A comparative study of secondary school library censorship in the UK and US

Ashley Count

Abstract

This research seeks to compare and contrast attitudes towards and experiences of censorship by secondary school library personnel in the United Kingdom and United States of America, in order that conflicts regarding censorship may be recognised and resolved.

A mixed methods approach was used, consisting of a questionnaire and interviews, to gather quantitative and qualitative data on the topics of censorship views, collection management, and access limitation practices, as well as participant awareness of professional organisations' standards and frameworks. A majority of UK and US participants expressed philosophical alignment with the concept of freedom of information and the rejection of censorship. UK participants, however, were found to be much more likely to censor by requiring parental permission, restricting access, and guiding students away from particular materials. Unlike US participants, many UK participants were unaware of any professional guidance offered on the topic of censorship; similarly, a significant majority did not have any policies to govern materials in their school libraries.

Recommendations are made to continue this research by extending it to a wider number of participants (including in Wales and Northern Ireland). It is also recommended that UK professional organisations more widely promote their policies on censorship and freedom of information, as well as share exemplars of policies with school librarians to help them recognise censorship, manage access, and promote freedom of information.

Keywords

Censorship, freedom of information, parental permission, school libraries, United Kingdom, United States of America

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 An American problem?

In the UK, censorship in school libraries can sometimes be perceived as a particularly American problem, with the UK School Library Association (SLA) believing that books are challenged far more in the US than in the UK (SLA, personal communication by email. 11 August 2021).

This perception is well-evidenced by the relative publicity that library censorship issues in these countries receive. The American Library Association (ALA) is vehement in its defence of freedom of information and passionate in its advocacy for freedom from censorship for libraries, dedicating an entire sub-organisation (the Office of Intellectual Freedom, or the OIF) to the topic (ALA 2021a). The OIF annually publishes its top-ten list of most challenged books in the US, which is publicised in UK online newspapers such as The Guardian (Flood 2015), and stories of book challenges in American states often make national and international news (Farzan 2019; Flood 2012). By comparison, instead of offering direct support, the SLA points school library professionals to the ALA for further guidance on handling challenges and bans (SLA 2021).

1.1.2 Censorship and freedom of information

Both countries subscribe to the fundamental rights of freedom of information and freedom from censorship. The ALA and its UK counterpart, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), define freedom of information as the "right to seek and receive information" regardless of the point of view of the author, material or library user (ALA 2007; CILIP n.d.).

The United Nations General Assembly holds the same view, stating in Article 19 of its Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948 p.5) that "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers." The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) has identified intellectual freedom as a central tenet of librarianship, arguing for the "essential correlation between the library concept and the values of freedom of expression" (IFLA 2018).

In contrast, censorship seeks to supress freedom of information and expression. This is often through objection due to concerns that content may be offensive or dangerous (ALA 2007; CILIP n.d.). In a library setting, this may include requests or demands for a library to remove certain items from circulation so that other library users are not able to access them (ALA 2016b), and may come from, among others, parties such as governmental organisations, administration and stakeholders, or library users themselves (ALA 2008; ALA 2016b). Censorship is roundly rejected by professional library organisations, who argue that libraries cannot perform as intended in a democratic society if freedom of information and objection to censorship are not upheld (CILIP n.d.; ALA 2007a).

1.1.3 Freedom of information in schools

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UK Human Rights Act 1998 state that the right to freedom of expression (which includes intellectual freedom) should exist for everyone (United Nations General Assembly 1948; UK government 1998). Indeed, the American Association of School Librarians (AASL), a branch of the ALA, heralds "intellectual freedom [as] every learner's right" as the fifth core statement in the organisation's Common Beliefs (AASL n.d.). CILIP (2018) also establishes impartiality and intellectual freedom—including freedom from censorship—in its own ethical framework.

Sturges (2006) argues that intellectual freedom is a benefit and a right, ensuring well-rounded neurological and intellectual development in children and continued development of independent thought into adulthood, and that it is essential for free, fair, and democratic societies. Similarly, Saylor and Ganea (2018) identify intellectual curiosity as a foundation for active learning. Therefore, it is within a school's and school library's interest to encourage and satisfy intellectual curiosity in its students in order to promote academic achievement and general well-being.

As established by the United Nations (UN), ALA, and CILIP (among others), students should therefore have the freedom to access any information they desire without the imposition of censorship. In secondary schools in particular, a broad range of information is needed to meet the information needs of school library users, which may vary due to age (student to staff), ability (students who are gifted and talented and/or have special educational needs), interests, and maturity levels.

This presents a number of challenges for the school librarian. One must balance these standards with the immediate and concrete duties of a member of school staff, including: managing the expectations and desires of parents and guardians, complying with the wishes of school leadership, adhering to the regulations imposed by wider school administrations (such as school districts or boards of governors), safeguarding, and complying with regional, state, and national law or

guidance. In short, pragmatism may outweigh adherence to standards, especially if security of or satisfaction in employment is jeopardised.

1.2 Rationale

The perception that censorship remains an 'American problem' does not mean that there is an absence of censorship in UK school libraries. As McNicol (2016) proposes, there is a possibility that censorship in UK school libraries is under-recognised and under-recorded, with further research needed in this area so that it can be documented, acknowledged, and prevented.

Indeed, the ALA, CILIP, and UN argue that it is of benefit to treat censorship in libraries as a problem to be solved; it is therefore important to recognise the extent of censorship, the form(s) it takes, and the success of any current mitigations. As the challenges of working in a school can sometimes directly conflict with a librarian's core duties, it is valuable to investigate how these conflicts can be resolved in order to satisfy often competing demands.

The inclusion of both the UK and US in this research is so that censorship at secondary school libraries in both countries can be directly compared. The countries already share a set of standards on information freedom; they also share a main language, and (as evident from perusals of bestsellers charts) a common taste in children's and young adult books (Amazon UK 2021; Amazon US 2021). These aspects make the US and UK particularly suited for comparison. The countries' key differences, too, merit investigation in order to evaluate how different demographics, school structures, and awareness of policy can impact school library management. The comparison is of benefit so that the UK and US can be contrasted and compared in order to establish how different variables may affect the extent and management of censorship in school libraries. It may also, if possible, highlight best practice if some schools/areas are more successful in limiting censorship practices than others.

As UK school libraries as a whole, including primary education, were included in the scope of research for McNicol's (2016) study, it was decided to narrow the focus of this study to secondary education only. This was also based on variability of library provision at primary stage, as well as the wider range of content types marketed to those in secondary school. In England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, approximately 45% of primary schools have a designated member of staff responsible for the library, versus 96% of secondary schools (BMG Research 2019). This is in contrast with the US, where 95.4% of elementary schools have libraries/media centres, each with an average of 1.4 members of staff (U.S. Department of Education 2020 table 701.15). With these inequalities of staffing and access, it was deemed difficult to draw comparisons without numerous confounding variables. UK primary library personnel may also have proved difficult to reach due to scarcity or complications of dual employment. For these reasons, it was decided that comparisons at primary and secondary levels should be discrete, and the primary level would not be included in this research.

1.3 Aim and objectives

The aim of this research was to conduct a comparative study of censorship in school libraries in the UK and US.

In order to achieve this aim, the research collected both qualitative data and quantitative data, and sought to:

1. Measure the extent of censorship in secondary school libraries in the UK and US and what form(s) this censorship may take
2. Identify what types of content are being challenged

3. Analyse existing support and guidance given by professional organisations to school librarians, and library personnel's awareness of and feelings toward the available guidance
4. Analyse library personnel's responses and feelings toward censorship itself
5. Measure well-being of library personnel regarding censorship practices, and identify any possible correlation between staff discomfort and censorship practices in schools

Ultimately, these objectives contributed to the aim of a comparative study of the impact of censorship on school libraries in these two countries, as well as measuring censorship that may currently go un- or under-reported in official statistics, as recommended by McNicol (2016).

1.4 Dissertation structure

The remainder of this dissertation is structured as follows:

- Section 2: A literature review, which calls upon materials on the topic of censorship in school libraries in the US and UK (and, where relevant, elsewhere). The literature review also explores legislation, frameworks, and case studies, as well as previous academic research.
- Section 3: The methodology of the research is detailed and justified.
- Section 4: The findings of the primary research are given and linked with the findings of the literature review to prompt further discussion and analysis.
- Section 5: The research is summarised and recommendations for further research and practice are given.

2. Literature review

As part of this report, a review of existing literature took place in order to identify wider issues around censorship in school libraries, as well as to help shape the primary research. This was in order to identify:

- What constitutes as censorship and what form(s) censorship may take.
- Existing frameworks, standards, and relevant legislation.
- Proposed solutions, such as age rating systems.
- Which parties and individuals are responsible for censorship.
- Given reasons for censorship or challenges.
- Any relevant previous studies.

2.1 Forms of censorship

Research into censorship must be performed with the knowledge of what, exactly, constitutes as censorship, and how censorship may present itself in school libraries.

The ALA (2007) and CILIP (n.d.) specifically define censorship as restrictions imposed on the availability of information by groups, individuals, or the state, due to the material being seen as objectionable or dangerous.

Censorship in a library may take the form of:

- A ban on materials (materials being removed from libraries).
- A challenge to materials (an official request to have materials removed from libraries), which may or may not be successful.
- Refusing to stock certain materials despite relevance to the collection.
- Limiting access to materials.

2.1.1 Challenges and bans

The outright book ban is possibly the most well-known form of censorship; this takes the form of the removal of books for loan or sale. Outright bans may also be selective, with books banned only in particular school libraries or classrooms (ALA 2007, Webb 2009).

Many libraries celebrate Banned Books Week, which runs in autumn each year, with displays and events that celebrate freedom of expression and speech (Banned Books Week 2021), while the OIF publishes its list of most challenged and banned books annually (ALA 2021c). Book banning has generally been ruled unconstitutional in the US and against the Human Rights Act in the UK, although it may be subject to further legislation on potential for harm or indecency (ALA 2016a; Webb 2009; Index on Censorship 2020).

While the ALA and CILIP are supportive of freedom of expression and are critical of attempts to ban books, there is concern that the number of books removed from stock due to challenges are underreported (Foerstel 2002).

2.1.2 Stock selection

Asheim (1958) argues that there is a fundamental difference between censorship and selection. The latter is performed by the librarian as a consequence of limited space and resources, so some materials must be preferred over others. Asheim states that selection is a positive process in which material is chosen for inclusion, and not excluded based on objectionable content or the wider work or life of its author.

Doyle revisits Asheim's arguments and claims that "one can oppose censorship but still see selection as an essential part of a librarian's duty. It is important, though, when librarians select, that they respect all viewpoints and see to it that voices across the spectrum are represented" (2002 p.242). This point on diversity of viewpoint is particularly salient when investigating the reality of current book bans and challenges, which are often against works by authors of colour or from LGBTQ+ perspectives, as evidenced in 2020's list of most challenged books (ALA 2021c).

O'Sullivan and O'Sullivan (2007) argue that budgetary limits may promote bias in a school library collection due to lack of funds to purchase a balance of titles. Librarians can also be hesitant to purchase a title that may cause controversy or invite complaints (SLJ Research 2016). Parker (2016), writing for CILIP, expresses concerns about "creeping" self-censorship that may be widespread but underreported, with librarians refusing to add books to collections over fear of parental backlash. According to Parker, there is a fear that library underfunding could lead to this type of censorship due to a lack of resources. In effect, this links back to Doyle's assertion that voices across the spectrum should be represented, a feat which may be difficult with limited funds.

2.1.3 Restriction of access

Access restrictions in libraries can prevent particular users from accessing material that may be deemed inappropriate. This can take the form of separate ('restricted') sections for books with mature content, or by requiring signed or verbal permission from a guardian before lending (SLJ Research 2016). This subject is explored further in Sections 2.2 Frameworks, standards and legislations and

2.3 Age rating **systems**.

2.2 Frameworks, standards, and legislation

As introduced in Section 1, a further literature review was performed on standards and frameworks put into place in both countries by their counterpart professional library organisations and governing bodies.

2.2.1 US standards: ALA and AASL

The ALA (2006a) advocates for intellectual freedom and freedom from censorship as one of its core values, championed by its dedicated sub-organisation the OIF. It is unequivocal about defending these rights regardless of the age of the user, stating:

> Library policies and procedures that effectively deny minors equal and equitable access to all library resources and services available to other users is in violation of the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights. The American Library Association opposes all attempts to restrict access to library services, resources, and facilities based on the age of library users. (ALA 2019 p.1)

The ALA (2007) encourages parents to be involved in choosing whether a child should read a book, and not the librarian; it encourages parents to ask librarians for help in recommending more age-appropriate materials. However, the ALA (2015) also states in its interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights for Minors that children have a right to privacy and confidentiality in their library use as would any other user. The AASL (n.d.), a division of the ALA, reiterates students' right to intellectual freedom.

These freedoms that the ALA advocates for also extend to the internet; the ALA (2006b) protests the wide use of and federal mandates for internet filtering in state schools. It advocates that digital literacy would effectively deter students from accessing inappropriate material, while allowing children to access information that may be blocked by imperfect or overzealous filtering systems.

The ALA (2016c) acknowledges that concern does exist for children's privacy of borrowing records, as parents in most states are able to access borrowing history as part of their child's general educational record; it advocates for librarians to implement privacy and security policies in order to prevent access to student records by both parents and third parties.

2.2.2 UK standards: CILIP, the SLA, and Ofsted

CILIP, like the ALA, advocates for intellectual freedom and freedom from censorship in libraries (CILIP n.d.). This extends to the use of the internet; CILIP expresses concerns that filtering is now widespread in UK libraries, and that users are not always informed of this fact. Further to this, CILIP believes that internet filtering in UK libraries goes against the Council of Europe's (2001) guidelines on public access and freedom of expression in networked information.

There is currently no clear way to report censorship concerns to CILIP. CILIP has been contacted for further information on its censorship and freedom of information policies; they have replied stating that an updated policy on intellectual freedom and freedom of access to information would be published this coming winter (CILIP, personal communication by email. 13 August 2021).

In contrast to the AASL, the SLA does not specifically host content regarding censorship or intellectual freedom on its website, though it does advocate for schools to incorporate collection development policies in its publication Priority Paperwork: Policy Making and Development Planning for Primary and Secondary School Libraries (Sargeant 2018). In its Stock Selection Policy document (SLA 2021), it recommends that school library development policies include the directive that stock "[b]e appropriate for the subject area and for the age, emotional development, ability level, and social, emotional, and intellectual development of the students for whom the materials are selected" while also affirming "the importance of intellectual freedom" and ensuring "a diversity of reading levels to suit different abilities and viewpoints on all topics, including those that may be

considered controversial". It also refers librarians to CILIP for further guidance on ethics and freedom of information and to the ALA for guidance on challenges.
In 2021 Ofsted, the body responsible for school inspections in England and Wales, downgraded an independent Islamic boarding school for failing to meet standards. This was in part due to the school library's inclusion of the text Islam on Homosexuality, which reportedly advocates the death penalty for homosexuals. Ofsted argued that the text was not concurrent with British values and "included inappropriate content which does not encourage respect for those who share one of the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010" (2021 p.1). A Jewish faith school was also criticised by Ofsted for redacting passages of books (including those on animal reproduction and climate change) within the school and school library (Ofsted 2018). While there is no explicit Ofsted guidance on censorship of materials in school libraries (Ofsted, personal communication by email. 23 August 2021), there is seemingly the possibility that school library materials may be held complicit in the failings of the wider school.

2.2.3 Legislation

The UK Human Rights Act 1998 and the US First Amendment both guarantee the right of freedom of speech, including freedom of expression and freedom of information (UK government 1998; ALA 2008). Concurrent to ALA and CILIP frameworks, Article 13 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) states:

> The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.
> The exercise of this right may be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:
> (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; or
> (b) For the protection of national security or of public order, or of public health or morals.
> (United Nations Human Rights 1989)

The UK signed on to the CRC and ratified it in 1991, and the US signed on in 1995 although it has not been ratified (United Nations Human Rights 2014).

De Choudens Baez (2015) explores case law, the right of freedom of information for children, and age restrictions. Her conclusions on the constitutionality and practical implications of age restrictions are explored in Section 2.3.3 Opposition to age rating.

Further legislation exists in both countries that place restrictions on freedom of expression in certain circumstances, including in relation to publications for children, although these are rarely called upon in court. In the UK, one piece of legislation is the Children and Young Persons (Harmful Publications) Act 1955, which states:

> This Act applies to any book, magazine or other like work which is of a kind likely to fall into the hands of children or young persons and consists wholly or mainly of stories told in pictures (with or without the addition of written matter), being stories portraying -
> (a) the commission of crimes; or
> (b) acts of violence or cruelty; or
> (c) incidents of a repulsive or horrible nature;
> in such a way that the work as a whole would tend to corrupt a child or young person into whose hands it might fall.

This legislation was seemingly passed to restrict children from accessing horror comics (Hansard 1982) and other than two incidents in 1970, there are no public records of successful prosecutions (Hansard 1974; Hansard 2008). However, given the rising popularity of graphic novels and manga, which can often be considered violent, this could be future cause for concern.

Similarly, the Obscene Publications Act 1959 also places limitations on the types of materials that may be distributed; in practice, this is becoming less frequent in application, especially in the case of books (Index on Censorship 2020). Recent legal guidance from the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) has also recommended further limitations on what could be considered obscene, including if a work has literary or educational merit (CPS 2018). Likewise, US obscenity law in relation to the distribution of materials to minors only applies to works that lack "serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value" (The United States Department of Justice 2020). While this value may be somewhat subjective, it could be argued that assessment of merit is regularly performed at the acquisitions stage in school libraries (or indeed at publication) and it would be relatively rare that an item of absolutely no literary or educational value would be acquired by a library and subsequently supplied to a minor.

Further challenges have come from specific US states. In 2020, US state legislation was proposed in Missouri that advocated that public library collections should be subject to "parental oversight boards" who would decide on appropriate titles for inclusion and access, threatening criminal proceedings against library personnel who failed to comply (Flood 2020). The bill failed to pass after opposition from the Missouri Library Association and the ALA, and similar proposed legislation was unsuccessful in Tennessee (ALA 2021b). This highlights the importance of professional organisations and sound legal doctrine to prevent this type of threat to freedom of expression and information, as well as to librarians' freedoms and livelihoods.

2.3 Age rating systems

Age rating books may seem like a sensible middle ground, offering clarity and clear ground rules in the lending and sale of books to readers who may be deemed too young for its content much in the way that is done in the UK and US for films and video games. Indeed, in a survey of 1,007 US parents, 61.7% believed that books should have age ratings similar to those found for films, video games, and comic books (SuperSummary 2019).

2.3.1 An example of a formal age rating system: New Zealand

A more formal, government-restricted age rating system for books can be found in New Zealand, where it is illegal for a shop, library, or parent to give an underage child restricted materials (New Zealand: Classification Office n.d.). Ratings are divided into three levels: restricted (R) items, RP (adult supervision required) items (R and RP are both given specific ages, such as R12, RP15, etc.), and guidance (G/PG/M) items (Classification Office n.d.). Books in New Zealand are not usually given age ratings in the first instance but may be subject to age ratings if complaints are received by members of the public—in practice, book classification is reactive rather than proactive, and "the Classification Office usually only classifie[s] a few books each year" (Classification in New Zealand: Information for Students n.d.).

Meffan (2017) is critical of this approach, arguing that it is too subjective and inconsistently applied, including in its perception of artistic or literary significance that a work may need to meet in order not to face a restriction or ban. The classification system was subject to public criticism in 2013, when Ted Dawe's young adult coming-of-age novel *Into the River,* initially given an unrestricted M rating, was subject to a R14 (illegal to give to a child under fourteen) label following a complaint by a Christian organisation about its offensive language and sexual content (Meffan 2017; Classification in New Zealand: Information for Students n.d.). This is in contrast to *Fifty Shades of Grey*, a novel well-

known for its sexual content, receiving an unrestricted M rating the previous year (NZ Register of Classification Decisions 2012).
Auckland Libraries appealed the rating for *Into the River*, arguing that there had been "a massive drop in issues for the title as the target audience (teenage boys) did not come across the title in their browsing" and that "managing the restriction [had] impeded access" to the novel (New Zealand: Office of Film and Literature Classification 2015 p.19). While the rating was appealed, the title was removed from shelves and ruled illegal to supply (BBC 2015). After a successful appeal, the R14 rating for *Into the River* was removed and the novel unrestricted (Classification in New Zealand: Information for Students n.d.). The New Zealand Office of Film and Literature Classification (2015) later ruled that the restriction of *Into the River* was not in line with the right to freedom of expression as set out in the New Zealand Bill of Rights, and that it was not clear whether or not freedom of expression was considered in the initial ruling on the book's R14 classification. Indeed, it argued, the book was well-served by its M guidance label, and that the choice was best left up to schools, libraries, and parents: "The harm of this material is prevented by 'professional curation' and adult supervision[,] not by government-mandated restriction" (2015 p.19).

2.3.2 Resources for age rating

While no formal age rating system for books exists in the US or UK, there are multiple resources for obtaining age-appropriateness guidance on books. Common Sense Media is one of these resources: a popular website hosting guidance on age-appropriateness given by editors, parents, and children (Common Sense Media n.d.b.). Peters, a UK-based book distributor for schools and libraries, also offers age-appropriateness ratings for books on its website, as evidenced by its Years 10-11 rating for *13 Reasons Why* (Peters 2021a).

It should be noted that these are resources for guidance only, and may be used by professionals or parents to inform media choices for children. It is not a formal age rating system by which a book can be legally restricted, and there may (or perhaps should) be some inherent flexibility. Lambert (2021) credits McMahon, a book editor at Common Sense Media, for saying, "The thing that we always stress is that you know your own kids best[….] [Y]ou know how sensitive they are and what they can handle."

2.3.3 Opposition to age rating

Self-governing age rating systems have previously been proposed in the US, but have been abandoned following opposition by authors, librarians, and readers (De Choudens Baez 2015).
Drawing on US case law, De Choudens Baez (2015 p.487) argues that:

> (1) age rating is censorship which has been criticized by the Supreme Court; (2) parents are in the better position to control children's access to age inappropriate books; (3) age ratings for books would not take into account the 'mature minor' who is capable of reading beyond his or her age group; and (4) visual media and literature are not consumed and processed by minors in the same ways.

The ALA is opposed to what it deems "prejudicial labelling systems", arguing for "the rights of individuals to form their own opinions about resources they choose to read, view, listen to, or otherwise access" (ALA 2015). The ALA argues that while labelling to aid collection management (for instance, the separation of books into teen and children's collections) may not be deemed prejudicial, any further labelling could present bias and negatively influence library users' borrowing.

Subjectivity of age rating also does complicate the process. Common Sense Media's book review pages highlight the inherent subjectivity of this system; for Suzanne Collins's 2008 bestseller *The Hunger Games*, editors gave it a rating of 12+, parents rated it 13+ on average (with individual

reviews ranging from 10+ to 18+), and children rated it 11+ (Common Sense Media n.d.a). This subjectivity of what constitutes inappropriate content is also a complication—this is evidenced by the inclusion of *And Tango Makes Three* on several years' Banned Books Lists due to LGBTQ+ content and "age-inappropriate" content, despite it being a picture book the publisher deemed appropriate for children aged four to eight (Magnuson 2011). There is also inconsistency between age rating sources, as demonstrated by the Years 7-9 suitability rating for *Six of Crows* on Peters (2021b) and the comparative 14+ rating for the same title on Common Sense Media (n.d.c).

It could therefore be argued that age rating library books may not be the panacea that many parents suggest; in fact, it may further cause complications due to subjectivity and inequality of application, all while inhibiting freedom of speech, inquiry, and expression.

2.4 Objectionable content

2.4.1 Objectionable content in the US

The ALA's annual The State of America's Libraries report includes a list of the year's most challenged books in the US in public, school, and academic libraries, including a brief precis for each title on why it was challenged or banned (ALA 2021c). In the previous five years, reasons for objection included sexual content, coarse language, witchcraft, religious viewpoints, unsuitability for age groups, and violence. In recent years, an increasing number of titles listed were objected to on the grounds of containing LGBTQ+ content. In 2019, this was the most prominent reason for objection for eight of the top ten most challenged books while in 2020, issues surrounding race overtook LGBTQ+ content as most-objected-to type of material.

There has been a gradual upward trend in the number of challenges and bans reported to the ALA since 2015. The ALA has noted that there seems to be an increase mainly in objections to "diverse content" (ALA 2021c).

SuperSummary (2019) also polled American parents/guardians on perceptions of objectionable content in children's/young adult books. Sexual content and nudity are the most objected-to content type, followed by Satanism, suicide, drug use, and profane/offensive language. Full results are shown in Figure 1.

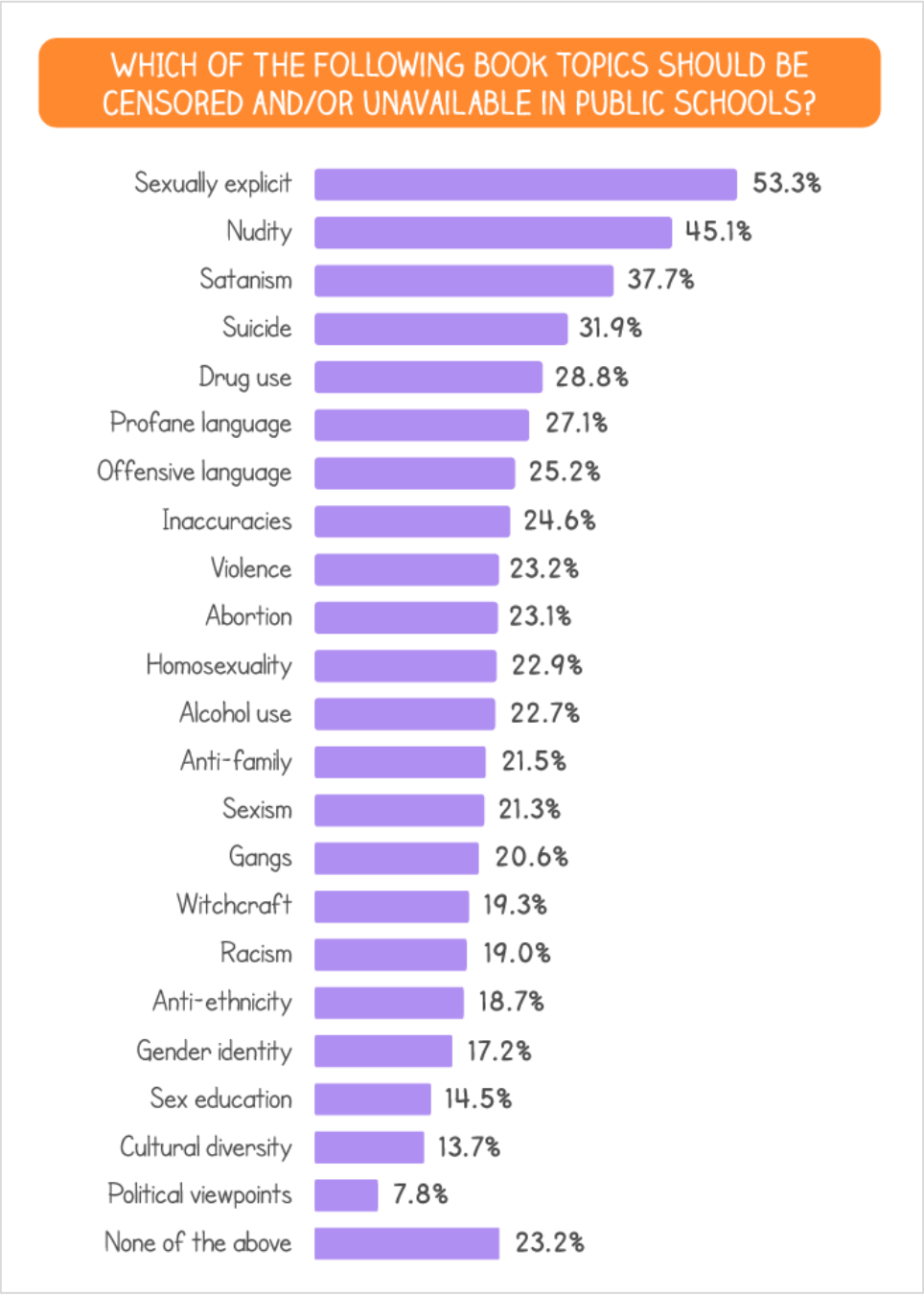

Figure 1. Approval of specific content types. Poll of 1,007 US parents/guardians (Supersummary 2019).

2.4.2 Objectionable content in the UK

Literature searches for UK-based content objections have revealed little available data on objected-to content in UK schools or school libraries. In a study of Scottish public libraries, Taylor and McMenemy (2013) found that of the small number of books officially challenged, sexual content was the most-objected-to type of content, followed by general inappropriateness for children.

2.5 Previous relevant studies

As noted above, Taylor and McMenemy (2013) utilised Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to obtain data on books officially challenged in Scottish public libraries in 2005-2009 and regarding

actions taken as a result of these challenges. The study found that only fifteen books had been officially challenged over this time period.

SLJ Research's (2016) survey on self-censorship explores attitudes of US elementary, middle, and high school librarians and how this impacts acquisitions and collection management. This provides useful comparative data to measure against the US-based data gathered as part of this research.
Dawkins (2018) examines not only censorship in and of itself, but how school librarians perceive censorship, and how this may impact on their own behaviour and tendency to self-censor out of fear of administrative discontentment. Dawkins surveyed 471 school librarians in North and South Carolina, US, with further follow-on interviews with 49 school librarians. Dawkins's mixed methods approach of a questionnaire followed by interview questions has been referred to as an exemplar for this research's methodology.

McNicol (2016) revisits a 2004 study on UK school librarians' intellectual freedom beliefs and how these beliefs are put into practice. From survey responses, McNicol found that many librarians were unsure how to respond to pressure from head teachers and parents, and that self-censorship practices were common. The author recommends that that further study would be beneficial to professional organisations. This has helped form the rationale for this research.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

As it became clear in the literature review, there was depth and breadth to the topic of censorship and intellectual freedom in the US from the ALA/AASL, and contrastingly a lack of publicly available guidance from CILIP and the SLA, despite some public advocacy for intellectual freedom. Previous studies on censorship in UK libraries have encouraged further research into this area. As libraries in both countries seek to follow similar frameworks, measurements are missing that ensure that both countries adhere to them. It was of benefit to gather the same data from both countries so that analysis could take place on how the same standards were enacted in two different and diverse nations.

The topic of censorship itself can prove difficult to research; its emotive qualities can make it difficult to gather unbiased data (McNeeley 2012), and the researchers' own preferences and feelings may influence qualitative data gathering by, for example, expressing biased questionnaire or interview questions (Gideon 2012). Strictly quantitative data was also not ideal since, as shown in studies by McNicol (2016) and Dawkins (2018), it was important to gather data on the *why's* of censorship as well as the *what*'s in order to understand how certain materials come to be challenged or banned. Comparatively, a mixed methods approach using triangulation of data should help verify data presented by quantitative and qualitative research, as well as 'cancel out' biases presented in either form (Creswell 2003).

It was therefore decided that a mixed methods approach should be used, using a survey to gather quantitative data and qualitative data in answer to both open and closed questions in a questionnaire, and a series of semi-structured interviews to add further qualitative data and scope to the topic.

3.2 Ethics

Prior to conducting the research, it was subject to ethical review in order to identify any potential harm that may be caused. Due to the topic's potential sensitivity as well as survey respondents communicating personal demographic information and personal views on the profession, it was deemed important that participants remained both anonymous and retained control of their data.

The cover page of the survey informed participants that:

- Their data would only be used for the purposes of this research.
- Their data would be kept securely and for a limited amount of time.
- They would not be made identifiable by the data.
- They had the right to withdraw at any time.

The researcher's contact information was also given for any further queries or withdrawal of consent.

Interview participants were given verbal statements to the same effect, with verbal informed consent necessary to record, transcribe and continue the interview.

Survey data was anonymous at submission—no names, contact information, or specific locations were taken as part of the research. Names and email addresses were taken for purposes of conducting the interviews. However, further questions that may identify the schools in which the participants worked were not asked in order to prevent identification of workplaces due to the small sample size.

In the case of the literature review, organisations were also contacted for further information. In doing so, the request letters were open about the purpose of the enquiry and how the organisation's response may be used in this research.

In the survey and interviews, it was acknowledged that participants' experience with censorship may be an emotive subject, and survey questions and comments were worded carefully, neutrally, and, where possible, in third person in order to prevent any potential emotional harm or personal affront.

3.3 Limitations of the research

There were some limitations of this research that must be considered:

3.3.1 Sample size

There were inequalities of sample size between US and UK cohorts, with approximately twice as many UK respondents (107) as US respondents (55). Small differences between the two populations should be given less consideration than clear trends in the overall sample.

Despite targeted advertising, Wales and Northern Ireland were also under-represented in UK responses to the survey—although this, according to the Great School Libraries (2019) report, is not unusual for UK-based school library research due to inequality in school library provision in Wales and Northern Ireland in comparison to England. It should consequently be noted that while the findings represent the UK, they are mostly applicable to England and Scotland.

3.3.2 Time frame and representation

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some librarians/library personnel have been made redundant or furloughed. While the sampling tried to be inclusive of this group, these potential respondents may not have been engaging in online library-related activity at the time in which the survey took place. Some schools in both countries have also removed or failed to reinstate librarian positions due to budgetary concerns (Lance and Kachel 2021; Teravainen and Clark 2017); other staff or volunteers who manage library stock part-time may therefore be less likely to participate in library-specific online activity due to its secondary position in relation to their primary job roles.

3.3.3 Content type

During the time period of this research, there was an apparent shift in the types of content most objected to in the US, with racial content facing high levels of challenge in comparison to previous years (ALA 2021c). This is not specifically accounted for in the survey, and it is recommended that racial issues are included in a separate category in future research on types of objectionable content. The inclusion of self-harm, suicide, and general death is also recommended as separate categories due to the number of respondents who specifically mentioned this in the survey and interviews.

3.3.4 School structure

US and UK secondary schools are largely structured differently. This can make direct comparison difficult although this particular topic is explored, with school structures compared, in the findings in Section 4.6.1 Self-censorship practices by school type.

Table 1. General year/grade equivalent by country.

England and Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	US	Age Equivalent
Y7	P7	Y8	Grade 6	11-12
Y8	S1	Y9	Grade 7	12-13
Y9	S2	Y10	Grade 8	13-14
Y10	S3	Y11	Grade 9	14-15
Y11	S4	Y12	Grade 10	15-16
Y12 (Lower Sixth Form)	S5	Y13 (Lower Sixth Form)	Grade 11	16-17
Y13 (Upper Sixth Form)	S6	Y14 (Upper Sixth Form)	Grade 12	17-18

Table 2. Types of schools in the US and UK.

Terminology	Definition
College	UK post-16 education, often vocational in nature. Not to be confused with US college (university).
High school	In the US, this school type generally includes Grades 9-12. In UK, this is usually synonymous with secondary school, or independent school for pupils in Years 9-11/13.
Junior high	US school type that usually includes Grades 7 and 8. May also include Grades 6 or 9. See also: Middle school.
Middle school	US school type that generally includes Grades 6-8. See also: Junior high
Secondary	Education that generally takes place from the age of 11 and ends before the age of 19. In the US, this may include middle school, junior high, and high school, and in the UK, secondary school and sixth form or college.
Secondary school	UK school type that usually includes Years 7-11 or 7-13. See also: High school.

3.3.5 Sample bias

The inclusion of the word 'censorship' may have repelled some library personnel who did not want to engage with this topic, particularly those who may have a history of conflict in relation to censorship issues. Some bias may have been introduced by attracting participants with general curiosity or a specific interest in this topic.

3.3.6 Previous studies

There is little publicly available literature on censorship and freedom of information in UK secondary school libraries outside of McNicol (2016). Therefore, there is relatively little previous research on

which to base this research report. Research methods and recommendations were also drawn upon and adapted from comparative US studies such as Dawkins (2018) and SLJ Research (2016).

3.4 Literature review

Sources for the literature review were accessed and assessed based on authority, relevance, and reliability. RGU LibrarySearch, Google Scholar, and EBSCOhost (among others) proved useful in highlighting reliable sources of information, while filtering narrowed down articles and monographs to the most relevant information. Pre-existing knowledge of professional organisations and website search functions aided the successful location of materials specific to the topic (such as policy creation materials from the ALA).

Backward- and forward-chaining were used to further access relevant authoritative sources. Press articles were also supported by backward-chaining and referral to authoritative sources, such as government websites. Professional organisations were contacted to obtain information not publicly available.

3.5 Survey

3.5.1 Rationale and sample selection

Due to the geographical spread and the need for a large amount of information, a survey was the preferred method of data gathering. In addition to these benefits, a survey aided anonymity (which was particularly beneficial due to the potentially sensitive subject matter). Data was gathered in the form of a questionnaire hosted by Online Surveys. It was distributed through mailing lists (such as listservs), professional email contacts in both countries, and on social media (primarily Facebook and Twitter) using hashtags and groups. A wide range of distribution methods were used in order to target those working as librarians both with and without qualifications or certifications, in professional and non-professional networks.

A pilot survey took place 4 to 14 February 2021 using questions asked in the final questionnaire as well as pilot-specific questions such as respondents' thoughts on the questionnaire's clarity, length etc. as recommended by Gideon (2012). Minor revisions were made in line with feedback. The final questionnaire was open to respondents over the period of 1 March to 16 May 2021.

3.5.2 Demographics and screening

Demographic information was gathered about both the respondent (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, nationality, region/state of residence, professional qualification(s)) and the respondent's workplace (e.g. school type, religious or non-religious, size of student body, private or state-funded). Demographics were gathered in order to aid analysis and identify trends. Respondents not from the UK/US or working only in primary schools or non-school libraries were automatically screened out. Definitions for any terms that may not directly translate between the two countries were provided to reduce confusion. The scope was also defined so that those who worked in secondary schools with primary provision (such as all-through schools) were not excluded but were categorised separately to aid analysis.

In order to ensure that data collected in the survey was current, it was requested that respondents should not fill out the questionnaire unless they had worked in a school library in the last two years, thus including those who had been furloughed or made redundant due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This was reinforced in the cover email/post promoting the questionnaire, as well as on the cover page on Online Surveys.

3.5.3 Questionnaire content

Beyond demographic data, the survey sought to ask respondents questions pertaining to:

- If challenges to materials were received.
- Who had lodged challenges (such as school administration, school boards, or parents).
- Stated reasons for challenges (such as sexual content, LGBTQ+ content, or strong language).
- Perceived likelihood of materials containing the above kinds of content being subject to challenges.
- Whether respondents had censored collections.

McNicol (2016) and Taylor and McMenemy (2013) formed the basis for the research design of gathering quantitative and qualitative data concurrently, with the inclusion of some open questions for the provision of further exploratory and explanatory information. As adopted by McNicol (2016), phrasing for certain questions, such as regarding personal beliefs on censorship, were written in the third person in order to obtain more accurate and less defensive answers. Questions that measured strength of feeling were also provided as statements coupled with a five-point Likert-type scale, rather than on a dichotomous 'yes/no' basis. This was to reduce any potential defensiveness on the part of the survey's respondents and to better measure and present personal beliefs.

Finally, the questionnaire also addressed the respondents' professional well-being, including questions on feelings toward ALA/CILIP/equivalent standards, whether respondents were happy with their collection management procedures, and whether respondents felt well-informed of the ALA/CILIP/equivalent standards.

3.6 Interviews

3.6.1 Rationale

While some qualitative data was gathered from the survey, following its completion and a primary analysis of the survey results, it was decided that more qualitative data would be beneficial in order to triangulate the data provided by the survey as well as provide further background information. Dawkins's (2018) research into school librarian self-censorship was identified as a desirable research process to emulate, with a graduation from survey to interview to explore issues brought up by the survey in further depth. It was therefore decided that a short series of semi-structured interviews should take place.

3.6.2 Interviewee selection

After a primary analysis of the survey results, it was decided that further questions generated by analysing the data would largely not apply to US respondents due to their general disapproval of censorship practices, so interviewing this cohort would be unnecessary. Instead, invitations for interview were extended through the media used in the initial distribution of the survey such as social media, and through professional contacts. Except for the narrowed country criteria of UK-only, the same screening criteria as for the survey applied: interviewees must have been working in a UK secondary school library in any capacity at some point in the last two years. It was deemed unnecessary that the interviewees should have also taken part in the initial survey, although some may have participated in both.

3.6.3 Interview setting

Five interviews were held on a one-to-one basis over Microsoft Teams in July and August 2021.

3.6.4 Interview content

Following an interview guide, interviewees were given a series of open interview questions with allowances made for follow-up and clarifying questions.

Basic demographic information was taken about the interviewee and school to determine the interviewee's position within the school (e.g. librarian, assistant librarian) and the general makeup of the school (e.g. religion, age range, size). Less demographic information about the school and interviewee was taken in comparison to the survey due to the much smaller sample size and the risk that the information may make anonymisation difficult.

The interviewees were also asked:

- What they considered the main purpose of a school library to be.
- Their response to a student trying to access/borrow material that is either too mature or too immature for them (including the use of parental permission).
- How they treated different types of content within the school (e.g. collection management).
- Why they restricted access, if applicable.
- Their personal feelings on students accessing 'mature' materials.

3.7 Analysis of data

As part of the data analysis, the surveys and interviews were reviewed comprehensively and systematically in order that no bias could be introduced, as recommended by Matthews and Ross (2010). Due to screening, there were no incomplete or non-applicable survey responses or interviews to filter out. This was made possible by automatic survey question requirements on Online Surveys and the researcher's ability to guide the structure of the interview in order to make sure relevant questions were answered.

Quantitative data was filtered and summarised using Online Surveys' and Microsoft Excel's analysis tools. Online Surveys' filtering and cross-tabulation tools were used to divide the survey respondents into US and UK cohorts for comparative study, with separate cross tabulation taking place to compare other groups in order to identify trends (e.g. by school type, participant education level etc.). The use of the Likert-type scale in closed questions allowed comparison of average values, such as librarians' feelings toward censorship. Raw numbers and general whole-group data were reviewed prior to cross-tabulation to identify trends for the respondents as a whole before country-based comparison. Tables and charts were used to aid identification or trends and are presented in the research findings in Section 4.

Where possible, data was tested for statistical significance using Fisher's Exact Test, with a 95% confidence level ($p < 0.05$) considered significant.

The semi-structured interviews and answers to open questions from the survey were coded using the comments feature in Microsoft Word, and then exported to an Excel spreadsheet via a Python-based comment extraction script for thematic analysis.

4. Results and discussion of findings

4.1 Introduction

This section recounts and analyses the findings of the survey and interviews that took place as part of this research.

As this is a comparative study, the findings of the survey are generally divided into two broad categories: library personnel in the UK and library personnel in the US. Where beneficial, further granularities are accounted for and expanded upon.

4.2 Demographic information of respondents

4.2.1 Survey respondents by country and region

There were 162 responses to the online questionnaire. 107 respondents (66.0%) were UK-based; 55 (34.0%) were US-based. Regional and further demographic information was collected in order to aid the research. Regional breakdowns are presented in
Figure 1 and

Figure 2.

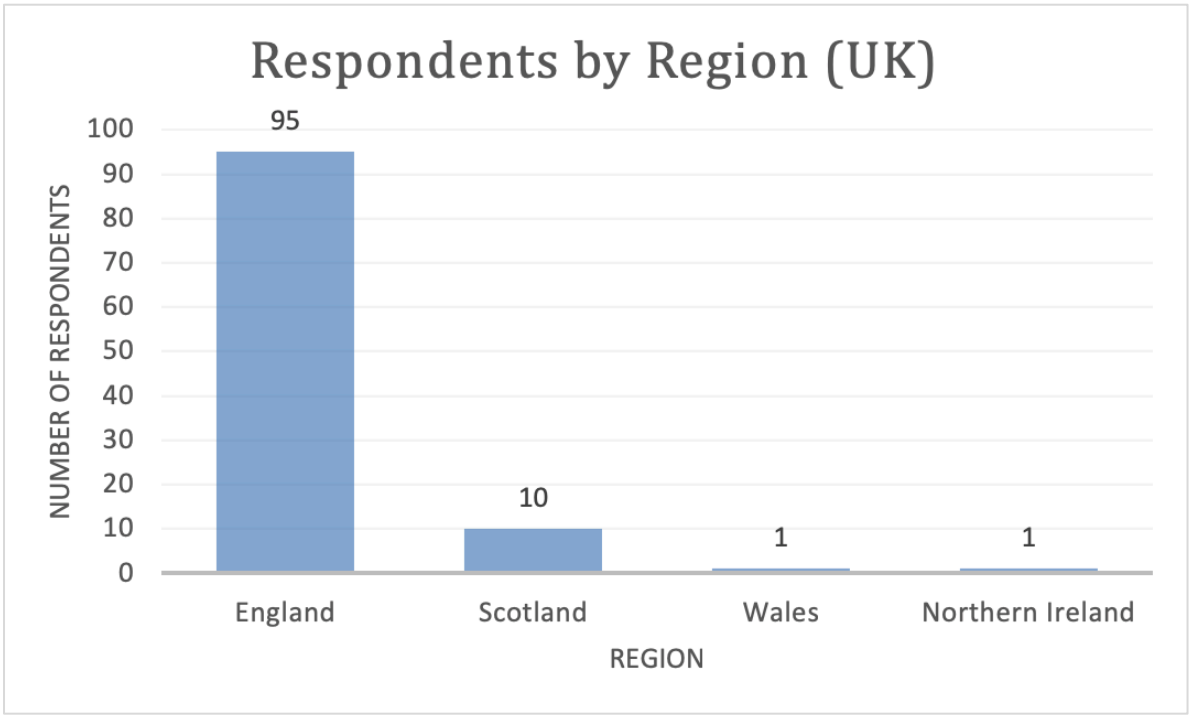

Figure 1. Number of UK survey respondents by region.

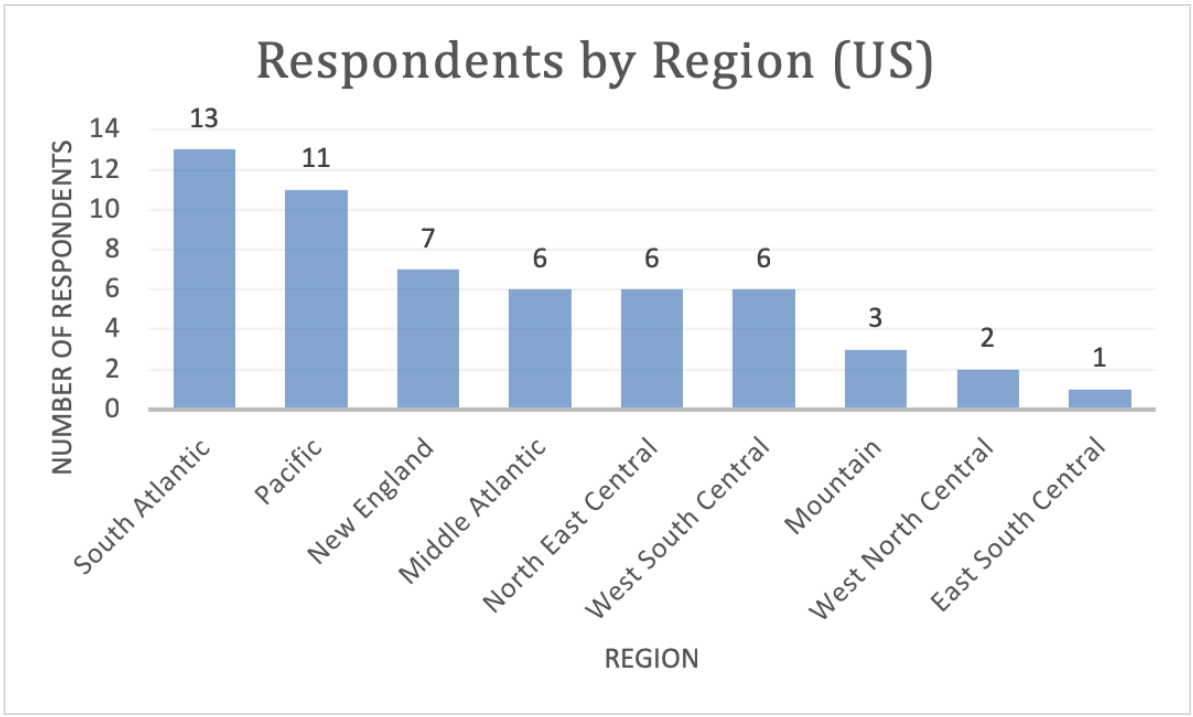

Figure 2. Number of US survey respondents by region.

NB: Regions are based on divisions used by the U.S. Census Bureau (n.d.).

While the number of responses from Wales and Northern Ireland were low, this is generally in line with population and librarian number trends (see Section 3.3 Limitations of the research). The Mountain, West North Central, and East South Central regions in the US also resulted in a comparatively low number of responses.

Tables 3, 4, and 5 and
Figure 3 show the gender and age demographics of respondents from each country. Percentages are shown as a percentage of respondents from that country (the UK or US), not the total number of respondents to the survey.

Table 3. Gender distribution, by country.

	Country			
	UK		**US**	
Gender	**Number**	**Percentage**	**Number**	**Percentage**
Male	5	4.7%	5	9.1%
Female	101	94.4%	49	89.1%
Other	1	0.9%	1	1.8%

Table 4. Age distribution of respondents, by country.

	Country			
	UK		**US**	
Age	**Number**	**Percentage**	**Number**	**Percentage**
18 to 24	1	0.9%	0	0.0%
25 to 34	15	14.0%	8	14.5%
35 to 44	25	23.4%	18	32.7%
45 to 54	45	42.1%	13	23.6%
55 to 64	19	17.8%	14	25.5%
65 to 74	2	1.9%	0	0.0%
75 or older	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Prefer not to say	0	0.0%	2	3.6%

US respondents were more likely to identify as male; however, this was not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). US respondents also skewed somewhat younger. The largest proportion (42.1%) of UK respondents were in the 45 to 54-year-old age bracket, while in the US, the mode age range was 35-44, with other respondents more evenly spread between other age ranges.

Due to its perceived potential impact on censorship issues, data on respondents' religion was collected. This is presented in
Figure 3 below:

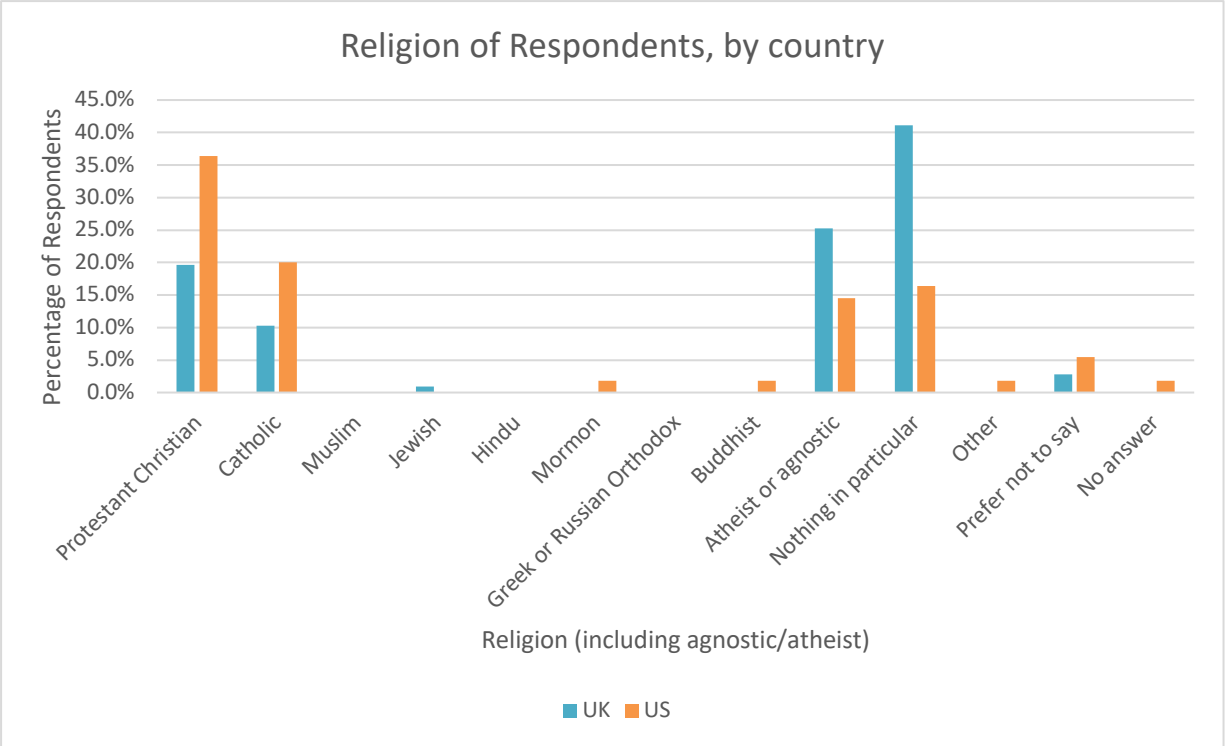

Figure 3. Religion of survey respondents, by country.

US respondents were significantly more likely to identify as Christian (56.4% versus 29.9% of UK respondents), while UK respondents were over twice as likely to identify as atheist/agnostic or as of no religion. Interestingly, this is in contrast to the religious affiliations of the general population: in the 2011 UK census, the percentage of those resident in England and Wales identifying as Christian was 59.3%, while no religion was 25.1% (Office for National Statistics 2020). In the US, the PRRI (2020) estimated that 69.7% of US residents identified as Christian and 23.3% were unaffiliated. While the number of US areligious respondents were slightly higher than the national average, UK respondents were over twice as likely to identify as areligious than the average UK resident. The potential impact of respondents' religion on censorship practices is assessed in Section 4.6 Potential confounding variables.

Finally, data on race/ethnicity was also collected. In both countries, respondents were almost entirely (96.3% UK; 94.5% US) non-Hispanic white, as detailed in Table 5:

Table 5. Race/ethnicity of respondents by country.

	Country			
	UK		**US**	
Race/Ethnicity	**Number**	**Percentage**	**Number**	**Percentage**
Asian	2	1.9%	0	0.0%
Hispanic/Latino	0	0.0%	2	3.6%
White	103	96.3%	52	94.5%
Prefer not to say/no answer	2	1.9%	1	0.0%

NB: Other options given in the survey are not presented in the results due to a null number of responses.

4.2.2 Nature of employment and academic qualifications

The distribution of respondents' job titles was similar between UK and US respondents, with the majority of respondents in both countries identifying as librarians or equivalent. A small number of assistant librarians and para-professionals also responded (
Figure 4). Respondents in the UK were more likely to select the 'other' option, with three respondents identifying with the job title 'teacher', 'teacher librarian', or 'literacy lead teacher'; two respondents also entered 'library manager' or 'learning resource centre manager' rather than identifying by equivalence to the role 'librarian'.

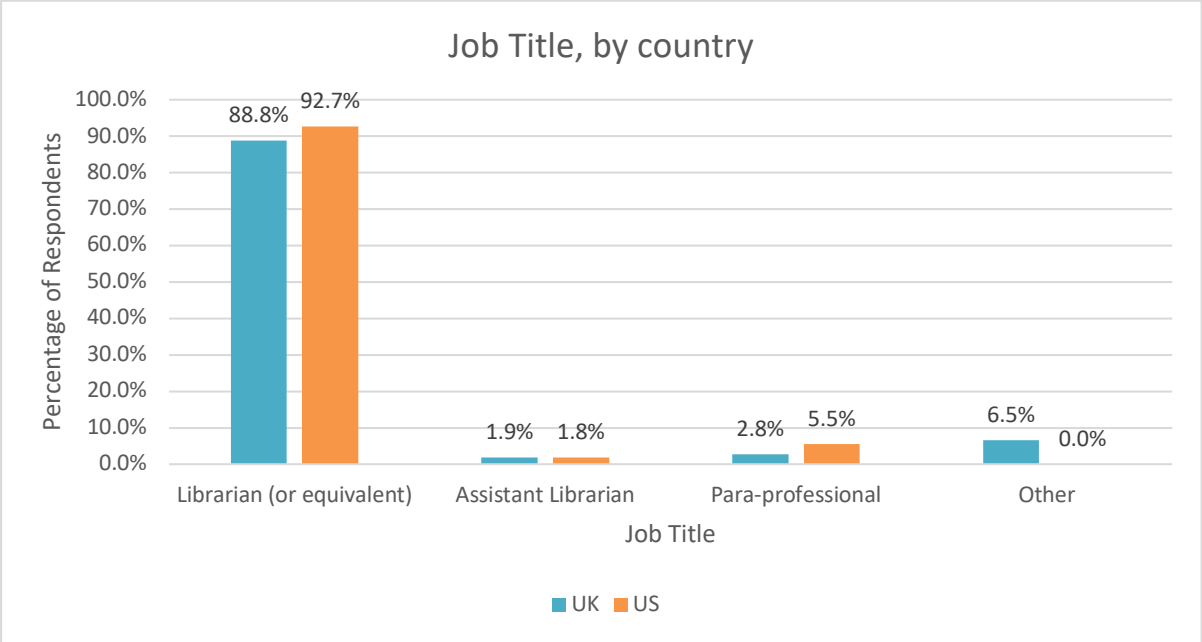

Figure 4. Job title of respondents, by country.

Academic qualifications between the two countries diverged steeply (
Figure 5). This finding is unsurprising, given the inequality of academic requirements for school librarians in the US versus the UK; in the US, 48 of 50 states require a teaching license in addition to a Bachelor's or Master's degree (Every Library Institute 2019), though enforcement of this requirement may vary by state (Lance and Kachel 2021). In the UK, given that there is no statutory requirement for schools to have libraries, there is no singular requirement for school librarians to hold a particular qualification; requirements may also vary from school to school (SLA 2018). Routes to CILIP-certified librarianship in the UK can also either be academic or vocational (UCAS 2021). Therefore, it is to be expected that US respondents to the survey were significantly more likely to hold a Master's degree or Doctorate
in Library and Information Sciences ($p < 0.05$), and UK respondents were significantly more likely to hold no academic qualification at all ($p < 0.05$).

This inequality in qualifications may prove a confounding variable regarding censorship and censorship issues and must be considered in light of further findings. This is explored further in Section 4.6 Potential confounding variables.

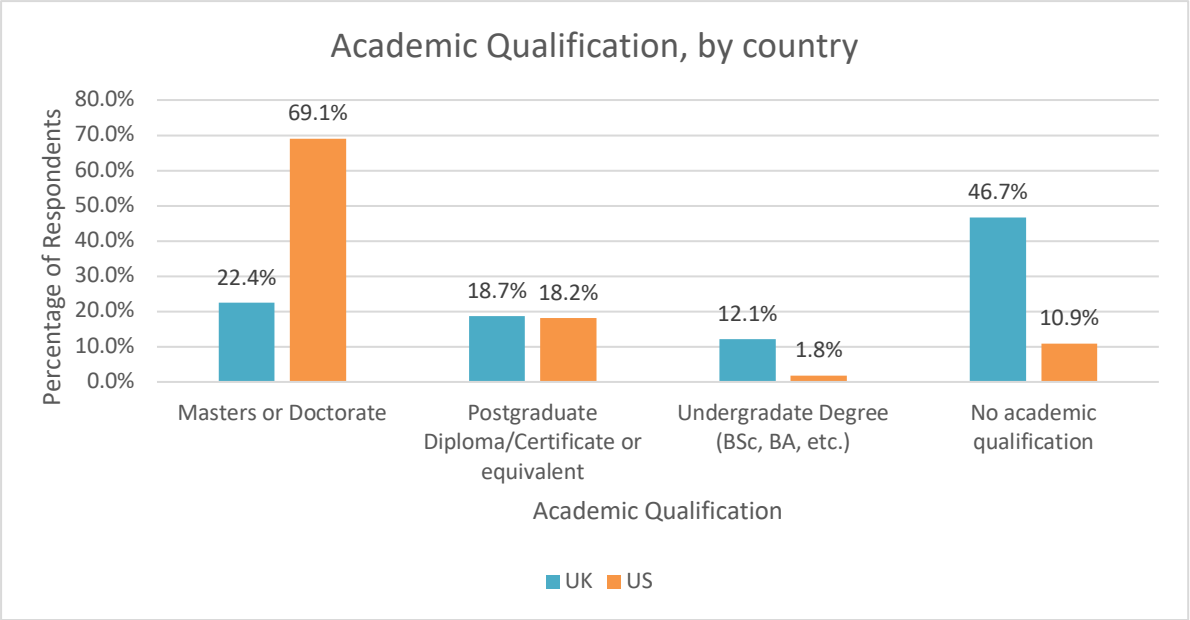

Figure 5. Highest academic qualification in Library and Information Sciences of respondents, by country.

4.2.3 Interviewee demographics

As an extension of the UK-based research, interviews were performed with five individuals working as librarians at secondary schools in England. While no other demographic information is provided in this report (including withholding of gender; each interviewee is referred to by the pronouns 'they/their') in order to limit potential identification, the demographics of the interviewees are generally in line with the UK survey respondents.

4.3 School demographics

The schools at which the survey respondents work may also play an important role in censorship practices, varying from the age range of the school, the size of the student body, whether it is public/state or fee-paying, the type of school (e.g. a 'special school' for students with Special Educational Needs) or whether it is of a religious character.

4.3.1 School age structure

The average age range of survey respondents' schools was similar in the US and UK, with secondary schools (divided between middle school/junior high school, high school, and UK secondary/high school) making up the majority of respondents in both countries: 87.9% in the UK (including relevant 'other' responses) and 90.9% in the US (Table 6).

Table 6. Survey respondents' school type by country.

	Country			
	UK		US	
Type of school	**Number**	**UK**	**Number**	**US**
High school	9	8.4%	21	38.2%
Middle school/junior high	0	0.0%	24	43.6%
Secondary (ages 11-16)	15	14.0%	1	1.8%
Secondary (ages 11-18)	65	60.7%	4	7.3%
All-through school (primary and secondary)	10	9.3%	4	7.3%
UK college/sixth form only	2	1.9%	0	0.0%
Combined primary and middle school or prep school	0	0.0%	1	1.8%
Special school	2	1.9%	0	0.0%
Other	4	3.7%	0	0.0%

4.3.2 State-funded and fee-paying schools

There was a distinct variation in respondents' schools in terms of state-funded or fee-paying, as well as religious character. 23.4% of UK respondents worked at an independent (fee-paying) school versus 5.4% of US respondents. The UK percentage is much higher than the 7% of UK pupils in private education (Independent Schools Council 2021), while the US percentage is slightly lower than the national average of 9% (U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics 2020).

This finding may be due to the following:

- The UK may have more librarians than average in independent schools, due to having multiple librarians per school or a higher ratio of libraries to pupil.
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, more independent school librarians may have been on furlough at the time of the survey, meaning they had more opportunity to read and respond to online survey requests.
- The survey may have been circulated among librarians at independent schools.
- Or a combination of the above factors

4.3.3 School size

On average, school sizes of respondents were larger in the UK than in the US. Mode student body size for the UK was 1201-2000, closely followed by the next largest value of 751-1200. The mode range for student body size of US respondents was 401-750, followed by 751-1200 (Table 7).

Table 7. Student body size of respondents' schools, by country.

	Country			
	UK		US	
Number of students	**Number**	**UK**	**Number**	**US**
Under 100	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
101 to 400	9	8.4%	7	12.7%
401 to 750	18	16.8%	20	36.4%
751 to 1200	38	35.5%	16	29.1%
1201 to 2000	40	37.4%	9	16.4%
Over 2000	1	0.9%	2	3.6%
No answer	1	0.9%	1	1.8%

The approximate average number of library loans per pupil was similar in the US and UK, although it is difficult to measure with accuracy due to the ranges used in both questions. It is recommended that this should be reduced to short-form numerical responses in future research so that any potential impact of censorship practices on loan numbers can be identified.

4.3.4 School religious character

In the UK, twenty-three (21.5%) of respondents worked at a school of religious character, with ten of these being Protestant Christian and thirteen Catholic; this is slightly higher than the 18.5% of secondary schools in England and Wales that are Protestant or Catholic (Fair Admissions Campaign 2021). Sixteen of these schools were state-funded and seven were fee-paying. No respondents in the US reported working in a religious school. As for fee-paying schools, this is explored further in Section 4.6.1 Self-censorship practices by school type.

4.3.5 Demographics of interviewees' schools

All five interview participants worked in state-funded secondary schools that educated students aged 11-18. Of these schools, two were faith schools (Roman Catholic) and the other two were of no religious character. The two interviewees who worked at Catholic schools are identified as Librarians 1 and 5.

4.4 Censorship views and practices

4.4.1 Survey results on censorship views

In order to gauge the views and beliefs of the library personnel toward censorship and freedom of information in schools, survey participants were given a series of statements about student access to materials and censorship practices. Participants were asked to disagree or agree with the statements based on a five-point Likert-type scale, which included, 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'neither agree nor disagree', 'agree', or 'strongly agree'. Participants were also given the option of choosing 'I don't know' in order to prevent dilution of the neutral option.

The statements were as follows:

- Students should be able to access all materials in a school library.
- Students should have guardian permission to borrow materials intended for a more mature audience.
- Students should not read materials intended for a more mature audience.
- Materials containing objectionable content should be separated from other materials intended for the same age group.

- Students should be guided toward more appropriate material if attempting to borrow something too mature for them.
- Students should be guided toward more appropriate material if attempting to borrow something too immature for them.
- School library computers should have internet filtering, even if it blocks out useful information.
- I would feel comfortable assembling a Banned Book display.
- I would feel comfortable running events for Banned Books Week.
- One of a librarian's key duties is fighting censorship.
- One of a librarian's key duties is promoting freedom of information.
- Freedom of information should not apply in a school setting.

A comparative chart of UK versus US findings for these statements can be found in Figure 6. There were many areas in which UK and US respondents felt similarly:

- Both US (72.7%) and UK (69.2%) respondents generally disagreed with the statement 'students should not read material intended for a more mature audience'. This expresses a general approval that, ideally, students should be able to read what they want.
- Most US and UK respondents agreed that school libraries should have internet filtering, even if it blocks useful information (which may highlight a more pragmatic approach to internet censorship in both countries, despite what is advocated by the ALA and CILIP).
- A majority of US and UK respondents would feel comfortable assembling a Banned Books display or running Banned Books Week events.
- A majority of US and UK respondents agreed that librarians should fight censorship although US respondents felt more strongly.
- A vast majority of US and UK respondents agreed that librarians should promote freedom of information.
- A vast majority of US and UK respondents disagreed with the statement that 'freedom of information should not apply in a school setting' although, again, US respondents felt more strongly.

While approximately 70% of both UK and US respondents disagreed with Statement 3 'students should not read material intended for a more mature audience', this belief culminated in different views on how students could access and borrow these materials. US respondents were much more likely than UK respondents to agree that 'students should be able to access all materials in a school library' ($p < 0.05$). UK respondents were more likely to favour separating objectionable content from other content intended for the same age group (Statement 4), although the majority of UK respondents still disagreed with this statement. US and UK respondents also diverged steeply on two other issues: offering guidance toward materials and guardian/parental permission for borrowing.

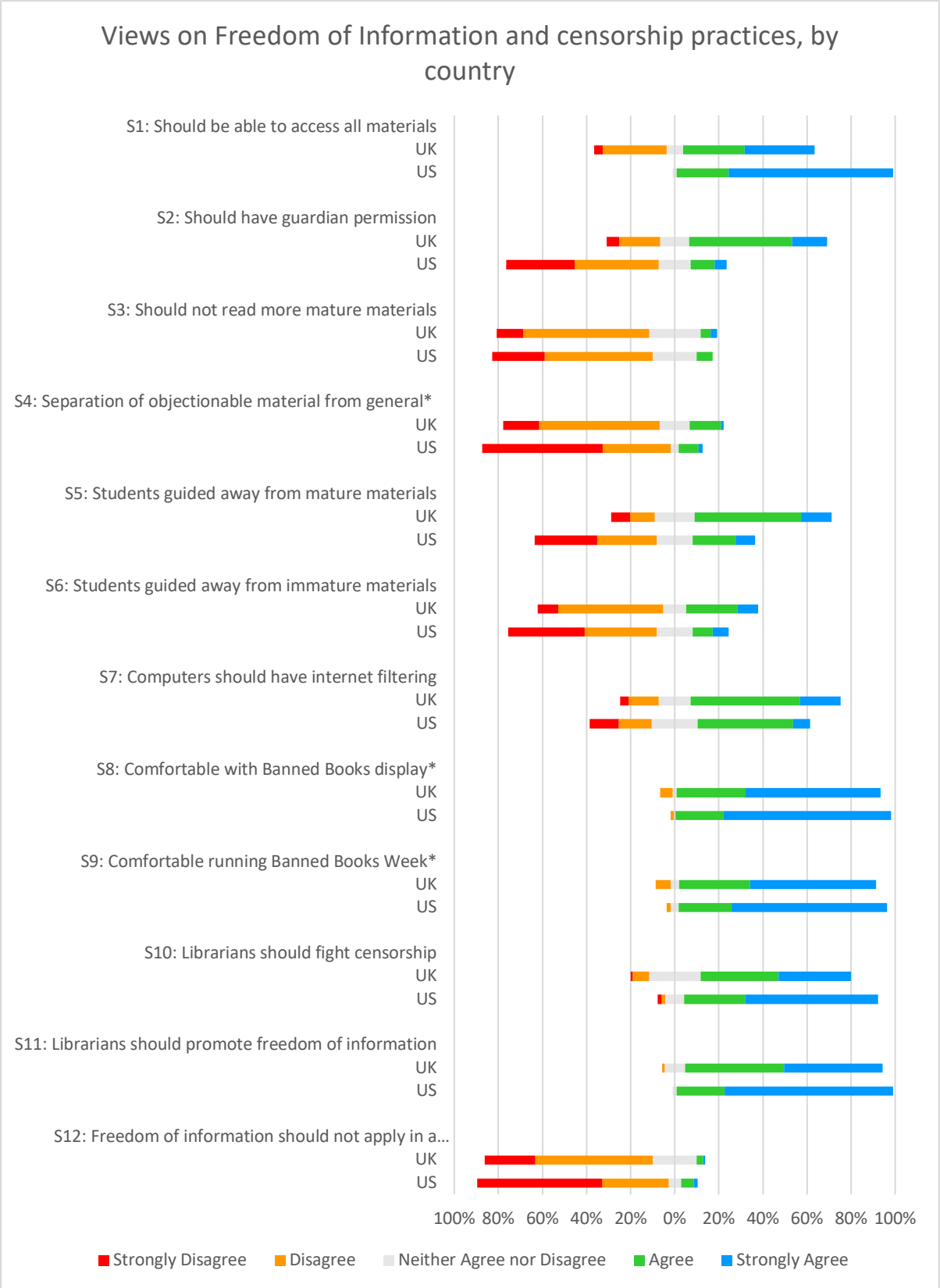

Figure 6. Views on statements 1-12 (full text given above): Freedom of Information and censorship practices, by country. *'Don't know's not included in results.

4.4.2 Access and parental permission

With 32.7% of UK respondents disagreeing with the statement that students should be able to access all materials in a school library (versus 0.0% of US respondents) and 62.6% agreeing with parental permission requirements (versus 16.4% of US respondents), there is obvious possibility of censorship practices taking place in UK secondary schools when compared to their US counterparts. US respondents were also over five times more likely to strongly disagree with the requirement of parental permission.

This was further demonstrated in the interviews, where every participant expressed that there were some restrictions in place at their school, ranging from parental permission requirements for individual students to strictly restricting access to any mature content to younger students. This is demonstrated in Table 8 below:

Table 8. Access, parental permission, and student guidance in interviewees' school libraries.

Interviewee	How access to materials is managed in their school library
Librarian 1	Recently combined sixth form and general library. Students are able to browse all materials but may need parental permission to borrow adult titles. Uses knowledge of student and student feedback to determine whether parental permission is necessary for the individual. Is considering implementation of parental opt-out system.
Librarian 2	Some mature titles are mixed in with the general collection, some sectioned off for older readers. Some titles carry content stickers. Parental permission required for younger students (Years 7 and 8) accessing mature-content-stickered books.
Librarian 3	Senior section in library, with all students allowed to access all parts. Individually guides pupils' reading choices, and discusses book content and if the students' guardians would be comfortable with the student reading mature content. Does disallow borrowing of mature material based on individual judgement of student.
Librarian 4	Two libraries (senior and junior). Students allowed to visit both libraries and use library catalogue to place requests. Never requires parental permission, but may disallow young students (e.g. Year 7) borrowing mature materials based on individual judgement of students.
Librarian 5	Years 7, 8, and 9 only allowed to read books marked as appropriate for their specific age groups. Mature titles placed on higher shelves. Year 9 allowed to read Year 10+ books with parental permission.

Two interviewees (Librarians 3 and 4) noted that they felt a sense of protectiveness over younger students, with Librarian 3 acknowledging that their position as a parent influenced their judgement. Librarian 5 felt that the system of restrictions in place was 'entirely reasonable' and based on the satisfaction of the students' parents, although they also felt that parental permission was needed for 'covering [their] own back'.

This difference between librarians and libraries, as shown in interviews and the survey, reveals an inherent inequality of access for UK students which is dependent on the school a student attends, especially in comparison to students of US respondents.

4.4.3 Guidance

UK library personnel were much more likely than US library personnel to agree that students should be guided away from materials that may be too mature for them (67.3% UK versus 34.5% US; $p < 0.05$). 32.7% of UK respondents also believed that students should be guided away from materials

that were too 'immature' for them versus 16.3% of US respondents, although this comparison is not quite statistically significant.

This is however supported by evidence from the interviews. Interviewees expressed a sense of duty in encouraging students to read more challenging books, while acknowledging that there is some comfort to be found in reading books targeted at younger students:

> When it comes to reading for pleasure, reading lower and comfort reading—so books that are much lower for them, for example, *Wimpy Kid* type books, which are incredibly popular, still, with Year 10 boys—I don't prevent them, but I encourage them with another option. (Librarian 1)

This was a sentiment echoed by other interviewees, particularly regarding the popular middle grade *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series. While most interviewees did not prevent students from borrowing them (when they were stocked), there was often encouragement to move on to more mature titles or the offer of 'buy one get one free' to partner a lower-level book with a more challenging title.

As previously shown in Table 8, three of the five librarians interviewed also expressed that they guided individual students when it came to reading mature materials, basing the student's ability to borrow titles on their knowledge of the student's maturity level.

This could potentially impact the borrowing abilities of students who feel less confident defending reading choices to library personnel.

4.4.4 Acquisitions and removals

Participants were asked for their views on acquiring materials and were asked to select the answer most in line with their views. If they were not responsible for acquisitions, they were asked to imagine that they were. Results for this section are shown in
Figure 7 below.

When it came to avoiding acquisitions due to content, UK and US survey respondents did not differ widely in their opinions. UK respondents were slightly more likely to avoid acquiring material if it would invite complaint, if the content might be upsetting to students, if the author had said or done something controversial, or if they would have to balance the materials with an opposing viewpoint. Both UK and US respondents expressed opposition to the idea that they would refuse to purchase titles they personally disagreed with. US respondents were significantly more likely to feel neutrally about purchasing materials by an author who had said or done something controversial ($p < 0.05$).
Some UK respondents' hesitance to purchase titles that may have to be balanced with other titles may also be as a result of budgetary deficiency, as argued by O'Sullivan and O'Sullivan (2007) and Parker (2016).

Restrictions on acquisitions due to budgets was also expressed in one interview. Librarian 1 stated that they did not replace *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series when books were lost or damaged unless they could be found cheaply in a charity shop. They reported, 'We also have a large loss amongst those books, so a lot of them never come back in or they come back in damaged. So they're often an investment, but that doesn't really pay out to a certain extent [….] With a restricted budget, we do purchase priority books.' They expressed that they felt the need to prioritise books that were on the curriculum rather than those strictly for comfort reading or pleasure.

While few respondents reported having removed items due to complaints (see Section 4.5.3 Response to complaints), some interviewees expressed that their libraries had been subject to self-

censorship practices in the past, with a previous librarian at Librarian 5's school having removed *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series as they were deemed unchallenging and too frequently borrowed. Librarian 5 had also removed a series of otherwise relevant young adult books from the collection as they determined, after review, that they were 'badly written' and were generally unsuitable for the library.

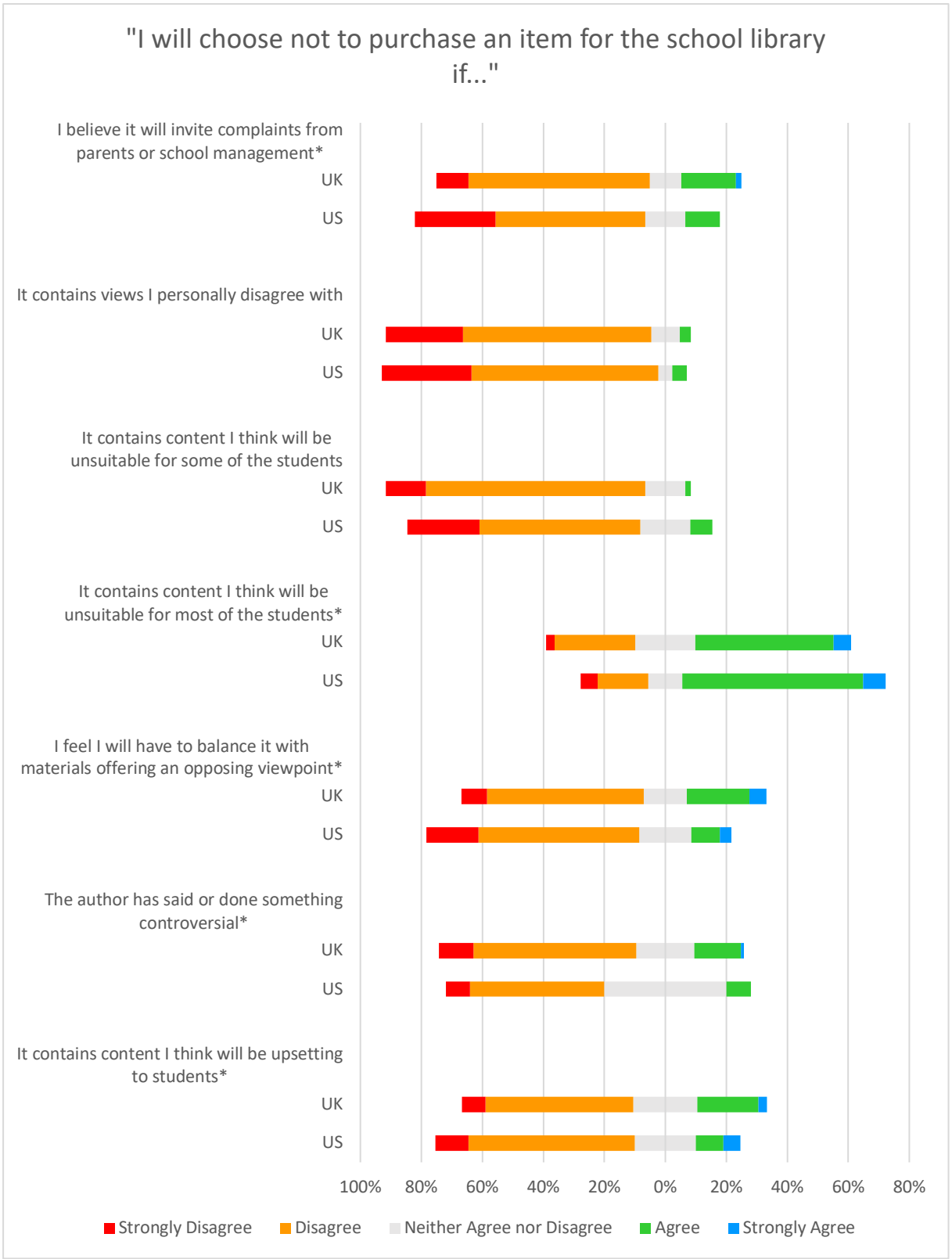

Figure 7. Views on avoiding acquisitions, by country. *'Don't know's not included in results.

4.5 Complaints and challenges

In the questionnaire, survey respondents were also asked about the nature of the complaints they have received, including their source(s) and the content type the complainant(s) opposed.

4.5.1 Sources of complaints and challenges

The majority of both UK (59.8%) and US (67.3%) respondents reported having previously received a third-party complaint, as detailed in Table 9. US respondents were more likely to receive a complaint from all parties except for parent-teacher associations. Parents/guardians were found to be the most common complainants, with 53.3% of UK respondents and 60.0% of US respondents having received a complaint from this party.

Table 9. Percentage of UK and US survey respondents who have received complaints from third parties, by party.

	Country	
Percentage of respondents who received complaints from the following parties:	**UK**	**US**
Parents/guardians	53.3%	60.0%
Teachers	15.0%	27.3%
Students	14.0%	27.3%
Senior staff/administration	5.6%	16.4%
Teaching assistants or support staff	5.6%	12.7%
District or local authority	0.9%	3.6%
School boards or boards of governors	0.9%	1.8%
Parent-teacher associations	1.9%	0.0%
No complaints received	40.2%	32.7%

4.5.2 Content type

Respondents in the US were also more likely to have received complaints due to every type of content except for general age inappropriateness, violence, and religious/anti-religious content; this is detailed in

Figure 8, below. US respondents were more than twice as likely to have received complaints due to 'characters modelling inappropriate behaviour' and fourteen times as likely to have received complaints due to drug/alcohol use than UK respondents. Consistent with the findings of SuperSummary ([2019]), sexual content was the most complained about type of content in both countries.

'Other' content for which respondents received complaints included suicide and self-harm, race issues, nudity (including animal), general opposition to graphic novel format, and perceived negativity of library stock.

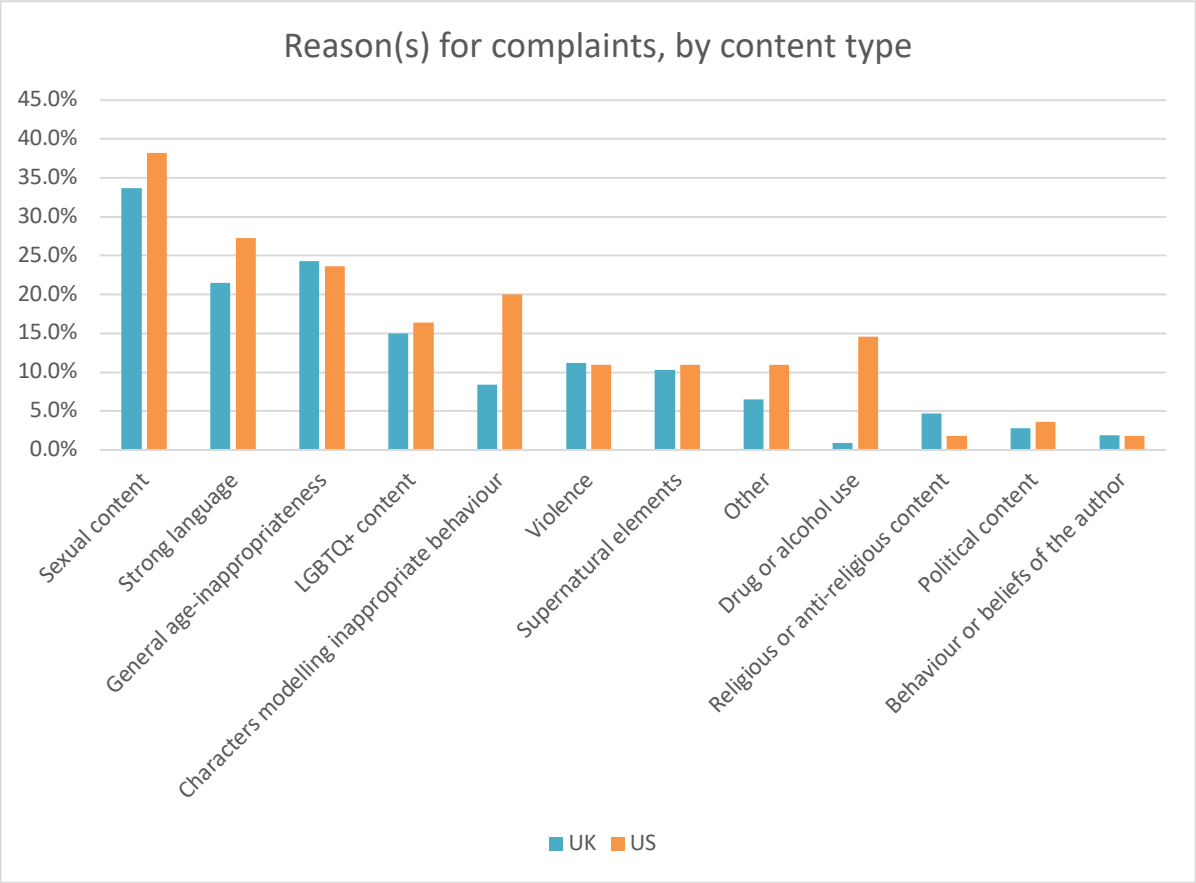

Figure 8. Reason(s) for complaint, by content type.

4.5.3 Response to complaints

As shown in Table 10, US and UK survey respondents were equally likely to remove books from stock due to complaints, with the vast majority of respondents in both countries (89 or 83.2% in UK, 46 or 83.6% in US) having never removed a book due to a complaint. Approximately 14% of respondents from both countries have removed between one and four, with one respondent in the UK having removed between five and nine resources from stock due to complaints.

Table 10. Participants who had removed materials due to complaints, by number of items removed.

	Country	
Number of materials removed due to complaint(s)	**UK**	**US**
0	83.2%	83.6%
1-4	14.0%	14.5%
5-9	0.9%	0.0%
10+	0.0%	0.0%
I don't know	0.9%	1.8%

US respondents were nearly twice as likely as UK respondents to remove materials due to complaints from administration, but were three times more likely to receive complaints from administration in the first instance. UK respondents were more likely to remove materials due to complaints from parents/guardians, students, and teachers, despite being less likely to receive complaints than their US counterparts. However, the number of respondents who had removed materials was too low to compare with accuracy.

Table 11. Participants who removed items due to complaints, by complainant. “Don’t know”s/no answers not included.

	Country	
Items removed due to complaints from which party?	**UK**	**US**
Senior Staff/Administration	5.6%	9.1%
Parents/Guardians	7.5%	5.5%
Students	4.7%	3.6%
Teachers	3.7%	1.8%
School Boards or Boards of Governors	0.9%	1.8%
District or Local Authority	0.0%	1.8%
Teaching Assistants or Support Staff	0.9%	0.0%
Parent-teacher associations	0.0%	0.0%

Interviewees reported complaints and removal requests from teachers, with Librarian 4 reporting a temporary removal request of a particular title after the suicide of a student. They reported complying with this request due to the sensitivity of the issue. They also reported removing an item due to a complaint from a parent about racist stereotyping after review of the item determined it was of little literary merit.

Two interviewees expressed confidence in handling complaints, while two others felt unequipped to handle complaints having not received one before. Librarian 5 stated that they felt ‘nervous’ about the idea. Librarian 3 acknowledged that as they job-shared, complaints were more likely to be directed towards their job share partner; however, they expressed confidence that in the event of a complaint, they would have administrative support.

4.5.4 Perceptions of complaints and challenges

In order to identify what types of content may be self-censored due to fear of complaints, survey participants were asked to rate each type of content by their perceived likelihood of receiving a complaint, as shown in
Figure 9.

US respondents were generally more likely to feel that they would receive a complaint due to content. US respondents were more than twice as likely than UK respondents to feel that religious content or anti-religious content would solicit complaint. UK respondents were slightly more likely to receive complaints, but the likelihood of receiving complaints about this type of content was low and insignificant.

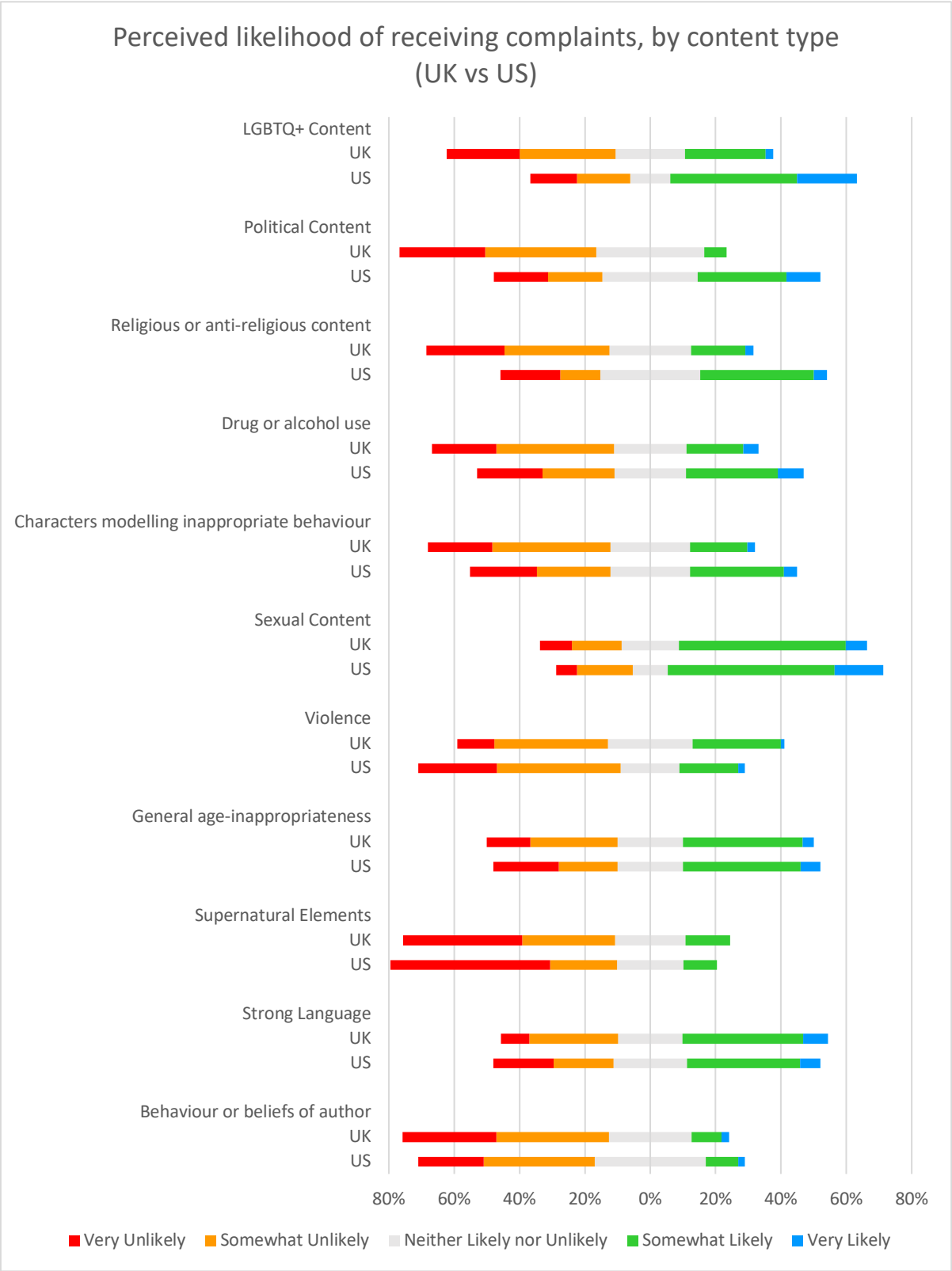

Figure 9. Participants' perceived likelihood of receiving complaints, by content type.

In general, compared to actual complaints received, respondents from both countries tended to vastly overestimate the likelihood they would receive complaints due to specific content, as shown in
Figure 10.

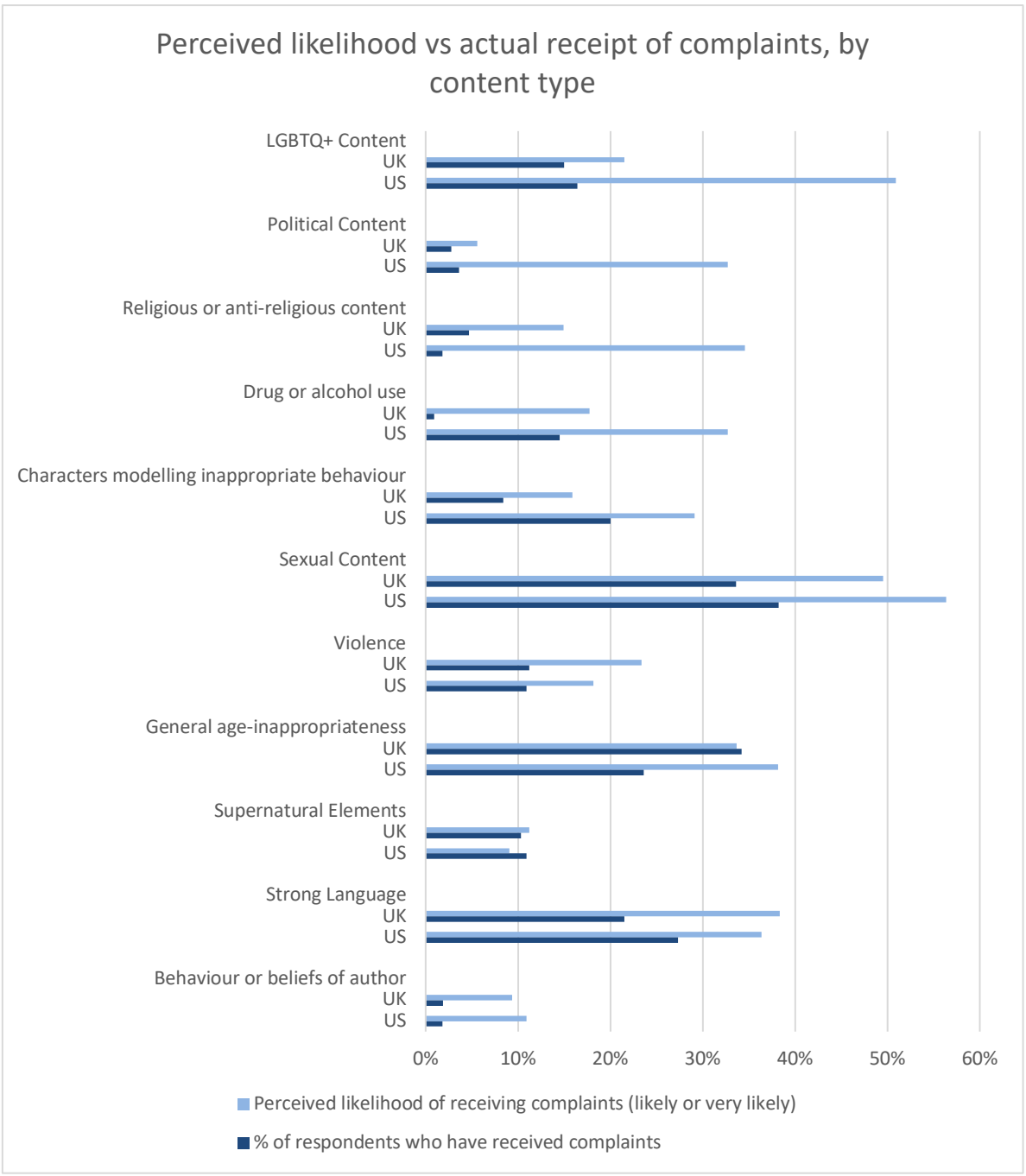

Figure 10. Perception of likelihood of receiving complaints vs. actual complaints received, by content type.

In almost every category, respondents were much more likely to believe they would receive complaints about certain content than was matched by the percentage of those who had actually received complaints. While sexual content was correctly identified as the most contentious type of content (33.6% of UK and 38.2% of US respondents had received complaints regarding sexual content), 49.5% (UK) and 56.4% (US) of respondents identified it as likely or very likely to solicit complaints from outside parties. More strikingly, US respondents were 310% more likely to identify LGBTQ+ content as likely or very likely to solicit complaints than they were to actually receive a complaint about this content. This may be due to widely publicised Banned Books lists and their frequent inclusion of LGBTQ+ content (ALA 2021c) influencing US librarian perceptions.

Complaints about religious and anti-religious content, political content, and drug and alcohol usage were also highly overestimated by UK and US respondents.

One of the only areas in which respondents' perceived and actual likelihood of receiving complaints roughly met was for supernatural content, where UK respondents slightly overestimated and US respondents slightly underestimated likelihood. This is also evidenced in general age-inappropriateness for UK respondents.

In interviews, Librarian 1, who worked at a Catholic school, also reported hesitance about supernatural content and how this may influence collection management practices. They stated that 'all of our vampire books regardless end up sitting in young adult, so we've had *Twilight* sitting in young adult even though we know that a large number of Year 7s have read it by the time they get to the school.' This provides further evidence of subjectivity in age rating and subject matter.

4.6 Potential confounding variables

It is clear from the data analysis that UK library personnel are much more likely to approve of censorship practices than US library personnel. It is important to account for other possible variables that may influence these practices, such as school age structures and the level of education of the respondent. In this section, self-censorship practices will be examined and compared according to school type (age structure, religious character, and independent or state), as well as by the respondents' academic qualifications and personal religious affiliation.

4.6.1 Self-censorship practices by school type

Arguably, the best comparison for UK secondary schools may be US middle schools. There can be some difficulty in continuing reading for pleasure (which was identified as a main purpose of the school library by all interviewees) in UK school libraries once students reach the point at which they begin studying for exams at around 14 to 15-years-old (Wilkinson et al. 2020). This was noted in the interview with Librarian 5, who expressed a wish to open up Year 10+ books to Year 9s as 'they aren't being borrowed.'

Consistent with SLJ Research's (2016) findings on self-censorship in American school libraries, US middle school library personnel were more likely to engage in censorship practices than US high school library personnel. However, in both settings, younger students would theoretically have access to content and materials intended for older audiences. With middle school students ranging in age from 11 to 14-years-old, this would lead to the inclusion of young adult literature in the collection unless it is being selected against. Similarly, with high schools including students aged fourteen to eighteen, this would lead to the inclusion of adult books.

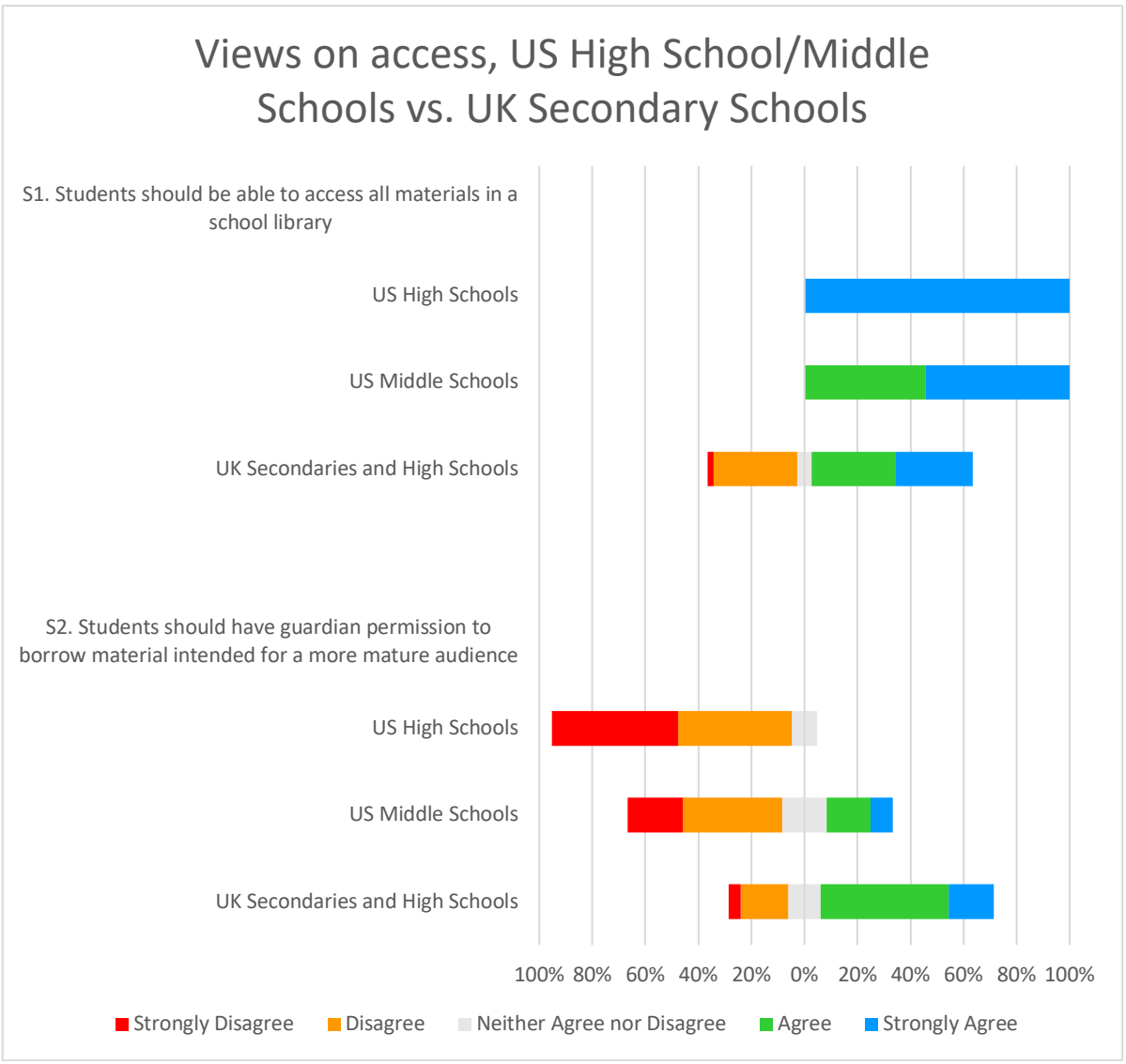

Figure 11. Views on access and parental permission requirements in US high schools, US middle schools, and UK secondary/high schools.

As shown in
Figure 11, US middle school respondents felt less strongly about access than US high school respondents, although 100% of US middle school and high school personnel agreed that students should be able to access all materials in a school library. This is compared to 60.7% of UK secondary respondents. US high school respondents were not at all likely to approve of parental permission requirements when compared to middle school respondents (0.0% for high school versus 25.0% for middle school; $p < 0.05$). In turn, middle school respondents were much less likely to approve of parental permission requirements than UK secondary school respondents (25.0% for middle school versus 65.2% for UK secondary school; $p < 0.05$).

The wide age provisions of all-through schools may also pose a complicating factor, but with ten respondents from all-through schools in the UK and three in the US, direct comparison of all-through schools in both countries would suffer from small sample size. Comparison between views on access and parental permission in UK secondary and all-through schools, meanwhile, shows no significant difference (
Figure 12).

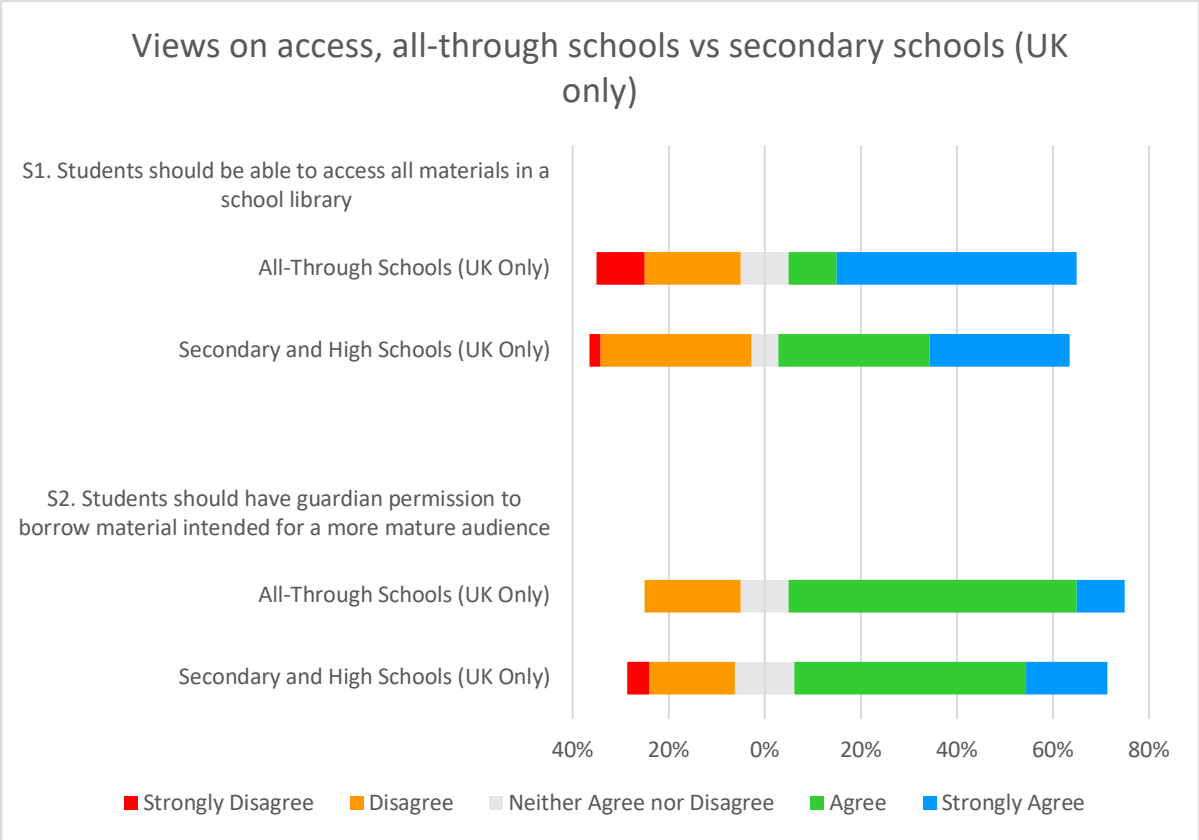

Figure 12. Views on access, all-through schools vs. secondary schools (UK only).

Therefore, while school age range does appear to play a part in US censorship practices (to a lesser degree than in the UK), it appears to have no significant impact on UK respondents' views on access and parental permission.

Given that many book challenges and attempted bans are promoted by religious interest groups (Foerstel 2002), it is also beneficial to analyse the data for any influence the religious character of a school may have.

Measuring religious schools, 69.6% of respondents worked at state-funded schools with religious character (either Protestant or Catholic) while 30.4% worked at religious independent schools. In this instance, all respondents who worked in religious schools were based in the UK, so the two groups (UK religious and UK non-religious) can be directly compared.

Table 12. Percentage of respondents who received complaints from particular third parties, religious vs. non-religious schools (UK only).

	School Type (UK Only)	
Have you ever received complaints about library materials from the following parties?	**Religious**	**Non-Religious**
Parents/guardians	52.2%	52.5%
Teachers	21.7%	12.5%
Students	17.4%	13.8%
Senior staff/administration	4.3%	6.3%
Teaching assistants or support staff	17.4%	1.3%
District or local authority	4.3%	0.0%
School boards or boards of governors	4.3%	0.0%
Parent-teacher associations	4.3%	1.3%
I have never received a complaint about library materials	39.1%	41.3%

As shown in Table 12, while respondents working at religious schools were more likely to receive complaints from other staff members such as teachers, teaching assistants, and support staff, there is no significant difference in the percentage of respondents who received complaints from any party, with 60.9% of respondents from religious schools having received a complaint versus 58.7% of respondents from non-religious schools. Parents/guardians were no more likely to complain at a religious school than at a non-religious school.

As outlined in
Figure 13, when it came to views on censorship issues, respondents working in religious schools were more likely to disagree with the idea that students should be able to access all materials than those working in non-religious schools (47.8% religious schools respondents disagree versus 30.4% at non-religious schools), but they are also less likely to agree that students should have parental permission to borrow mature materials (63% of non-religious school respondents versus 52% at religious schools). However, this is not statistically significant.

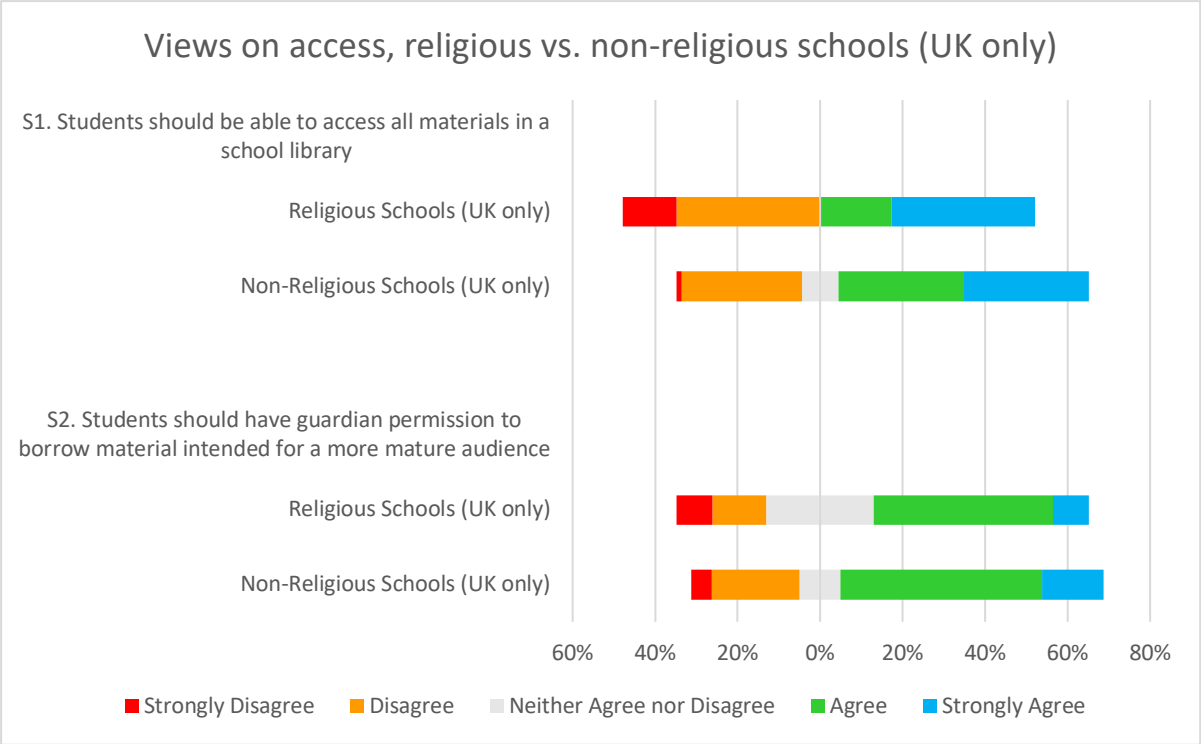

Figure 13. Views on access and parental permission requirements, religious vs. non-religious schools (UK only).

A majority of respondents working at religious schools were areligious themselves, with 56.5% of respondents working at UK religious schools identifying as atheist/agnostic or 'nothing in particular.' As noted in
Figure 14, there was no significant difference between the views of UK areligious and religious respondents other than that religious respondents were more strongly in favour of parental permission ($p < 0.05$). Given the significant number of UK respondents who identified as areligious, there appears to be no significant impact on general UK censorship views.

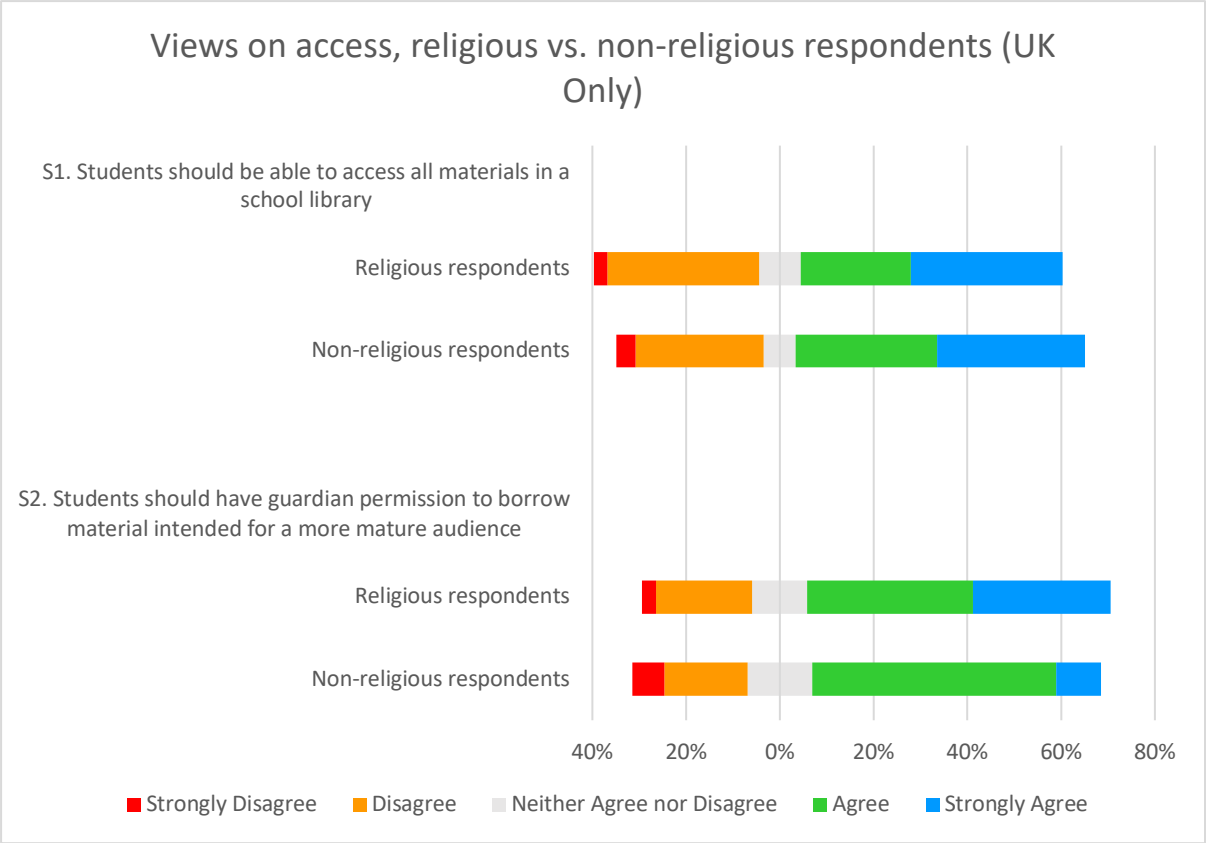

Figure 14: Views on access and parental permission requirements, religious vs. non-religious respondents (UK only).

As detailed in Table 13, respondents working in the UK independent sector were more likely to receive complaints in general (with 57.5% of those in state schools having received a complaint versus 68.0% of those in independent schools); independent school library personnel were also more likely to receive complaints from parents and senior staff. However, it should be noted that the sample size of independent schools remains too small to prove significance.

Table 13. Percentage of respondents who received complaints from particular third parties, state-funded vs. fee-paying (UK only).

	School Type (UK Only)	
Have you ever received complaints about library materials from the following parties?	**State-funded**	**Fee-paying**
Parents/guardians	51.3%	60.0%
Teachers	13.8%	16.0%
Students	13.8%	16.0%
Senior staff/administration	5.0%	8.0%
Teaching assistants or support staff	7.5%	0.0%
District or local authority	1.3%	0.0%
School boards or boards of governors	1.3%	0.0%
Parent-teacher associations	2.5%	0.0%
I have never received a complaint about library materials	42.5%	32.0%

As detailed in
Figure 15, respondents working at independent schools and state schools were equally likely to agree that students should be able to access all materials in a school library. As in the comparison for religious and non-religious schools, the two cohorts diverged again on the topic of parental permission, with state school personnel more likely to agree with its implementation than independent school personnel (70.0% state versus 44.0% independent; $p < 0.05$). This could be due to a variety of reasons, including:

- The perceived maturity and ability of the student body.
- Independent schools are more likely to be boarding schools, and therefore may already be acting *in loco parentis.*
- Librarians at independent schools may feel more pressured to drive academic achievement through challenging texts.

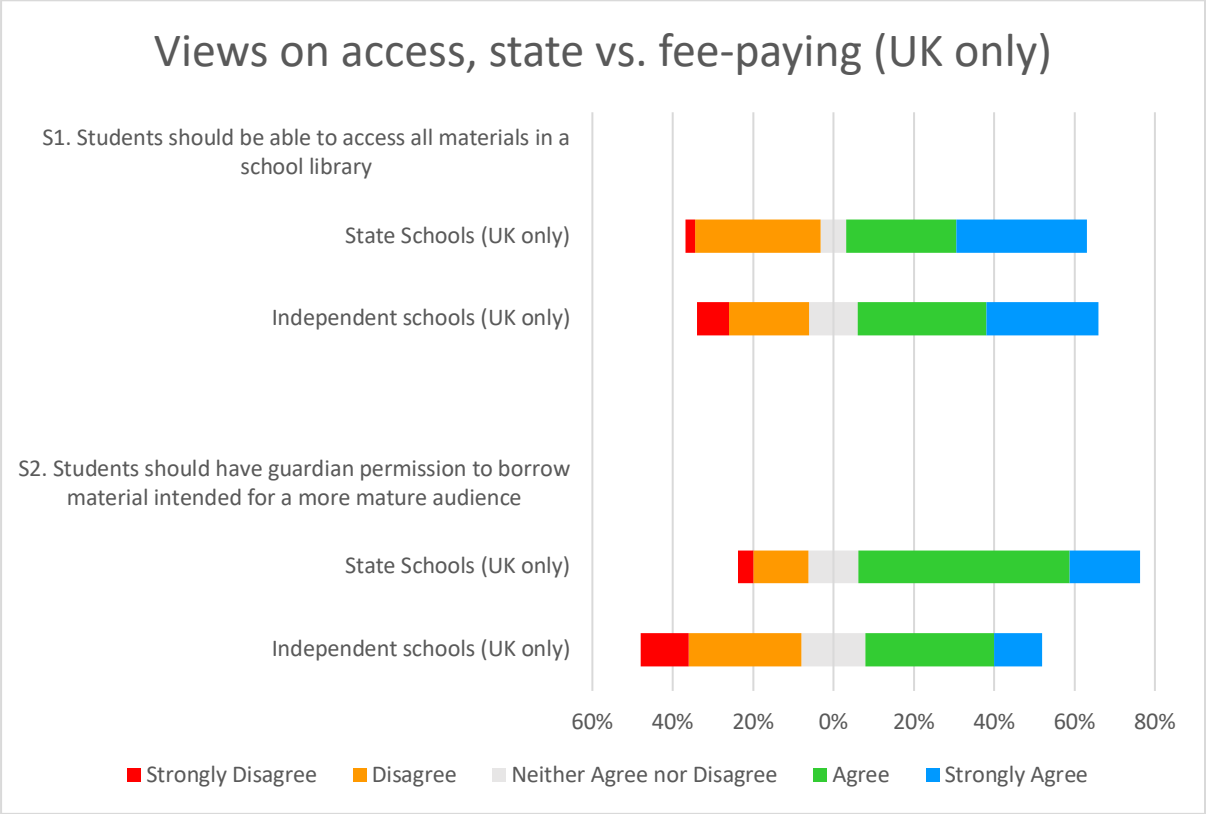

Figure 15. Views on access and parental permission requirements, state schools vs. fee-paying schools (UK only).

Considering the relatively high number of UK independent school based respondents to the survey (see Section
4.3.2 State-funded and fee-paying **schools**), it is worth noting that in the absence of respondents from independent schools—which, as previously noted, only educate approximately 7% of UK schoolchildren (Independent Schools Council 2021)—a larger percentage of UK respondents approve of censorship practices such as requiring parental permission for mature materials.

4.6.2 Self-censorship practices by respondents' academic qualifications

As evidenced in Section 4.2.2 Nature of employment and academic qualifications, there are also stark inequalities in academic qualifications when comparing UK and US respondents, with US

respondents much more likely to be educated to Master's level or above. Indeed, a higher level of education in Library and Information Science was correlated with a higher likelihood of favouring access for all students to all materials than those with lower educational qualifications (see Figure 16). Similarly, respondents with a Master's or higher qualification were much more likely to oppose guardian permission. Those with a Bachelor's degree or no degree were equally likely to agree that parental permission should be required, and those with no academic qualification were more likely to strongly agree with the concept of parental permission than any other cohort.

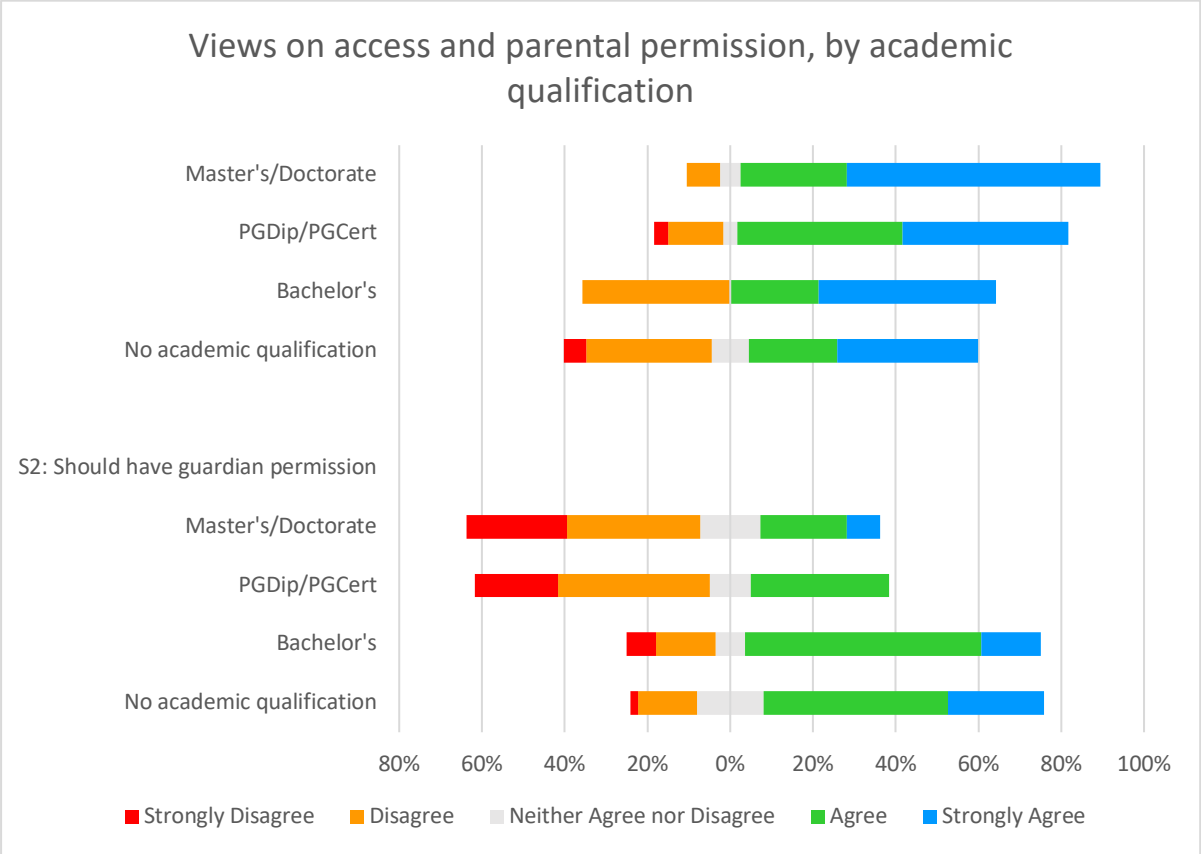

Figure 16. Views on access and parental permission requirements, compared by respondents' highest academic qualifications in Library and Information Sciences.

However, this correlation is not as strong when measuring UK responses only. As evidenced in Figure 17, for UK responses, there is only a slight correlation between academic qualification and approval of free access, with respondents with a lower qualification more likely to disagree. In the US, only those holding no academic qualifications diverged slightly from the norm of 100% approval of free access; likewise, they were more likely to approve of parental permission requirements.

The majority of UK respondents with a Master's, Bachelor's or no academic qualification approved of parental permission requirements, while only those holding a Postgraduate degree had majority disagreement.

Therefore, it can be concluded that level of academic qualification may have some small influence but does not significantly contribute to differences in censorship views between the UK and the US.

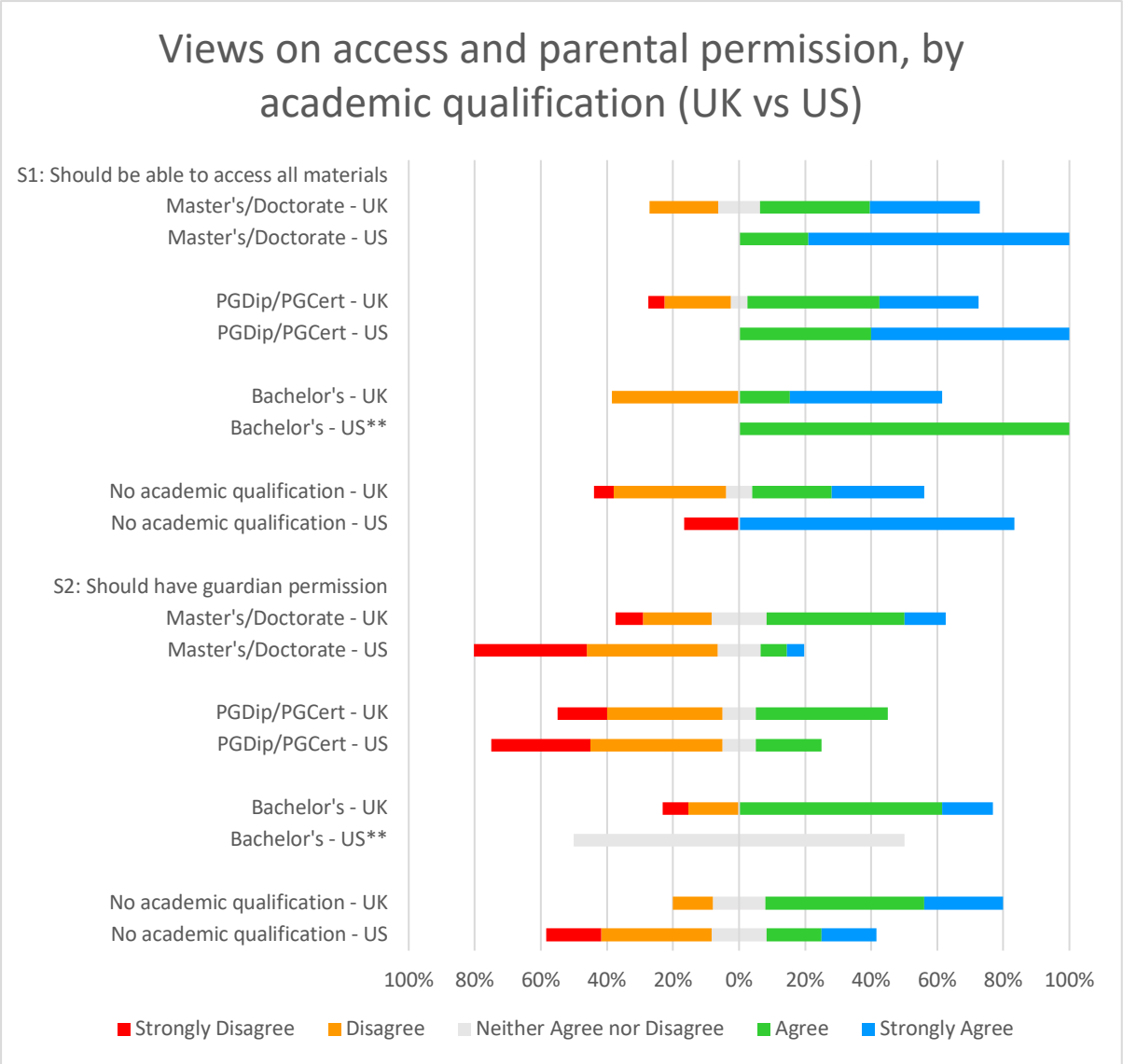

Figure 17. Views on access and parental permission requirements, compared by respondents' highest academic qualification in Library and Information Sciences (UK vs US). **Only one US respondent held a Bachelor's degree as a highest qualification.

4.6.3 Conclusion

With the variables of academic qualification, school type, religion, and school age range accounted for, it appears that while these factors may slightly influence censorship practices, they do not account for the differences between UK and US respondents' behaviours in a significant way.

4.7 Policies and professional guidance

4.7.1 School library materials policies

School library policies managing access and collection management can serve to protect staff processes, student freedom, and the library's stock (ALA 2017). However, as detailed in Table 14, only 22.4% of UK respondents had a school policy governing library materials versus 80.0% of US respondents. 14.0% of UK respondents had one in development, with 63.5% of respondents either not having one or unaware if they did or did not.

Table 14. Percentage of survey participants who had school library policies, by country.

	Country	
Is there an official school policy governing materials in your school library?	**UK**	**US**
Yes	22.4%	80.0%
No, but one is in development	14.0%	3.6%
No	59.8%	12.7%
I don't know/no answer	3.7%	3.6%

This was also replicated in interviews, where one respondent (Librarian 1) had a library policy in place and was in the process of rewriting it to clarify positions on access and censorship issues. No other interviewees had a library policy. Librarian 2 expressed a wish for an informal policy, while Librarian 5 preferred the idea of a disclaimer. Librarian 4 did not approve of the idea of 'the school almost forc[ing them] to apply a certain policy.'

4.7.2 Library staff disciplinary measures

Out of all 162 survey respondents, only one (US-based) respondent had been subject to written or unwritten disciplinary action due to content of materials held within the school library. Therefore, it can be assumed that while complaints are common and removal of materials is uncommon, actual disciplinary measures due to library content are rare.

4.7.3 Professional guidance

There was a marked contrast between UK and US survey participants in regard to awareness of guidance provided by their respective professional organisations (POs), as demonstrated in Figure 18. Respondents were asked to consider their PO (e.g. the ALA, CILIP, state library organisation, or the SLA) when answering questions about the PO's actions and viewpoints.

Figure 18. Survey participants' views on their professional organisations and censorship, by country (does not include 'don't know's, therefore totals do not add up to 100%).

US respondents felt generally well-informed of their PO's positions and offering of support regarding censorship and complaints; 81.8% of US respondents agreed that their PO offered support regarding complaints, and the same percentage agreed that their PO offered clear messaging about its position(s) on censorship. 76.4% were aware of their PO's content policy design resources, and 76.4% agreed that their PO took the correct stance on censorship in school libraries.

In comparison, UK respondents professed little knowledge of their PO's stances or resources, with their agreement with each statement ranging from 35-45%. The number of respondents in the UK answering 'don't know' was consistently higher than in the US, as demonstrated in

.

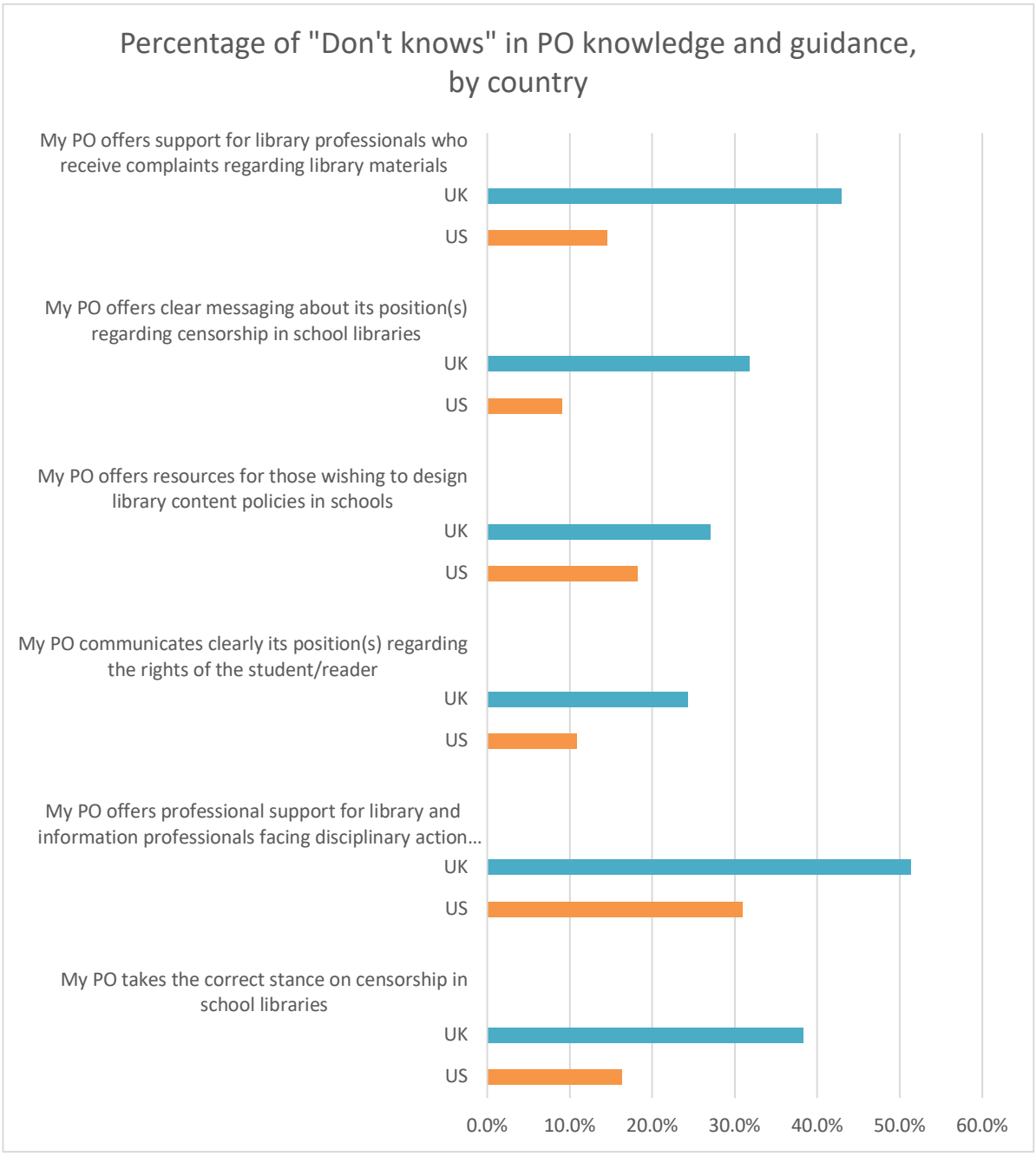

Figure 19. Percentage of respondents answering 'don't know' to questions about their professional organisation(s), by country.

This is reflected in responses given by interviewees—none of the librarians interviewed felt informed of any positions or policies on censorship held by CILIP or the SLA. This appears to highlight a need for better communication of professional standards and POs' positions to those working in UK school libraries.

4.7.4 Open questions—support and desired improvements

Finally, survey participants were asked two optional open questions:

1. Do you feel you could be better supported in your role with regard to censorship in school libraries? If so, how?
2. Does your library operate the way you would like in regards to censorship (e.g. handling complaints, collection management)? If not, how could this be improved?

Fifty-one UK participants and twenty-one US participants responded to Question 1, and fifty-seven UK participants and twenty-three US participants responded to Question 2.

In replying to Question 1 (how they could be better supported in their role regarding censorship), nine of the twenty-one US respondents (42.9%) stated that they already felt well-supported and that no further support was needed, while three (14.3%) expressed a need for their policy to either be updated or to benefit from more visibility. Four (19.0%) either wanted more support from school administrators or training for administrators on the library policy already in place. Three (14.3%) wished for more support from outside parties, either through training opportunities or informal support from other library personnel.

Of the fifty-one UK respondents to Question 1, thirteen (25.5%) felt that they needed no more support—three of these respondents stated that their school administration was already supportive. Eight (15.7%) wanted their administrators to either be more supportive or to receive training on the issue. Seven (13.7%) expressed a need for a library policy (either new or updated), while nine (17.6%) wanted more guidance from POs. Five (9.8%) were content with the censorship practices they had in place, stating that limiting materials was necessary due to the nature of the school where they worked and the vulnerability of pupils, or that censorship was 'not a huge issue' and that access limitations they had in place 'worked well.'

In answering Question 2, US respondents were highly likely to report positively—eighteen (78.3%) of the twenty-three respondents said yes, they were happy with how their libraries were run with regard to censorship and with the policies they had in place, although three (13.0%) respondents were concerned about administrators or complainants not properly following procedures. One respondent noted that the library policy had prevented the removal of books from stock, as was happening prior to the policy being implemented. Two (8.7%) had not received complaints so were unable to test their policies.

Thirty-two (56.1%) of fifty-seven UK respondents were satisfied with how their library was managed regarding censorship, with four of these respondents noting that they had never experienced complaints, and four others limiting collection access in some way. Five (8.8%) noted that they were content that their professional judgement was trusted in the role and eleven (19.3%) mentioned that their library practiced some form of censorship; either in requiring parental permission (with one beginning this policy after a complaint), limits on self-checkout, prejudicial labelling, or 'censor[ing] appropriately.' Seven (12.3%) expressed a desire to develop a policy or already had. One respondent exercised a parental opt-out system, which was rarely used and allowed students to have more choice over what they did (or did not) read.

5. Conclusion

As evident from this data, UK and US librarians are generally in alignment about the philosophy of censorship. Concurrent with standards held by the ALA and CILIP, both groups support freedom of information and believe that one of their duties is to fight censorship, and the majority claim that students should be able to access the materials they desire. Both countries express reservations about unfiltered internet access in school libraries (despite ALA and CILIP opposition), and

experience similar reservations about types of objectionable content, with sexual content being the most complained about topic. Actual removal of books from collections in both countries is rare. However, echoing the findings of McNicol (2016), the philosophy of UK librarians and their subsequent actions do not align. In comparison to US respondents, there is widespread support amongst UK library personnel for censorship practices such as limiting access to materials through parental permission requirements, prejudicial labelling, or using individually tailored guidance to limit students' ability to access or borrow materials. While offering guidance is not considered a form of censorship—indeed, it is a recommended method by the ALA to help inform reading choices (ALA 2007)—the form this guidance can take can be more restrictive than necessary. As noted by interviewees, these forms of censorship were not necessarily recognised as forms of censorship, but instead as fulfilling an academic duty and a duty of care for young and potentially vulnerable pupils. This has left a natural inequality of access among pupils in the UK, with access to materials in one UK school library likely to be different than that in others.

Despite these restrictions, the majority of respondents in the UK had still received complaints regarding materials at a lower but not substantially lower rate than the US cohort. While other UK participants had not received complaints, some interviewees and survey participants expressed concern that they were not certain what they would do if they did, and their feelings towards this topic were largely based on perceived support by the school's administration, with some expressing a desire to have a policy in place to 'cover their backs' in future.

In line with previous research, sexual content was the most objected-to type of content in both countries. Other types of content met similar objections in the UK and US except for characters modelling inappropriate behaviour and drug/alcohol usage, which was objected to far more often in the US than in the UK. In both countries, library personnel tended to greatly overestimate the likelihood of receiving a complaint due to a specific type of content, especially LGBTQ+ content.

There is an inequality of coverage by CILIP and the ALA regarding freedom of information and censorship. While a vast majority of US respondents were aware of and supportive of their professional organisations' stances on censorship, 38.3% of UK respondents expressed unawareness of what those stances were, with 43.0% unaware if CILIP/the SLA provided support when facing book challenges (and 31.8% agreeing that their professional organisation did provide support, despite the SLA referring members to the ALA).

US respondents were also more likely to express contentment with the support they received and with how their libraries were run with regard to censorship, with UK respondents less likely to express contentment. UK respondents were also more likely to be satisfied but actively censor their collections.

6. Recommendations

As a result of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- After rewriting its Freedom of Information and Censorship policies, CILIP should widely publicise these policies to school librarians, including to those who are not CILIP members, in order to increase awareness of these policies and what constitutes censorship.
- The SLA should publicise its resources for policy writing more widely and strongly encourage secondary school librarians to implement policies at their schools.
- Further guidance should be published on the lending of graphic novels and manga (as well as the implications of the still-extant Children and Young Persons [Harmful Publications] Act 1955).

- Discussions should take place by school library personnel, the ALA/AASL, and CILIP in order to further form school library internet censorship policy and approaches.
- Larger studies should take place on the extent of censorship and its forms in UK school libraries, particularly in Wales and Northern Ireland as well as in religious and independent schools.
- Further professionally-led discussions should take place on how UK school librarians can balance the pastoral, academic, and personal needs of their pupils without limiting their essential freedoms.

7. References

AASL, n.d.. *Common Beliefs*. [online]. Chicago, IL: American Association of School Librarians. Available from: https://standards.aasl.org/beliefs/ [Accessed 20 April 2020].

ALA, 2006a. *Core values of librarianship.* [online]. Chicago, IL: American Association of School Librarians. Available from: https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/corevalues [Accessed 11 September 2021].

ALA, 2006b. *Filters and filtering*. [online]. American Library Association. Available from: http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/filtering [Accessed 1 May, 2020].

ALA, 2007. *Intellectual freedom and censorship Q&A.* [online]. Chicago, IL: American Association of School Librarians. Available from: http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/censorship/faq [Accessed 23 February 2021].

ALA, 2008. *First Amendment and censorship*. [online]. Chicago, IL: American Library Association. Available from: http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/censorship [Accessed 22 March 2020].

ALA, 2015. *Labeling Systems: an Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights*. [online]. Chicago, IL: American Library Association. Available from: https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretation/labeling-systems [Accessed 19 August 2021].

ALA, 2016a. *Banned book FAQ.* [online]. Chicago, IL: American Library Association. Available from: http://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/banned-books-qa [Accessed April 26, 2020].

ALA, 2016b. *The Censor: motives and tactics*. [online]. Chicago, IL: American Library Association. Available from: http://www.ala.org/tools/challengedmaterials/preparation/censor-motives-and-tactics [Accessed 22 February 2020].

ALA, 2016c. *Library privacy guidelines for students in K-12 schools.* [online]. Chicago, IL: American Library Association. Available from: http://www.ala.org/advocacy/privacy/guidelines/students [Accessed 16 April 2020].

ALA, 2017. *Why do I need a policy?* [online]. Chicago: IL, American Library Association. Available from: https://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport/selectionpolicytoolkit/why [Accessed 22 August 2021].

ALA, 2019. *Access to library resources and services for minors: an interpretation of the* Library Bill of Rights. [online]. Chicago, IL: American Library Association. Available from: https://www.ala.org/aboutala/sites/ala.org.aboutala/files/content/B.2.1.4%20Access%20to%20Library%20Resources%20and%20Services%20for%20Minors.pdf [Accessed 19 August 2021].

ALA, 2021a. *Intellectual Freedom: issues and resources.* [online]. Chicago, IL: American Library Association. Available from: https://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom [Accessed 31 August 2021].

ALA, 2021b. *Missouri Library Association receives the 2021 Gerald Hodges Intellectual Freedom Chapter Relations Award.* [online]. Chicago, IL: American Library Association. Available from: https://www.ala.org/news/member-news/2021/04/missouri-library-association-receives-2021-gerald-hodges-intellectual-freedom [Accessed 16 August 2021].

ALA, 2021c. *Top 10 most challenged books lists*. [online]. Chicago, IL: American Library Association. Available from: http://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/frequentlychallengedbooks/top10 [Accessed 21 August 2021].

AMAZON UK, 2021. *Amazon best sellers in teen and young adult books.* Seattle, WA: Amazon. Available from: https://www.amazon.co.uk/Best-Sellers-Books-Teen-Young-Adult/zgbs/books/52/ref=zg_bs_pg_1?_encoding=UTF8&pg=1 [Accessed 31 August 2021].

AMAZON US, 2021. *Amazon best sellers in teen and young adult books.* Seattle, WA: Amazon. Available from: https://www.amazon.com/Best-Sellers-Books-Teen-Young-Adult/zgbs/books/28/ref=zg_bs_pg_1?_encoding=UTF8&pg=1 [Accessed 31 August 2021].

ASHEIM, L., 1953. Not censorship but selection. *Wilson Library Bulletin*, 28, pp. 63-67.

BANNED BOOKS WEEK, 2021. *Banned Books Week*. [online]. Chicago, IL: Banned Books Week Coalition/ALA. Available from: https://bannedbooksweek.org/ [Accessed 21 August 2021].

BBC, 2015. *New Zealand: award-winning* Into the River *novel banned*. [online]. London: BBC. Available from: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-news-from-elsewhere-34173842 [Accessed 31 August 2021].

BMG RESEARCH, 2019. *National survey to scope school library provision in England, Northern Ireland, and Wales*. [online]. Birmingham: BMG Research. Available from: https://d824397c-0ce2-4fc6-b5c4-8d2e4de5b242.filesusr.com/ugd/8d6dfb_8b81a7c94c2c4c4a970265496f42307a.pdf [Accessed 26 February 2021].

Children and Young Persons (Harmful Publications) Act 1955 (3 and 4 Eli. 2 c. 28).

CILIP, n.d. *Freedom of access to information.* [online]. London: CILIP. Available from: https://www.cilip.org.uk/page/FreedomOfAccessToInformation [Accessed 23 February 2021].

CLASSIFICATION IN NEW ZEALAND: INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS, n.d.. *Book case study* - Into the River. [online]. Wellington: Office of Film and Literature Classification. Available from: https://www.censor.org.nz/resources/case-studies/index-books/into-the-river/ [Accessed 19 August 2021].

CLASSIFICATON OFFICE, n.d.. *New Zealand's classification labels.* [online]. Wellington: Classification Office. Available from: https://www.classificationoffice.govt.nz/find-ratings/new-zealands-classification-labels/ [Accessed 18 August 2021].

COMMON SENSE MEDIA, n.d.a. *The Hunger Games, Book 1*. [online]. San Francisco, CA: Common Sense Media. Available from: https://www.commonsensemedia.org/book-reviews/the-hunger-games-book-1 [Accessed 23 August 2021].

COMMON SENSE MEDIA, n.d.b. *Our Mission*. [online]. San Francisco: Common Sense Media. Available from: https://www.commonsensemedia.org/about-us/our-mission [Accessed 19 August 2021].

COMMON SENSE MEDIA, n.d.c. *Six of Crows, Book 1*. [online]. San Francisco, CA: Common Sense Media. Available from: https://www.commonsensemedia.org/book-reviews/six-of-crows-book-1 [Accessed 11 September 2021].

COUNCIL OF EUROPE, 2001. *Public access and freedom of expression in networked information: guidelines for a European cultural policy*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

CPS, 2018. *Obscene Publications - for consultation*. [online]. London: The Crown Prosecution Service. Available from: https://www.cps.gov.uk/publication/obscene-publications-consultation [Accessed 21 August 2021].

CRESWELL, J., W., 2003. *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

DAWKINS, A.M., 2018. The decision by school librarians to self-censor: The Impact of Perceived Administrative Discomfort. *Teacher Librarian,* 45(3), pp. 8-12.

DE CHOUDENS BAEZ, N., 2015. This book Is not yet rated: age ratings in the literary market vs. minors' First Amendment right to receive information. *Cardozo Arts & Entertainment Law Journal*, 33(2), pp. 473–494.

DOYLE, T., 2002. A Millian critique of library censorship. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 23(3), pp. 241-243.

FAIR ADMISSIONS CAMPAIGN, 2021. *Number of schools by type*. [online]. Available from: https://fairadmissions.org.uk/why-is-this-an-issue/number-of-schools-by-type/ [Accessed 23 August 2021].

FARZAN, A. N., 2019. Catholic school removed Harry Potter books from its library, warning that readers 'risk conjuring evil spirits'. *The Washington Post*. [online]. In press. Available from: https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/09/03/harry-potter-books-catholic-school-ban-conjuring-evil-spirits/ [Accessed 13 August 2021].

FLOOD, A., 2012. A School District Was Sued Over a Children's Book About Lesbian Moms. *Business Insider*. [online]. In press. Available from: https://www.businessinsider.com/school-removed-book-about-lesbian-moms-2012-11?r=US&IR=T [Accessed 13 August 2021].

FLOOD, A., 2015. Are Americans falling in love with censorship? *The Guardian*. [online]. In press. Available from: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/aug/07/are-americans-falling-in-love-with-censorship [Accessed 16 September 2021].

FOERSTEL, H., 2002. *Banned in the U.S.A.: A reference guide to book censorship in schools and public libraries*. Rev ed. Westport, CT: Greenwood.

GIDEON, L., 2012. The Art of Question Phrasing. In: L. GIDEON, ed. *Handbook of Survey Methodology for the Social Sciences*. New York: Springer. pp. 91-107.

GREAT SCHOOL LIBRARIES, 2019. *Great School Libraries survey findings and update on Phase 1.* Great School Libraries Campaign. sine loco: Great School Libraries Campaign.

Hansard. 1974. H.C. Vol. 882, cc. 588-9W. (5 December).

Hansard. 1982. H.C. Vol. 34, cc. 549-50W. (22 December).

Hansard. 2008. H.L. Vol. 34, col. WA69. (20 February).

IFLA, 2018. *FAIFE mission.* [online]. The Hague: IFLA. Available from: https://www.ifla.org/g/faife/faife-mission/ [Accessed 22 February 2021].

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS COUNCIL, 2021. *Research*. [online]. London: Independent Schools Council. Available from: https://www.isc.co.uk/research/ [Accessed 16 August 2021].

INDEX OF CENSORSHIP, 2020. *Free speech & the law: Obscene Publications.* [online]. London: Index on Censorship. Available from: https://www.indexoncensorship.org/2020/01/free-speech-and-the-law-obscene-publications/ [Accessed 21 August 2021].

LAMBERT, L., 2021. *Help! My kid wants to read* Fifty Shades of Grey: *what to do If your child is interested in books with adult themes*. [online]. New York: Brightly. Available from: https://www.readbrightly.com/help-my-kid-wants-to-read-fifty-shades-of-grey-what-to-do-if-your-child-is-interested-in-books-with-adult-themes/ [Accessed 19 August 2021].

LANCE, K. C. and KACHEL, D.E., 2021. *Perspectives on School Librarian Employment in the United States, 2009-10 to 2018-19*. [online]. s.l.: SLIDE. Available from: https://libslide.org/pubs/Perspectives.pdf [Accessed 12 August 2021].

MAGNUSON, M., 2011. Perceptions of self and the "other": an analysis of challenges to "And Tango Makes Three". *School Library Media Research,* 14.

MATTHEWS, B. and ROSS, L., 2010. *Research Methods*. Harlow: Longman.

MCNEELEY, S., 2012. Sensitive issues in surveys: reducing refusals while increasing reliability and quality of responses to sensitive survey items. In: L. GIDEON, ed. *Handbook of Survey Methodology for the Social Sciences*. New York: Springer. pp. 377-396.

MCNICOL, S., 2016. School librarians' intellectual freedom attitudes and practices. *New Library World,* 117(5), pp. 329-342.

MEFFAN, J., 2017. Literary Criticism and Censorship Laws in New Zealand. *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, 35(1), pp. 92-114.

NEW ZEALAND: OFFICE OF FILM AND LITERATURE CLASSIFICATION, 2015. *Notice of decision under Section 38(1)*. [online]. Wellington: Classification Office. Available from: https://www.censor.org.nz/assets/PDFs/Into-the-River-OFLC-reconsideration-decision-2015.pdf [Accessed 19 August 2021].

NZ REGISTER OF CLASSIFICATION DECISIONS, 2012. *Fifty Shades of Grey*. [online]. Wellington: Office of Film and Literature Classification. Available from: https://register.classificationoffice.govt.nz/Pages/Screens/DDA/PublicationDecisionInformationPage.aspx [Accessed 19 August 2021].

OFFICE FOR NATIONAL STATISTICS, 2020. *Exploring religion in England and Wales: February 2020.* [online]. Newport: Office for National Statistics. Available from: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/articles/exploringreligioninenglandandwales/february2020#size-of-the-religious-populations [Accessed 18 August 2021].

OFSTED, 2018. *Yesodey Hatorah Senior Girls School.* [online]. Manchester: Ofsted. Available from: https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50004479 [Accessed 8 July 2021].

OFSTED, 2021. *Institute of Islamic Education*. [online]. Manchester: Ofsted. Available from: https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50166642 [Accessed 8 July 2021].

O'SULLIVAN, M., and O'SULLIVAN, C., 2007. Selection or censorship: libraries and the intelligent design debate. *Library Review*, 56(3), pp. 200-207.

PARKER, N., 2016. *Freedom to think, freedom to read.* [online]. 28 September 2016. Available from: https://archive.cilip.org.uk/blog/freedom-think-freedom-read [Accessed 30 April 2020].

PETERS, 2021a. *13 Reasons Why*. [online]. Birmingham: Peters. Available from: https://peters.co.uk/book-page/9780141387772 [Accessed 19 August 2021].

PETERS, 2021b. *Six of Crows*. [online]. Birmingham: Peters. Available from: https://peters.co.uk/book-page/9781780622286 [Accessed 10 September 2021].

PRRI, 2020. *The American Values Atlas—Religious Affiliation—National*. [online]. Washington, DC: PRRI. Available from: http://ava.prri.org/#religious/2020/States/religion/m/national [Accessed 18 August 2021].

SARGEANT, R., 2018. *Priority Paperwork: Policy Making and Development Planning for Primary and Secondary School Libraries*. Swindon: SLA.

SAYLOR M. M. and GANEA, P.A., 2018. Introduction: how children propel development. In: M. SAYLOR and P. GANEA, eds. *Active learning from infancy to childhood*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer. pp. 3-11.

SLA, 2018. *Skills and expertise required in school libraries: a guide*. [online]. Swindon: SLA. Available from: https://www.sla.org.uk/filedownload/d53f3e0b5adc70aceb4eb38c6fc72a602e10702b/5bba3a6b3f43dd075f5a87b8b6d01df11a8764f3/ [Accessed 18 August 2021].

SLA, 2021. *Stock selection policy*. [online]. Swindon: SLA. Available from: https://www.sla.org.uk/search/stock%20selection%20policy [Accessed 11 August 2021].

SLJ RESEARCH, 2016. *Controversial books survey.* New York: School Library Journal. Available from: https://s3.amazonaws.com/WebVault/SLJ/SLJ_ControversialBooksSurveyReport_2016.pdf [Accessed 19 August 2021].

STURGES, P., 2006. *Why intellectual freedom matters*. [online]. The Hague: IFLA. Available from: https://www.ifla.org/files/assets/faife/publications/sturges/intellectual-freedom-matters.pdf [Accessed 6 May 2021].

SUPERSUMMARY, 2019. *Read-stricted: a deep dive into banned books in America.* [online]. s.l.: SuperSummary. Available from: https://www.supersummary.com/banned-books/ [Accessed 19 August 2021].

TAYLOR, K. and MCMENEMY, D., 2013. Censorship challenges to books in Scottish public libraries. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 45(2), pp. 153–167.

TERAVAINEN, A. and CLARK, C., 2017. *School libraries: a literature review of current provision and evidence of impact*. London: National Literacy Trust.

The Human Rights Act 1998. Article 10.

THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, 2020. *Citizen's guide to U.S. federal law on obscenity.* [online]. Washington, D.C.: The United States Department of Justice. Available from: https://www.justice.gov/criminal-ceos/citizens-guide-us-federal-law-obscenity [Accessed 21 August 2021].

UCAS, 2021. *Librarian.* [online]. Cheltenham: UCAS. Available from: https://www.ucas.com/ucas/after-gcses/find-career-ideas/explore-jobs/job-profile/librarian [Accessed 18 August 2021].

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY, 1948. *Universal declaration of Human Rights.* [online]. Available from: https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights [Accessed 31 August 2021].

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS, 1989. *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. [online]. Available at: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx [Accessed 5 April 2021].

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS, 2014. *Status of ratification interactive dashboard*. [online]. Available at: https://indicators.ohchr.org/ [Accessed 21 August 2021].

U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, n.d. *Statistical Groupings of States and Counties*. [online]. Washington, D.C.: The United States Census Bureau. Available from: https://www2.census.gov/geo/pdfs/reference/GARM/Ch6GARM.pdf [Accessed 14 September 2021].

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, 2020. *Table 701.15. Number and percentage of public schools with libraries/media centers and average number of staff per library/media center, by staff type and employment status and school level, enrollment size, and locale: 2015-16.* [online]. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Available from: https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_701.15.asp [Accessed 20 September 2021].

WEBB, S. L., 2009. *Book banning*. [online]. Munfreesboro, TN: Middle Tennessee State University. Available from: https://mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/986/book-banning .[Accessed 21 August 2021].

WILKINSON, K. et al., 2020. Reading during adolescence: why adolescents choose (or do not choose) books. *Journal of adolescent & adult literacy*, 64(2), pp. 157-166.

Acknowledgements

There are a number of people who helped me in the development of this research:

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr Graeme Baxter, for your advice and guidance. Your support has been invaluable. I would also like to thank Lynne Cooper and all of my colleagues for your support and encouragement.

Thank you to those who participated in the survey and interviews and formed the basis of this research. Lastly, huge thanks go to my family and friends, especially Patrick.