

A "Difficult Matter:" Discussions of "Intellectual Freedom" in *Catholic Library World* between 1980 and 2015

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Introduction

Some librarians face the "difficult matter" of balancing personally held religious values and the values supported through American Library Association (ALA) documentation such as the Code of Ethics and Library Bill of Rights. Evidence of the struggle to balance these values, especially regarding intellectual freedom, can be found through several means including the written expressions of religiously affiliated librarians (whether personally religious or affiliated with a religious institution). This poster reviews the findings of a recently conducted content analysis in which the terms censor* and "intellectual freedom" were counted and contextualized over a 35 year period in *Catholic Library World* (CLW), the professional journal of the Catholic Library Association (CLA).

Research Questions

Two research questions guided the course of the study on which this poster reports:

1. What are the frequency and context of the terms "intellectual freedom" and "censorship" in articles about those topics published in *CLW*?
2. What do these patterns indicate about the attitudes of *CLW* authors towards intellectual freedom and censorship? (Welsh, 2016)

Methodology: Content Analysis

1. Located *CLW* articles from 1980-2015 through keyword search in ATLA CPLI and LISTA using "intellectual freedom" and censorship
2. Identified frequency of censor* and "intellectual freedom" in articles (OCR and reading) [see Figure 1]
3. Determine context of censor* and "intellectual freedom": positive, negative, or neutral?
4. Analyze results: setting, over time, frequency

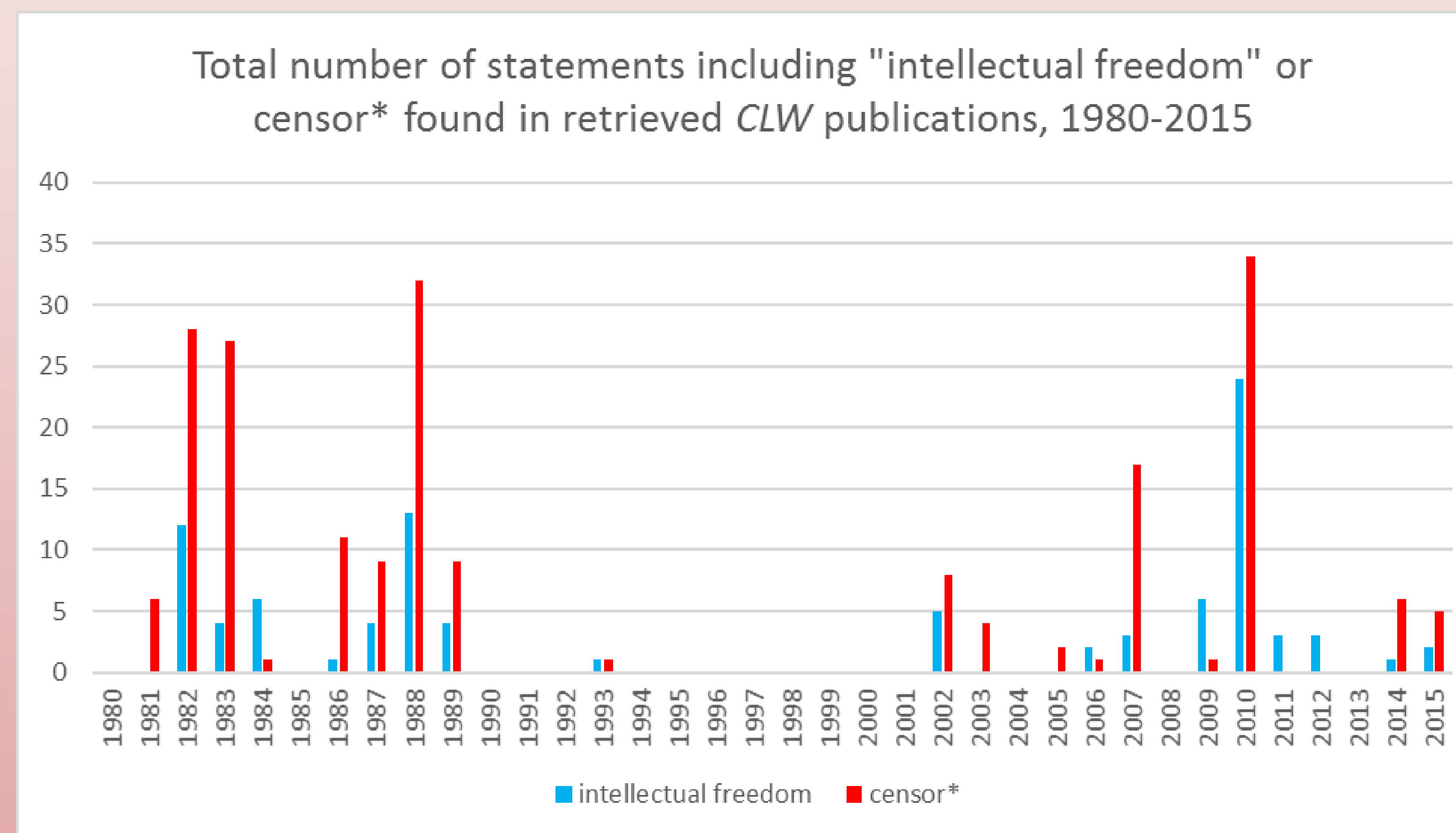


Figure 1: Number of instances of "intellectual freedom" or "censor*" found in retrieved CLW publications between 1980 - 2015 (Welsh, 2016)

Limitations...

...in scope. Intellectual freedom is a broad topic composed of many related concepts (eg. privacy, access, expression) and this research only focused on intellectual freedom and censor* in the articles. Additional keywords could also be examined.

... in accessing the articles. Not all articles were born digital or scanned with optical character recognition (OCR). All possible relevant articles may not have been retrieved.

...in coding the instances of the terms intellectual freedom and censor*. Content was coded individually and partnering with other researchers could have resulted in different coding.

Future Research

The methodology used to analyze *CLW* could also be applied to other journals. It would be interesting to compare the findings of this research with content from *The Christian Librarian* (the official publication of the Association of Christian Librarians) and a journal with a broader audience and scope, such as *Library Journal*, over the same period of time. What have librarians who are not Catholic written about intellectual freedom?

Additionally, very few articles on the topic of intellectual freedom or censor* were retrieved from the 1990's. This publication trend should also be analyzed. Why were more articles seemingly published on the topic in the 1980's and after 2001? What about trends prior to 1980?

Findings

Of 94 statements, most of those about intellectual freedom were positive or neutral.

Context of statements including the term "intellectual freedom" in *CLW*, 1980-2015

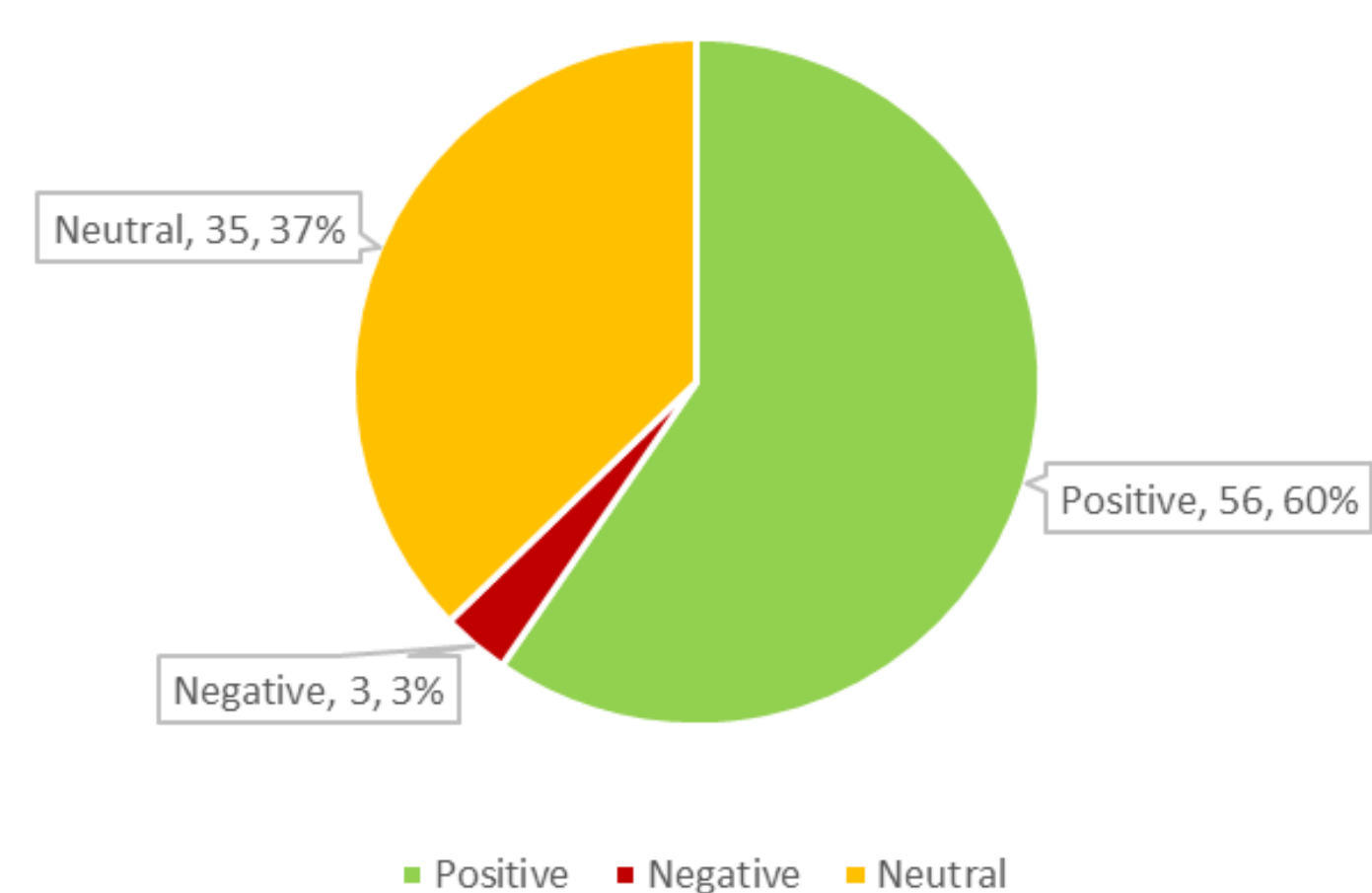


Figure 2: Context of statements including the term "intellectual freedom" in *CLW*, 1980-2015 (Welsh, 2016)

Context of statements including the term censor* in *CLW*, 1980-2015

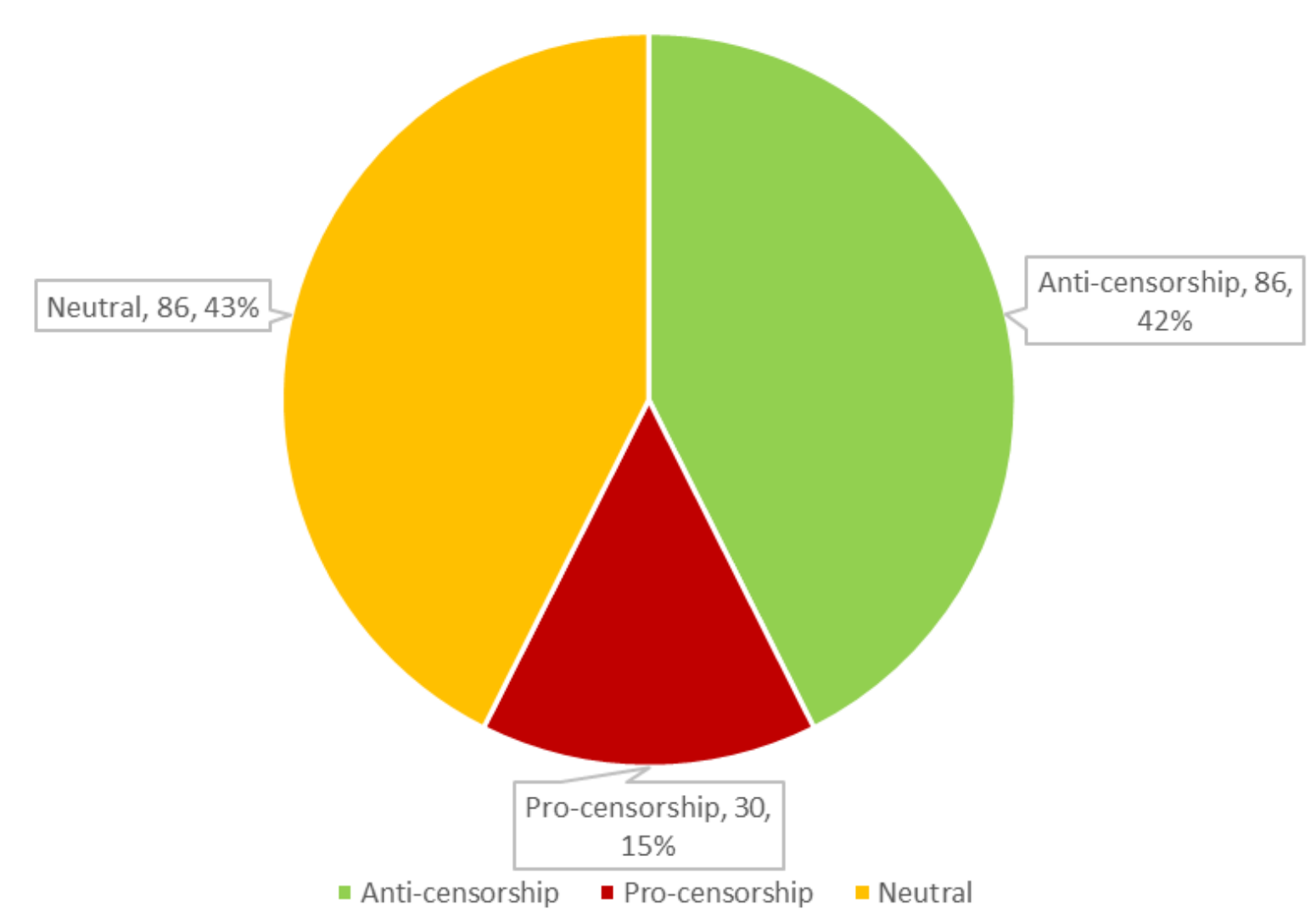


Figure 3: Context of statements including the term "censor*" in *CLW*, 1980-2015 (Welsh, 2016)

Of 202 statements about censor*, most were positive or neutral.

Most statements related to schools or were general comments about unidentified library settings or the profession as a whole.

Context of statements based on library setting discussed in each article in *CLW*, 1980-2015

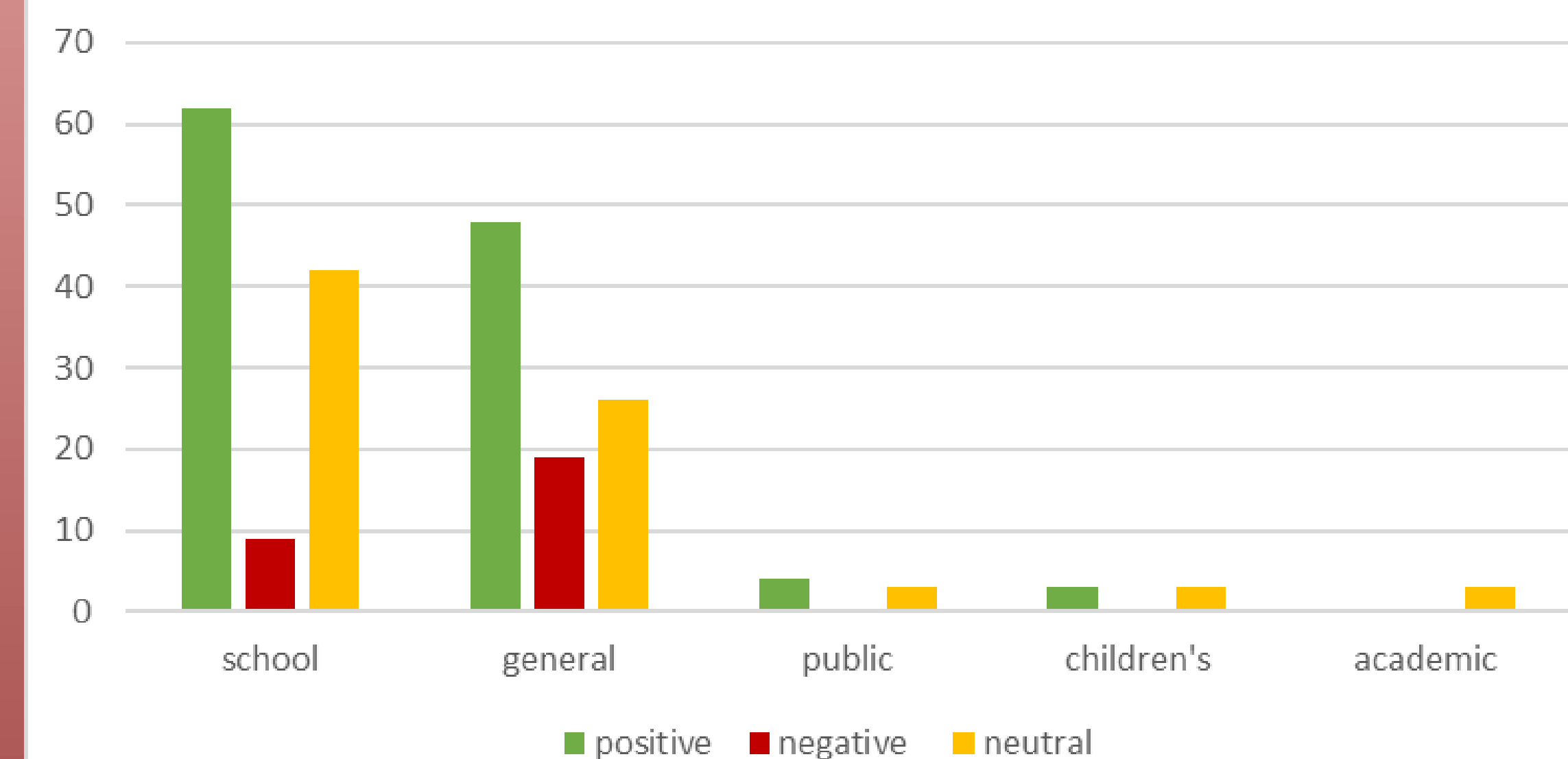


Figure 4: Context of statements based on library setting discussed in each article in *CLW*, 1980-2015 (Welsh, 2016)

Conclusion

The findings of this content analysis suggest that the majority of *CLW* contributors expressed support for intellectual freedom in their writing. However, some acknowledged the challenges of maintaining individual values and practicing their professional values. More research should be conducted on the impact of religious values on professional practice relating to intellectual freedom.

References

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- Rehring, M. C. (1982). Some thoughts about controversial materials: School libraries. *Catholic Library World*, 53(7), 277-278.
- Welsh, M. E. (2016). Expressing intellectual freedom: A content analysis of *Catholic Library World* from 1980 to 2015. *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, 11(4), 41-56. Retrieved from <https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/ebliip/index.php/EBLIIP/article/view/27980/21055>

Quotes:

"Because individual attitudes, beliefs, and values guide actions... and because these and subsequent judgments are so highly personal and subjective, it is difficult to lay out no-fail criteria and guidelines [regarding collection development]." (Rehring, 1982)

"Fulfilling my professional commitment to these young people is a more difficult matter with which to deal because I have problems melding together the Christian philosophy of our school and the intellectual freedom of our students." (Hodges, 1982)