determining what books they think are suitable for minors (anyone under the age of 18). Parents are still the main authority when it comes to challenging books in schools, however they are not the only ones—both local and state governments have gotten involved in book challenges across the nation. The movement grabbed the government’s attention because of the scale of the campaign. Based on the data from the ALA, in the past few years, book challenges have impacted every state. And social media has contributed to this growth through the organization of parental groups, like Moms for Liberty and Parents Against Bad Books, and the accessibility and dissemination of information and opinions. Because of this, governors and other state legislators have started bringing the conversation into the governing system.

The conversations in the local and state governments center around obscenity laws and the constitutionality of book bans. In December of 2022, Louisiana’s Attorney General Jeff Landry introduced a “Protecting Minors tip line” for residents to report “librarians, teachers, school board members, district superintendents, and library supervisors who share books and resources addressing gender identity, sexual orientation, and materials addressing puberty;” Landry even admitted that the books being challenged in the public libraries were “legal, constitutionally protected materials” which calls into question how Louisiana will successfully amend their state obscenity laws to also address content in books (“State of Americas Libraries” 5). In Idaho, the state’s House Committee on State Affairs met to discuss House Bill 384 aims to “prevent school and public libraries giving or making available any materials to minors that

‘depict nudity, sexual conduct or sado-masochistic abuse and that is harmful to minors’” (Billson). The term “sexual conduct” encompasses a multitude of scenarios and concepts, including but not limited to homosexuality (Billson). Due to the vague language of the bill, it provides the legal system and individuals who wish to ban books the ability to ban them for numerous reasons. In Mississippi, a book banning bill targeting public libraries is “denying minors access to *Overdrive* and *Hoopla*, two widely used databases for accessing e-books or audiobooks” (Villarreal). The focus of the law is to restrict minors' online access to “sexually oriented” materials (Villarreal). Like in Idaho, this bill consists of vague language in order to act as a catch all for whatever book the state government deems to consist of “sexually oriented” content. However, in Iowa Governor Pritzker signed a bill that will “make Illinois the first state in the nation to outlaw book bans” (Savage). The law impacts public libraries in the state by making them ineligible for state funding if they restrict or ban material due to “partisan or doctrinal’ disapproval” (Savage). While in theory this law does the opposite of a book ban, like a book ban, it still restricts the agency of individuals.

The bills impact the dominant tropes of the argument and the key tropes. The key tropes in this argument connect to the tropes used by Moms for Liberty: authority and political frameworks. Authority and political frameworks are interconnected to the dominant trope of protection. While the focus of the argument is protection—specifically of minors—it is substantiated by the tropes of authority and political frameworks. The authorities represented in this argument are the organizations and individuals pushing for bans as well as the governmental entities putting legislation in place. Organizations like Moms for Liberty call for parents to have the ultimate say in what their child reads, while wanting to restrict the readings for more than just

their children. And they are calling on the government to help them do that. Because of the involvement of the government, the movement becomes politicized.

Proponents of book bans fall under Lakoff's strict father model. Of this model the defining attributes of a moral authority bestowed by the parent, the obedience of the child, and the protection of the parent are reflected within the arguments of those in favor of book bans (Lakoff 4-5). The organizations—and their supporters—argue that they wish to provide protection to the children, and have their protective measures enforced and obeyed. The enforcement is done by the government who also, in this respect, acts as a moral authority who must be obeyed. The child—and the schools and libraries—must obey the moral authority of the government. The government's oversight and legislation come from the arguments of protection presented by concerned parents.

Opponents of book bans have a less structured argument. Many of the individuals and organizations fighting against book bans have been countering the individual claims made by proponents rather than focusing on the larger issues. Their main counter argument is that students should have the right to choose what they read, and it should not be dictated by any one individual or entity. Book bans impact both students and teachers. Not only does it act as a form of censorship, but it destabilizes the curriculum (Chiesa). The books assigned in the classroom are chosen to meet the course objectives and prepare students for the next stage of their education and adulthood. The New York Times conducted a "Student Opinion forum" and found that a majority of students disagree with book bans (The Learning Network). Many argued that "controversial literature helps them to think critically of the world" (The Learning Network). The forum also conveyed that students do not find book bans to be effective given the advancement of the internet and technology (The Learning Network). Anyone with internet access can find

information and content like the content in the books currently being challenged and banned. The content and messages in books help students learn about experiences different from their own. Former librarian, and ALA president Lessa Kanani'opua Pelayo-Lozada stated that students mentioned that books with “queer characters and stories with swear words made them feel seen” (“State of America’s Libraries” 3). And for many students, libraries act as a “grounding place” for them (“State of America’s Libraries” 3).

While action has been taken by proponents of book bans, those against the bans have also started taking action. As of November of 2023, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Iowa, in tandem with Lamda Legal, have started taking legal action against a new Iowa law they say “seeks to silence LGBTQ+ students, erase any recognition of LGBTQ+ people from public schools, and bans books with sexual or LGBTQ+ content” (Beck). The ACLU is leading a lawsuit for several families to protest the law. Another lawsuit against the bill in Iowa is also underway; the Iowa State Board of Education, along with Penguin Random House, and authors Laurie Halse Anderson, John Green, Malinda Lo, and Jodi Picoult “filed a federal lawsuit” (Gruber-Miller and Nguyen). The lawsuit seeks “to block the ban on all books from Iowa’s K-12 schools that contain depictions or descriptions of sex acts” by arguing that it violates the first and 14th amendments (Gruber-Miller and Nguyen). Penguin Random House is also involved in another lawsuit focused on a “Florida Panhandle school district over its removal of books about race and LGBTQ+ content” (“Federal Lawsuit Florida School”). The publishing house partnered with PEN America, some of the authors whose books were removed, and parents of students in the district (“Federal Lawsuit Florida School”). Like with proponents of book bans, those opposing the bans are also organizing and forming groups to push back against the bans.

Analyzing the argument of opponents of book bans, the dominant trope is agency. The connecting key terms are childhood, and identity. Their sole goal is to give both librarians and children of all ages the agency to read what they want. Unlike proponents of book bans, the agency does not entirely go to the parent. While in theory, some agency should be extended to the parent—if the dominant trope is agency—in reality their focus is on librarians and children. Both key terms are intertwined with the dominant trope of agency. Childhood is the time where we start understanding and curating our identities. Having the agency to read a book of a child's choosing enables them to explore their identity and learn about people with different experiences.

Opponents of book bans fit the nurturant parent model as presented by Lakoff. As previously mentioned, this model focuses on freedom of discovery for the child, both the parent and the child taking responsibility for themselves, fairness for everyone, and community building (Lakoff 7-8). Within the context of the argument presented by opponents of book bans, freedom of discovery connects to the dominant trope of agency; the child is permitted to explore their identity and further their understanding of the world through their agency of reading. The concept of both the child and parent taking responsibility relates to the agency of the child and the school library. The child and the parent are responsible for what that specific child reads; the responsibility does not fall to the teacher or librarian, and no singular organization or individual determines what every child should read. This also correlates to the model's belief of fairness for everyone. From the model it can be established that it is up to the child and their parent to determine what the child reads, rather than an entity establishing what is suitable or not suitable for everyone. The concept of community building is not overtly connected to the dominant trope of agency, but it is connected to the key tropes of childhood and identity. Children create their

communities through school and discovering their identity. What a student reads influences which communities they create and join, and how they interact with the people in those communities.

The overall arguments center around childhood and agency; the overarching question is should children have agency in relation to the content of certain books they are exposed to? Agency and childhood are used in conjunction by both sides of the argument. Because of this, both childhood and agency represent the dominant tropes of the arguments at play. For proponents of books bans, the dominant trope of agency comes from the agency they receive by having the control over which books are deemed suitable for children. They determine what every child can read in school. Agency as the dominant tropes in the argument opposing the bans comes from providing children with a choice of what they want to read. Giving the child agency encourages them to explore their identity and learn about people and cultures different from them. Because of the significance of children in both arguments, childhood becomes the second dominant trope. The protection of childhood restricts the child's agency, while encouraging a child's agency limits the oversight of the parent.

The key tropes are protection, identity, and authority. The key tropes, like with each argument, are intertwined into the dominant tropes. Protection comes in the form of the parent's control and the legislation produced by the government, but also from the categorization of books—children's, young adult, adult. Identity is explicitly attached to agency. The identity of the child is overshadowed by the protection and agency of the parent regarding banning books. In relation to opposing the bans, identity is fostered by the agency of the child and librarians. Authority manifests in multiple ways. Regarding book banning, as previously stated, the parents and organizations pushing for bans, as well as governmental entities, hold the authority. In

regard to the opposing argument, the authority is granted to the librarians, and more importantly, each individual child. Protection, identity and authority all influence how each side views childhood and agency in relation to what they consider as the solution to the argument.

Because of this overlap in dominant and key tropes, the compromise should focus wholly on the child/children. While the parent should have a say in what their child reads, they should not be the overarching voice for every child. Every parent, child, and family is different, and that must be taken into consideration when proposing a solution. Two possible solutions are starting to be enacted in classroom: allowing children to choose from a list of books for class reading lists, and sending home permission slips. Both options provide the parent with information about what their child can read, while allowing them to make that decision with child, and simultaneously providing some agency to the child in determining what book they read. However, permission slips have not been as effective in decreasing the challenging of books. A school in Buffalo, New York used permission slips to ask parents if they were okay with their child reading *Looking for Alaska*, or if they would prefer their child be assigned another book (Michallon). The author, John Green, was informed that there were “a few people that weren’t happy with this solution” (Michallon). He noted that many of the people against permission slips, did not have children in the school—or grade level—that were assigned the book, but rather they were community members that did not want any student to read the book because of its “sexual content” (Michallon).

An ideal solution would center around the rhetorical listening tools provided by Ratcliffe and Jensen. Is there a way to get representatives from both sides to the table to thoughtfully listen to each other? The dominant tropes of agency and childhood should be the focus of the conversation. Each side should have the opportunity to present their argument without

interruption and both the speaker and the audience should keep an “open stance” during the discussions (Ratcliffe and Jensen 21). This could come in the form of annual meetings between parents, teachers, and school board members. From here, the conversations should center around coming to an understanding regarding the amount of agency given to the children, teachers, and parents. Students should have the opportunity to express their position and feelings about the matter as well, since they are the ones directly impacted by the proposed solution. There is no one set solution that is guaranteed to work, but by implementing rhetorical listening, the subject can be approached with openness and understanding, to find a solution that all parties can agree on.

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