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Intellectual Freedom in Crisis: Moral Panics, Censorship, and the Cost to Library Workers

OVERVIEW

This webinar examines the current landscape of attacks on intellectual freedom and the impacts of coordinated censorship campaigns. We'll analyze the role of moral entrepreneurs, including organized advocacy groups and bad faith social media auditors/influencers.

We'll explore the historical context of how moral panics operate to limit access to reading materials and confine intellectual freedom. We look at moral panics over three centuries: penny dreadfuls in 19th century England, comics censorship in 20th century US and Canada, and our current crisis. Understanding this history helps us respond more effectively in today's environment. It also provides perspective on the life cycle of moral panics.

The webinar covers legal threats facing libraries, including new state laws in Idaho, Missouri, Louisiana, and other states.

Finally, we'll address the human cost of this crisis: the occupational trauma and burnout facing library workers, including the impact of anticipatory anxiety and the disproportionate impact on marginalized staff.

LEARNING AGENDA

1. Understand the current landscape of intellectual freedom challenges
2. Analyze the mechanisms of coordinated censorship campaigns
3. Compare how moral panics have operated to censor materials across four historical periods
4. Recognize the symptoms of occupational burnout and trauma faced by library staff.

BIO

Sonya Schryer Norris is a third-generation Michigan library worker. She has over 26 years of experience in libraries, including 16 years as a Consultant in Library Development for the Library of Michigan. Since founding Plum Librarian LLC in 2020, she has served as a consultant and trainer to 12 state libraries. She's also worked as the Niche Academy administrator for seven states including the Library of Virginia, California Libraries Learn (CALL) and the Washington State Library.

Sonya has created 35+ courses on Niche Academy that have been adopted in all 50 states and internationally. Her timely Burnout in Public Libraries series became the Library of Virginia's top tutorial in 2025.

For 22 years, Sonya's articles have appeared in *Library Journal*, *Computers in Libraries*, and for Cengage. She presents regularly for organizations including Library 2.0, PCI Webinars, the Southeast Collaborative Online Conference, the Public Library Association and state library agencies. Her current topics include intellectual freedom, cultivating effective relationships with supervisors, burnout, moral panics and reading materials, and eAccessibility training.

Cost for webinar presentation: \$750