

“They Kind of Rely on the Library”: School Librarians Serving LGBT Students

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Abstract

This research examines school librarians’ perspectives on collecting LGBT materials. Based on qualitative interviews with thirty-one school librarians, this project found generally strong support for collecting LGBT materials. School librarians discussed serving their communities, having resources for all students, and meeting the needs of diverse students. In addition, they shared several ways that school libraries can counter bullying: creating a bully-free zone in the library, collecting LGBT and anti-bullying materials, collaborating with guidance counselors and teachers, suggesting particular books for certain students, being a supporter of students, and positioning the school library as a safe space.

Introduction

LGBT students are in nearly every high school in the United States.ⁱ Some researchers report that approximately 3 to 10 ten percent of the student population,ⁱⁱ or 5 to 6 percent of teens in grades 7–12,ⁱⁱⁱ self-identify as LGBT. Mehra and Braquet estimated that there are 2.5 million LGBT teenagers in the United States.^{iv} Given these numbers, it is clear that virtually all school libraries in the United States serve at least some LGBT students. Furthermore, even if a school has no LGBT-identified students, it is highly likely that the heterosexual students know of LGBT friends, family members, and other individuals. Martin and Murdock estimate about 80 percent of teens know someone who is LGBT.^v

Previous literature has examined the occurrence of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT)^{vi} resources in school libraries.^{vii} Most of this literature has performed a count of resources, such as a list check.^{viii}

The current study is a follow-up to Oltmann, which analyzed the holdings of high school libraries in two different states, one in the South and one in the Northeast.^{ix} This follow-up study

provides an in-depth investigation of the perspectives of school librarians, the individuals who are responsible for collecting (or not collecting) LGBT resources in school libraries. There have been anecdotal reports and autobiographical reflections,^x but to date there has been no systematic investigation into the perceptions of school librarians. Thus, this paper fills an important gap in the research.

In addition, library and information science (LIS) research on LGBT resources has only touched lightly, if at all, on bullying of LGBT teens. However, this may be a fruitful area, drawing connections between efforts to reduce bullying in schools and the collection of LGBT resources.

Research Questions

This research sought to address the following research questions:

1. What are school librarians' views on collecting LGBT resources?
2. For those who do collect LGBT resources, what are their reasons for doing so?
3. What roles can school librarians play to counter bullying of LGBT students?

Literature Review

As described above, LGBT teens face a number of obstacles, including bullying, which has been connected to various problems later in life. There are a number of programs or interventions designed to aid bullied students, though to date the role of the school library has rarely been considered.

Bullying and Associated Problems

Within the past few decades, there has been “a particular emphasis on issues of bullying” in high schools.^{xi} Fedewa and Ahn noted that research shows “the rates of bullying for GLB[T] students are reportedly significantly higher.”^{xii} Their own research indicated that GLB youths were 2.24 times more likely to be teased or bullied than their straight peers.

In 2007 the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) conducted a National School Climate Survey to capture the environment of LGBT teens in high schools. In that survey, 86 percent of LGBT teens reported being verbally harassed at school because of their sexual orientation, and 67 percent reported experiencing verbal harassment because of their gender expression.^{xiii} Over half (61 percent) reported feeling unsafe at school.^{xiv} Gardes noted that LGBT students hear antigay slurs as often as twenty-six times per day, with faculty intervention rarely occurring.^{xv}

Four years later, in a follow-up survey by GLSEN, 80 percent of LGBT students reported receiving verbal harassment due to sexual orientation. Thirty-eight percent reported being physical harassed due to sexual orientation, and 27 percent due to gender expression. As Perez, Schanding, and Dao noted, these rates of harassment are lower than the reported rates in previous years, though they are still higher than the rates of non-LGBT harassment.^{xvi} A significant percentage of “adolescent students experience what is referred to as gender-based, homophobic, and anti-LGBT bias/bullying.”^{xvii}

The frequent harassment and bullying experienced by LGBT students is correlated with “high levels of health risk behavior.”^{xxviii} Fedewa and Ahn noted that homophobic bullying was “significantly related to their psychological, physical, and social problems.”^{xxix} Research has found that LGBT students are more likely to participate in risky behaviors such as using drugs and alcohol, not practicing safe sex, becoming homeless, and having suicidal thoughts and behaviors.^{xx} Hughes-Hassell, Overberg, and Harris explained that “the isolation and despair LGBTQ youth experience places them at a high risk for a variety of other problems including homelessness, substance abuse, and suicide.”^{xxxi} Kosciw, Palmer, Kull, and Greytak found that diminished academic achievement was correlated with bullying and harassment of LGBT students.^{xxii} Summarizing the current literature, Savage and Schanding noted that LGBT teens have higher rates of feeling isolated, using alcohol and other substances, having difficulty focusing on schoolwork, feeling ostracized by their families, engaging in sexually risky behavior, and experiencing mental health and suicidality issues.^{xxiii}

Frameworks to Support LGBT Students

Because of the findings that LGBT students face frequent harassment and that this harassment has measurable negative effects in their lives, several frameworks have emerged that attempt to support LGBT students. Three of the most common are anti-bullying policies, gay-straight alliances (often referred to as GSA groups or clubs), and development and designation of “safe spaces” at schools and other locations.

Several researchers mention the presence of anti-bullying or harassment policies as an important step toward protecting LGBT youth and reducing the incidence of harassment they experience.^{xxiv} In particular, the explicit “inclusion of gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation as protective classes” can have beneficial outcomes.^{xxv} This sort of school-based support can improve the overall environment for LGBT students.^{xxvi} Greytak, Kosciw, and Boesen cautioned, however, that many school policies focus on reporting procedures and processes, which may limit their effectiveness in actually reducing bullying.^{xxvii}

The second type of supportive framework mentioned in the literature is the existence of a GSA group. The general purpose of GSAs is “to provide safe environments for LGBTQ and heterosexual youth to socialize, receive support, and engage in advocacy efforts.”^{xxviii} These are typically student-run organizations, similar to other high school groups. They may meet regularly, host events, and provide opportunities for LGBT students and straight allies to support one another.^{xxix} The number of GSAs nationwide has increased substantially over the past decade (reaching approximately four thousand as of 2012), indicating both a need for such an organization and the increasing acceptability of them.^{xxx} GSAs can play four different roles in a school: offering counseling and support, providing a safe space (see below), acting as a vehicle for raising awareness and increasing visibility, and being part of a broader schoolwide effort for increasing visibility and awareness of LGBT issues.^{xxxi} The presence of a GSA can improve students’ perception of safety and acceptance at the school.^{xxxii} Kosciw et al. found that the existence of a GSA was positively correlated to “a decreased incidence of anti-LGBT victimization.”^{xxxiii}

The third type of framework for supporting LGBT students is the development and designation of “safe spaces” or “safe zones.”^{xxxiv} The concept of a safe space is often vague and imprecise,^{xxxv} but it generally means a program that provides some training to faculty and staff, who then publicly show support for LGBT students with stickers or signs. For example, a faculty member might hang a pink triangle or a rainbow sticker on her door, which signifies that her classroom is a safe space for LGBT students; as a safe place, the classroom should have fewer incidents of slurs, bullying, and harassment.^{xxxvi}

Safe place programs “help raise awareness about LGBTQ issues, increase support of LGBTQ students, it helps LGBTQ students feel more safe [*sic*], valued, and it instills in them a sense of belonging.”^{xxxvii} As Ratts et al. noted, the presence of a safe space program provides visible evidence of LGBT allies in the school.^{xxxviii}

Role of School Librarians

In addition to the three supportive frameworks discussed above, the literature also frequently mentions curricular support. This involves classroom or library materials that discuss LGBT history, politics, events, and individuals in a positive way.^{xxxix}

There are several reasons for inclusion of LGBT-positive information and materials in schools. Kosciw et al. reported that an inclusive, LGBT-positive curriculum was correlated with less victimization, having an increased benefit “in schools with poor climates or for students who are more severely victimized.”^{xl} Similarly, Szalacha found that students felt safer in schools that had LGBT issues incorporated in the curriculum.^{xli} In addition, students reported being more resilient when they had access to information about sexual orientation and gender identity.^{xlii}

As Patterson explained, “Less is known about the influence of curricular material than about legislative and policy responses to the problems of LGBT students in schools, but the available evidence suggests that curricular changes may contribute to safer schools.”^{xliii} Given the paucity of research into informational resources, perhaps it is not surprising that school libraries are rarely mentioned as a possible avenue for attaining and sharing such resources. Cianciotto and Cahill’s call for school libraries to “include age-appropriate books about LGBT people, history and culture” is unusual; every other article that mentioned curricular and informational resources for LGBT students failed to mention school libraries.^{xliv}

Yet school libraries could be a vital, important asset in the efforts to make schools safer and more accepting of LGBT students—a point frequently asserted in the library science literature, though overlooked in most of the LGBT research. Downey noted that “librarians are in the powerful and important position of being able to help reduce these risks [faced by LGBT students] by providing access to quality GLBT-themed young adult (YA) materials.”^{xlv} Whelan and Garry argued that libraries can be “safe havens” for LGBT students searching for information.^{xlvi} Vaillancourt and Rauch both suggested that LGBT students can benefit from access to information as well as a sense of community that the library can foster.^{xlvii} Students benefit in two ways: LGBT students have access to information that can support them and enrich their lives, and straight students have access to information to better understand LGBT history,

culture, and individuals.^{xlviii} Phillips noted that librarians could offer pastoral care to support teens who are victimized by bullying.^{xlix}

Some authors suggest that libraries, including school libraries, explicitly reach out to LGBT students, “publicly inviting and welcoming a group that is often excluded and marginalized” by conducting outreach, hosting programming, and celebrating LGBT-related events (such as acknowledging the Stonewall anniversary).¹ Even if a school does not have LGBT-related information in the curriculum, the library can collect such information; one of the school library’s missions is to “enable students to access ideas unavailable in the school curriculum.”^{li}

Censorship in School Libraries

As Boon and Howard note, however, “a young adult’s access to fiction with LGBT content differs considerably depending upon his or her location.”^{lii} Oltmann and Hughes-Hassell, Overberg, and Harris similarly found variance in the number of LGBT titles held by high school libraries.^{liii} The 2007 GLSEN study found that most students said they did not have access to LGBT materials in their school libraries.^{liv} “A lack of LGBTQ-themed literature in school libraries can send a message to LGBTQ teens that the school library is not the place for them, and that their lives and their concerns are not valued there.”^{lv}

Garry investigated the tension between selection and censorship when school librarians purchase (or do not purchase) LGBT-related resources. She reported that “administrative and community support” was particularly important, with “those who felt supported [seeming] more comfortable with potentially controversial materials than did those who felt stifled.”^{lvi}

Some scholars focus on self-censorship, or “making collection management decisions on the basis of avoiding conflict . . . self-censorship decisions are often made on the basis of religious, sexual, political, or health factors.”^{lvii} Whelan argued that self-censorship by school librarians is “rampant and lethal.” She reported on a survey which found that 70 percent of school librarians said they would not buy certain materials if they thought parents would object to its presence in the school library.^{lviii}

The current study brings together these various threads in the literature. School librarians could be a part of the framework meant to support LGBT students who experience bullying at school; conversely, school librarians could be practicing censorship (or self-censorship) by not supplying relevant resources. However, this question is overlooked in the relevant research.

The current study draws upon strands in the literature, particularly Oltmann and Garry.^{lix} Similar to Garry, this project is based on qualitative interviews with school librarians, asking them about their reasons for collecting (or not collecting) LGBT materials.^{lx} Similar to Oltmann, this study focuses on two states, one in the South and one in the Northeast. (See Oltmann for a detailed depiction of the two states.^{lxi}) These two states were chosen because they are very different on a number of demographic variables (such as political leaning, rural/urban, and, at the time of the study, variance in whether same-sex marriage was legal).

Methods

The data for this project was collected via qualitative telephone interviews. As Lilleker explained, “Interviews can provide immense amounts of information that could not be gleaned from official published documents or contemporary media accounts.”^{lxii} Qualitative interviews seemed particularly apt for this research project, which sought to uncover school librarians’ perspectives on a sensitive, potentially controversial, subject.

Subjects were recruited in multiple waves. First, a general recruitment e-mail was sent out via the official Listservs for school librarians in the southern and the northeastern state. Second, school librarians from smaller schools were targeted with individualized e-mails; this was done on the premise that smaller schools were likely to have fewer LGBT books (as supported by Oltmann^{lxiii}). These steps resulted in thirty-one total interviews, with twenty-four from the southern state and seven from the northeastern state. It is not known why the number of respondents varies so much, but the responses from the two states were remarkably similar and will be analyzed together.

The goal was to recruit public high school librarians exclusively. Inclusion of LGBT materials in elementary or middle schools—or in private schools—may be more controversial than their inclusion in public high schools, due to students’ age and maturity and the mission of the schools. However, focusing on public high schools proved somewhat difficult because there were relatively few respondents and because school librarians from middle and elementary schools were eager to be interviewed. The final sample includes respondents from two private high schools, two public middle schools, one middle/high school combination, and one elementary school (see table 1). Although variance was anticipated based on the respondents’ location (northeastern or southern), type of locale (urban, suburban, or rural), and school size (large or small enrollment), no variance was found; in other words, regardless of these demographics, the respondents’ comments were substantively the same.

The interviews lasted from eight to thirty-two minutes, with an average of eighteen minutes. All but two respondents were female, but to protect the male respondents’ identity, all were given female pseudonyms. Table 1 displays the pseudonyms, the location (southern or northeastern state), the school setting of each respondent, and the length of their interviews.

Every interview was conducted via telephone and recorded with the respondents’ permission. The interviews were transcribed and then analyzed with QSR NVivo 10.0 following standard content analysis procedures for qualitative data.^{lxiv} The data was coded deductively, based on the content in the interviews themselves; it was organized into categories (similar to the headings in the “Results” section), with key quotations noted.

Initially, the interviews focused on inclusion of LGBT books in high school library collections. As the interviews continued, the topic of bullying and libraries’ roles in combating bullying emerged as important themes; questions about bullying were then added to subsequent interviews. This is elaborated below.

Table 1. Summary of interviews

	Location	Type of school	Length of interview
Alexa	Southern	HS, public	17.01
Allison	Southern	HS, public	24.50
Courtney	Southern	HS, public	11.44
Diana	Southern	MS, public	21.52
Emily	Southern	HS, public	23.11
Erin	Southern	HS, public	21.39
Gemma	Southern	HS, public	8.03
Ginny	Southern	HS, public	11.05
Holly	Southern	HS, private	14.37
Ivy	Southern	HS, public	28.24
Jody	Southern	HS, public	12.53
Kelsey	Southern	HS, public	17.49
Kerri	Southern	HS, public	24.05
Kyla	Southern	HS, public	13.01
LaToya	Southern	HS, public	15.41
Lynn	Southern	HS, public	18.16
Madeleine	Southern	HS, public	17.31
Mia	Southern	MS/HS, public	22.40
Nora	Southern	HS, public	18.38
Pamela	Southern	E, public	13.25
Patricia	Southern	HS, public	12.11
Rose	Southern	HS, public	20.51
Serena	Southern	HS, public	23.42
Terry	Southern	HS, public	16.31
Amelia	Northeastern	MS, public	16.28
Annabelle	Northeastern	HS, public	15.33
Dorothy	Northeastern	HS, public	16.48
Gwyneth	Northeastern	HS, public	24.17
Jamica	Northeastern	HS, public	32.22
Phoebe	Northeastern	HS, private	14.52
Velda	Northeastern	MS, public	26.16

Note: HS = high school, MS = middle school, E= elementary school.

Findings

The most significant finding is that all thirty-one respondents felt that collecting LGBT materials was important and valuable. For example, Erin said, “Your collection should absolutely mirror your students. . . . They’re the people who are reading books, and I think there should be some books about them, too.” Similarly, Rose explained, “I do feel strongly that there’s a high need for that. Kids need, teenagers want to see themselves in the literature.” These respondents emphasized the importance of reflecting one’s population in the materials collected.

If one considers the research indicating that LGBT-identified individuals live in every county in the United States,^{lxv} then these librarians are correct: including LGBT resources reflects their

population. Patricia further explained, “I do really think it’s important that we have literature to reflect all of our kids, our white, our black, our Hindu, our gay, I don’t care. I think it’s important that they be able to see some of themselves in a positive light.” Kelsey further elaborated on this point:

At this level [high school], you have kids who are really trying to figure out who they are and even who other people around them are, and I feel like it’s important for them to be able to read about things that either they may be feeling or questioning. And they may see themselves in the characters of a book, or other people around them; it helps them understand. I think that that’s good for them to be able to kind of internalize that in a private setting such as reading a book. . . . I think that books give them the opportunity to have kind of a private conversation with themselves about an issue.

Other respondents focused on the thoroughness of their collection. Gemma noted that LGBT books “are necessary if you want a well-rounded collection, a well-rounded library.” Emily added, “I think it’s our responsibility as librarians to have books on all manner of topics.” Madeleine also focused on the librarian’s role: “Our job as a librarian is to have something for all of the students, something that is interesting for everybody where they can connect with” the literature.

Allison demonstrated that she was aware of some of the problems faced by LGBT teens; she noted that “the highest suicide rate of teenagers is for GLBT kids, and so I don’t want that to ever be on my conscience that I have not provided those kids with the same kind of materials that would make them realize that they’re not alone in the world.”

This research relies on the interviews of thirty-one respondents; there are approximately 225 high school librarians in the southern state and approximately 160 in the northeastern state. Clearly, this small sample cannot be seen as representative of the broader population. There are many perspectives missing from this sample, as seen in the general agreement on collecting LGBT resources. Librarians who were ambivalent or negative about collecting LGBT resources are not represented here. Essentially, they declined to participate in the study; there are many possible reasons for this, but the non-participation of some librarians cannot really be studied from this data.

However, there is rich, saturated representation of the positive perspective. Saturation occurs in qualitative research when “no new themes, findings, concepts, or problems were evident in the data.”^{lxvi} The nuances of the positive perspective were fully captured, as described below.

Variation in Responses

While all of the respondents thought inclusion of LGBT books was appropriate, the comfort level and enthusiasm for this position varied greatly. Twelve respondents indicated some hesitancy or reluctance when discussing collecting LGBT materials, though only seven of those twelve were from public high schools. Kerri expressed a neutral stance, saying, “I’m okay with it. I have not sought out material, but when things come in, I’m okay with it.” Mia echoed her,

saying, “I wouldn’t say I shy away from those titles, but I don’t intentionally set about making sure that I’m really stocked up. I probably am a little bit more conservative in general about my choices”; then she added: “I never shy away from a book because there might be openly gay characters in the story, but I am really cautious when that is the story.” Similarly, Gwyneth reported that sometimes “I don’t really feel comfortable with this book so I’ll send it back. . . . I do exercise some judgment—I don’t know if censorship’s the right word.”

Ivy said, “I want to say I’m all for it, but my community is a little stodgy, so you’ve got to look for what’s going to push it without pushing it so far that your community’s going to be in a complete uproar about it.” Serena explained, “I’m not purposely going out and looking for those per se, but if they’re popping up on a list, that’s not an automatic negative for me.” However, as she elaborated, she displayed some caution:

Personally I don’t have any trouble with having those types of topics in the library . . . but there are a few newer books that are coming out that are a little more, I don’t want to say *graphic* per se, but a little more in your face than others. I don’t know what the technical word for that would be. David Levithan was one recently [who] came out with *Two Boys Kissing*. The cover of that and the title of that—if it had had a different name and a different cover, I would’ve put it in the collection in a heartbeat because my kids love David Levithan. But that particular title and that particular cover—I’m in a very rural, very conservative, Christian area, and to put that on my shelf, I think would have been just pushing it a little too much.

Even though Serena’s students would have likely enjoyed the book, she did not buy it. Note that there was no actual challenge or hostility from the community; the *potential* of such problems was enough to dissuade her from purchasing the item. Here, we see some evidence of self-censorship. Several of these respondents declined to purchase items that they felt could be challenged, the very definition of self-censorship. While less than half of the respondents indicated that they self-censored, its presence in regards to LGBT literature is troubling.

In contrast, nineteen respondents expressed strong, willing opinions about including LGBT materials. Nora simply stated, “I 100 percent think we need that in the library.” Ginny similarly said that “it needs to be here. It’s not offensive or whatever; it’s a must.” She added that it ought to be done “because of the kids. When the kids come in and find a book, it’s like, ‘Wow, you really got this!’ So it’s just part of the curriculum; it’s part of who I am and [what] the library is.”

Lynn was even more emphatic: “I definitely think it’s a *must*. Every school in every county across the country needs to have that, and I’m a big believer in that.” Kyla explained, “If I didn’t have those books, that would not be serving part of my population, and not only that, but I think all students should have access to books in that genre.” Dorothy noted that the northeastern state where she worked was known for being fairly liberal, “so it’s probably easier for me to justify inclusion than it might be in some parts of the country or some communities.”

Several respondents noted that high school is a time of exploration and self-discovery. Gwyneth, for example, said: “I think these kids need to find out if this is what they want do to with their

life, if this is what speaks to them, if this is what's in their hearts." Alexa added that "kids who are struggling with that sexuality, kids who are exploring and just trying to figure out who they are" need resources to help them.

Patricia added, "[LGBT materials] should definitely be included. We've got GLBT kids. So what? Like, you're not allowed to be reflected in the literature? That's *crazy*." Again, as many respondents did, Patricia emphasized the importance of students seeing themselves reflected in the available literature. This was a strong theme in several responses. Alexa noted, "I have students who want to read that, and they're exploring their sexuality at this point and they need to be reading about real people and fiction that looks like them. Kids are exploring and just trying to figure out who they are." Rose added that "kids need to see themselves in the literature."

Some respondents compared the inclusion of LGBT materials to the inclusion of other specialty literature that focused on other minorities or other sensitive topics. Diana said, "I try to always include the best African American characters [and] books, and it's a reflection of our world and our reality." Allison, likewise, noted that she also collected "the same thing for African American kids or poor kids or . . . there's a new books about a girl [who's] mixed race." She worked to make sure the diversity of her student population was reflected in her library's collection. Finally, Jamica compared LGBT materials to resources that feature African American characters, noting that she collects both, even though the corresponding populations may be small: "I want students who are not gay and not African American to have access to materials about people [who] are not just like them."

Many of the respondents reported that they personally knew LGBT individuals, often family members, friends, current or former students, or school officials. Terry, for example, said, "As a teenager, I had a couple of friends who were gay, but they moved away because they knew there wasn't going to be any acceptance." Serena noted, "I've had a lot of kids who have graduated from here, and after they've graduated, they have come out and openly said that they're gay or lesbian or whatever." One librarian told the story of a student who came in searching for material because his brother had just come out as gay; the librarian was able to point the student to several resources that provided him with a better understanding of the situation.

Jamica said that a former student, now in college, wrote a letter explaining he was transgender and thanking her for her support: "He was saying 'thank you for making me feel that I was understood.' . . . I just felt like, I'm doing my job if that person felt supported and represented." The respondents were frequently moved as they described these situations and the LGBT individuals with whom they were close. It was clear, for several of them, that personally knowing LGBT individuals was one of the reasons their libraries contained LGBT materials. Amelia said, "I knew I had some students [who] were struggling with their identities in a very conservative town. And so I immediately realized I had a very vulnerable audience that these books could help."

Support from Administration

Respondents were asked about the levels of support they felt they received from their principals

and other administrative staff. The responses were mixed. Several people indicated that their administration was unlikely to know whether the school librarian collected LGBT materials—or anything else. Alexa said, “I don’t think they’re aware that I have as much as I do and, honestly, most administrations don’t know what’s in their library.” Mia added that it “probably has not crossed their minds,” and Dorothy went further, saying that the administration was “pretty oblivious about what’s in the library.”

Some individuals indicated that they were unlikely to receive much support from their administration for having LGBT materials in the school library. Ivy said, “I suspect they might be a little uncomfortable with it, because I think maybe in the climate that we’re in.” Several respondents noted that they had had worked for several principals over the last several years who displayed varying levels of interest in the school library. Because of this frequent turnover, the librarians did not have a sense of support from the administration. Patricia added, “Actually, [the principal] can be open-minded, but he’s much more conservative than I am.”

However, most respondents said that they believed their administration would support having such materials in the school library. Nora, for example, explained: “I would say that they probably support my choices as a library professional to have all kinds of books in the library. . . . I’ve never received any kind of pushback.” Pamela added, “We’ve never had that discussion, [but] they trust me in my selections. . . . It might warrant a discussion, but I think that they would support whatever my thoughts were.” Here, we see the school librarians relying on their expertise and professionalism and assuming that other professionals—the administrators—will similarly recognize and respect this professionalism. Lynn was a bit more guarded, explaining that her administration would be “supportive but yet cautious, always wanting to make sure that we can defend what we have here.” Serena extended this point:

I talk to my administrator on a routine basis, and he’s very supportive of what I have at the library. If there’s something I think that’s may be a question at some point, I’ll say, “Hey, heads-up, I’ve got this, it’s new, the kids are liking it, and I’m putting it on the shelf.” And he’ll say, “Okay, fine.” He trusts my judgment and my selection of what I’m doing, and that I’m doing what’s best for the kids. So I feel very supported. . . . I feel absolutely they would stand behind me on whatever I’ve got. And because what I choose, for the most part, is based on good reviews and awards and recommended lists, that’s support enough for it.

Ginny noted that her principal “never asked, never questioned anything that I put in,” while Annabelle said, “I can’t imagine them giving me a hard time.” Gwyneth said that her administration “would not be surprised to know that I have it because we do have the gay-straight alliance in the building. So I’m assuming they are [supportive of LGBT resources in the school library].” Rose said, “The administration does support my library [in many ways],” and she thought that support would extend to LGBT resources: “They’re very inclusive, and I would think that they would be shocked if I did not try to be inclusive of all of our students.”

Jody explained that the administration knew there were LGBT students at the school, and thus the administration should conclude that the library has resources for this population. She said,

“We have to service these kids. My principal is also a Christian, but never once has he come to me to say, ‘What are you doing?’ He gets it.” Holly, at a private religious school, had a more nuanced response. She did collect some LGBT resources because her collection development statement “simply says that we will provide materials that are balanced without over-sensationalizing and we will focus on accuracy.” She added:

The administration is fully aware [that I have LGBT resources]. I did give them a sampling of some of the things we had, and I was asked to remove some of the books and I was allowed to keep some. I wish I knew their criteria for making those demands, but I honestly don’t.

Role of Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) Groups

A number of respondents noted that their schools had gay-straight alliances or similar groups designed to show support for LGBT students and their allies. For example, both Gwyneth and Nora indicated that their schools’ GSA groups were very active; Nora added that she “will highlight those particular books and put them on display so that the students know we have books about everyone here” when the GSA meets. Terry noted that her school had a group similar to the GSA, which indicated to her that “our administration is pretty open” and respectful of those students. Annabelle explained that “several of the people in my book club belong to an organization in our school called the Gay-Straight Alliance and are very interested in making sure that it’s a well-rounded collection.” LaToya indicated that her school’s GSA met in the library, another way that libraries can demonstrate support for LGBT students. Jamica, Allison, Dorothy, Patricia, Emily, and Amelia also mentioned their schools’ GSA groups.

All of the respondents who discussed GSA groups volunteered the information without prompting during the interview. They saw providing LGBT resources as one way to establish support for LGBT students, similar to a school allowing a GSA. Perhaps the schools’ GSA groups prompted the librarians to be assertive about searching for and collecting LGBT resources.

Bullying and the Librarian’s Role

The majority of respondents said they saw little evidence of bullying. Sometimes this was attributed to the general school atmosphere, with a zero-tolerance policy for bullying—for example, illustrated by Erin’s comment that the administration is “very, very good about picking up on that stuff and nipping it in the bud. They take it very, very seriously.” Others reported that there may be less physical bullying in the school halls, but a lot of it has moved to the online environment, where it is less visible to teachers and staff. As Nora said, “I think they’re going more online. It’s more subversive so it’s not necessarily an outright thing in front of the teacher . . . but it definitely exists. It’s definitely still around.” Respondents noted that students are bullied about a variety of things, including weight, dress, appearance, family background (such as economic status, being in jail, drug use, etc.), race, ethnicity, being socially awkward, and also sexuality and gender identity.

Many respondents also talked about the school library's role in combating bullying. For example, several respondents indicated that they saw little evidence of bullying because they explicitly created no-bullying zones in their libraries; they did not allow teasing, name-calling, or other negative behaviors. Velda explained: "I am pretty careful, and I keep a really close eye out. . . . If I see it and hear it, I immediately speak to that student. . . . I make it very clear at the beginning of the year that I have a zero tolerance for bullying." Phoebe also made a point to intervene if she saw bullying, modeling appropriate behavior, because "I really do think that librarians can be that person who shows kids the right way to intervene and the right way to deal with things."

Other than enacting a no-bullying zone in their libraries, the respondents indicated several ways that school librarians could play a role in reducing bullying: collecting materials for the school library, collaborating with the guidance counselors and teachers, suggesting particular books for certain students, being a supporter of students, and creating a safe space.

Amelia, for example, said that "building those collections that address [bullying], that take it on and show kids different ways to maneuver situations, is so important." Ginny felt that the main support a library could offer was "just the books that you keep. I have a lot of books on bullying and [it's] in the storyline." Similarly, Madeleine was concerned about "making sure we have books and literature and that kind of thing." LaToya agreed, noting, "I have books on suicide and other topics that are not particularly comfortable but again might be necessary for a student who has a need." Erin explained that her school had done a big anti-bullying push a few years ago: "I went ahead and bulked up the collection and got every book about bullying that is recommended for high schools. And those have been helpful. I have seen a lot of kids check those out." Several respondents emphasized that they promoted anti-bullying materials. Mia noted that she promoted them, not as anti-bullying books per se, but just as good books, with the result that "the kids will read them."

In addition, several respondents indicated that they worked closely with teachers and guidance counselors to build an anti-bullying collection and incorporate it into the curriculum. Nora said, "My counseling office approached me earlier in the year; they wanted more video resources about bullying. So we were able to get some of those on DVD. . . . We found a couple that would support what they were also doing." Dorothy noted that incorporating anti-bullying resources into the curriculum "really gets the kids talking . . . something that the whole class reads [and] when you hear them talking afterward, you know they've absorbed something." Velda explained:

I work closely with our school psychologist and social work[er] and our school counselors by writing them lists of books and lists of materials and lessons because it's imperative: How are kids going to learn and function if they feel left out, different, weird, strange, that they don't belong, or that other kids can bully them? How are they going to be able to focus and do well in school?

Another way that school librarians combat bullying is through bibliotherapy, or suggesting particular books for particular students. Rose noted that "there are lots of young adult novels out there that kids can be pointed to for helping with bullying." Ivy explained:

If you are good at being able to match up books with kids, then you can say, “Hey, come over here, I’ve got a great book; I think you’ll like it.” If it’s for somebody who bullies, then you can hand them a book on bullying that has . . . redemption: “You can do this.” If it’s somebody who is bullied, then it’s like, “You’re not all by yourself; you’re not alone.” In a high school, a librarian is like a counselor.

Kyla added that school librarians can help “through providing the books that have characters in those situations where the student can read that and see how those characters deal with it in positive ways. . . . I’m a firm believer in bibliotherapy.”

Librarians sometimes discussed deeper relationships in their efforts to reduce bullying. For example, Gwyneth said that the library is a place where “kids can come and get away from things and maybe process” whatever they are going through. Madeleine noted that she tries to be “an advocate” for the students, especially those who are socially awkward and spend time in the library. Alexa explained, “I feel like my role here is a ministry because not only do I supply them with books, but I love them and I give them attention and life advice.” Diana related that “these kids, most of them have nobody to talk to, and they do experience bullying at school, so they kind of rely on the library once they discover that I’m not going to be mean.”

School Libraries as Safe Spaces

A final way that school librarians can aid bullied students, according to the respondents, was by positioning the library as a safe place. Half of the respondents used the phrase “safe place” or “safe space” (without prompting from the interviewer) when describing their library, LGBT students, and the library’s role in combating bullying. Gemma, for example, said, “We offer a place for kids to come, a safe place for kids to come and get away . . . where they’ve got somebody who can look out for them and make sure they’re in a good environment.” Lynn concurred, saying, “Anything the library can do to help promote a safer, more inclusive learning environment.” Ginny added that “the library is your safe haven. The library is a safe haven for kids [who] are different, being picked on. This is where they want to come and be safe. It’s a huge role.” Alexa said:

My library has sometimes been called “the Isle of Misfit Toys” because a lot of my kids, the kids who just hang out here at lunch and before and after school, are the kids [who] just don’t really fit in anywhere. I think [the library] is a safe place for them.

Ivy, similarly, said that students enter her library before school “because it’s a safe place; it’s a place where they don’t feel like anybody’s going to make fun of them . . . just because it is a place they can go.” Phoebe explained that her goal was to “make my space the safest place possible, always; safe physically, safe mentally, safe emotionally because there are so many places, especially in this digital world, [where] kids aren’t safe.” Terry shared, “A lot of students come to the library for safety because they feel safe [there].” Gwyneth noted that “the library is kind of a sanctuary for those who have been thinking that they are . . . that they might be gay.”

She recalled boys who felt ostracized because of their sexuality coming to the library to relax and be themselves. Courtney added, “I really want kids to feel welcome and find a home, because a lot of the kids [whom] we service aren’t necessarily mainstream, and they find a place [in the library] to hang out where they like to be.”

For some respondents, thinking of the library as a safe space had a more formal conceptualization. For example, Emily explained that she received a “safe space” sticker from the GSA group and was proud to hang it by the library door. Velda said she had a large sign in her school library, stating that it was a safe space. She elaborated, “It’s imperative that kids have a safe place where they can just be themselves and not worry that someone’s judging them.”

Discussion

These school librarians were vocal about the importance of collecting LGBT resources and about the roles that school libraries can play in countering bullying in schools. All of the respondents interviewed for this project indicated that they collected LGBT materials, though some expressed a certain degree of reluctance or hesitation. Most, though, were enthusiastic about collecting LGBT resources, noting that it is important for students to see themselves reflected in the school’s resources; just as important, non-LGBT students need opportunities to learn about LGBT issues. Finding this much concurrence in the interviews was unexpected and leads to a few tentative conclusions.

First, this research demonstrates acceptance of having LGBT resources in school libraries, although, as explained above, negative perspectives were not represented in the data. Overall, the respondents were comfortable with collecting LGBT materials and were unafraid of stating so. They indicated that, even with conservative administrations or communities, they still thought they should have these materials. Many respondents relied on their professionalism and professional ethical principles to support their decision to collect LGBT resources. The similarity in responses, across thirty-one respondents from two very different states, is striking. This may be in part because librarians open to collecting these materials were more likely to agree to take part in the study.

A second, and related, conclusion is that many respondents had personal reasons (in addition to the professional ones) for maintaining an LGBT collection. Several told stories of LGBT individuals they personally knew, such as family members or close friends. They knew that these individuals had gone through difficult times in school, and the school librarians wanted to ease the way for other LGBT individuals so that the pain and difficulty of harassment and bullying would not be repeated. Others told of current or recent students who had found value and comfort in the school library’s LGBT collection. Some linked the school library’s collection with the school’s GSA group, indicating that library collections were another way that the school environment could be supportive of LGBT students. Respondents discussed bibliotherapy and reaching out to marginalized students (many of whom were openly or suspected to be LGBT), demonstrating their deep caring and commitment to serving students.

Third, this research found evidence of some self-censorship in public high school libraries with regard to LGBT resources, as predicted in previous literature. Some respondents indicated hesitation about purchasing LGBT materials, while others flatly stated that they avoided items

which had the potential to spark challenges. Doing so is clearly a form of self-censorship. This is cause for concern, especially since other librarians explained how beneficial LGBT resources were for many students. It is important to note, however, that the evidence for self-censorship was limited. Most respondents did not say anything that indicated they practiced self-censorship.

Fourth, respondents noted several ways that libraries could aid schools in reducing bullying. These efforts included making the library a bully-free zone, collecting anti-bullying books, collaborating with teachers and guidance counselors, conducting bibliotherapy, connecting deeply to students, and making the school library an explicit safe zone. For many respondents, this latter role was the most important thing that the school library could do to counter bullying.

Fifth, this research illuminates the roles of school libraries in combating bullying—a fact too often overlooked by researchers of youth, LGBT youth, and bullying. As discussed in the literature review, only one source mentioned school libraries as a possible resource; the overwhelming majority of resources on bullying and LGBT victimization did not even consider school libraries as a possible ally in the charge against bullying. This is something that school librarians and library advocates need to correct, by reaching out more assertively to anti-bullying groups and researchers.

Conclusion and Future Directions

These conclusions can be evaluated and tested in other states and other school libraries. Most of the data for this project came from public high school librarians; it would be interesting to compare these results with research that focused on middle or elementary school or private schools. Although this data came from two very different states, one mostly conservative and one mostly liberal, additional variation would be useful; do these similarities, for example, hold true across the nation?

An additional area for future research is the recruitment of school librarians who are neutral or negative about collecting LGBT resources. It seems unlikely that *all* school librarians in either the southern state or the northeastern state approve of and eagerly seek to collect LGBT materials. It is likely, rather, that those librarians who disagree with collecting LGBT resources deliberately chose to not participate in this research. This may be particularly true in communities that are conservative or in schools where the administration is conservative (however, recall that some respondents indicated that they collected LGBT resources in conservative communities or under conservative administrations). It cannot be determined, from this research, why those school librarians with neutral or negative perspectives on LGBT materials did not participate; we may speculate that selecting LGBT materials carries some social and professional approval, and choosing to not have these items may have some negative stigma attached. Perhaps the school librarians who chose to not collect these items feared negative perceptions of their actions. Others, however—those who participated in the interviews—focused on the positive aspects of providing LGBT materials.

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^v Cited in Rauch, “GLBTQ Collections.”

^{vi} This paper uses the abbreviation LGBT to represent lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals. Some of the relevant literature adds a “Q” for queer and questioning. Some of the relevant literature changes the order of these letters. When citing literature, I will follow the author’s format.

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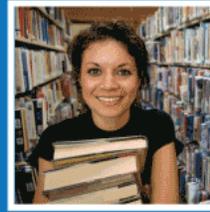
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Sex in the Stacks: Teenager Sex Education Information Seeking Behavior and Barriers to the Use of Library Resources

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Abstract

Due to the proliferation of sex education information sources in the twenty-first century, teenagers are faced with a wealth of available sources on the topic. However, hegemonic narratives from classroom education alienate certain youth, while negative misinformation from unreliable sources has the power to encourage harmful behaviors. At even greater risk are youth coping with trauma, particularly survivors of sexual assault and queer teens, or those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who have limited Internet access. This qualitative pilot study identifies the explicit and implicit choices that teenagers make to seek and select specific information sources for sex education, and it examines the factors that prevent teenagers from seeking such information from library resources. Data was collected in the form of semi-structured, face-to-face interviews comprised of open-ended questions with four participants. The results suggest that teenagers use a variety of sources to gather sex education information, including curricular instruction and the Internet, as well as interpersonal, media, and print sources. A wide range of factors attracted participants to use specific sources, such as ease, privacy, comfort, perceived experience, familiarity, openness, and assured provenance. None of the participants visited the library for sex education, and lack of awareness of collections as well as confidentiality concerns represented the main barriers to use of libraries.

Keywords: Sexuality Information, Adolescents, Credibility, Sense-Making

Introduction

The twenty-first century has seen a proliferation of information sources, and the corresponding increase in access to such sources has had large impacts on the manner in which teens seek and evaluate sex education information. Classroom sex education curriculum is in need of updating in many North American states and provinces, where outdated, hegemonic narratives alienate certain youth. In other jurisdictions, initiatives to modernize and diversify classroom sex education curriculum, such as the 2015 Ontario sex education reforms, have been met with strong opposition from parent groups who view such reforms as not aligned with religious family values.¹ Due to the general nature of classroom instruction, teenagers are turning to a variety of information sources to individualize their sex education based on their unique desires and needs. Developing comprehension of how teenagers seek sex education information should assist information providers in providing relevant resources. A greater understanding

is needed of how teenagers choose, implicitly or explicitly, specific sources for sex education, while taking into consideration such factors as prejudice, awareness, and access that might prevent teenagers from seeking such information from library resources.

The goal of this pilot study is to help school and public libraries to develop collections and provide services that are intrinsically relevant and of interest to teenagers. A focus on users' information needs and information seeking behavior will disclose teenagers' perspectives as they search for information on sexual health through a variety of sources. By unveiling the perceptions of teenage users, library professionals can commence work to engage this group with their collections or services that provide greater privacy, diversity, and authority than information sought from formal curricular sources or informal sources alone.

Research Questions

Research questions were posed to uncover participants' sex education information seeking behavior, including the types of information, types of sources, and their reasoning behind selecting each information source. The second major line of questioning sought to uncover whether teenagers use the library for sex education and their rationale for using, or not using, it for that purpose. This study addressed the following questions:

- How do teenagers seek sex education information sources? How do they select their chosen sources?
- Do teenagers use the library as a sex education information source? Why or why not?

Literature Review

Importance of Sex Education

Sex education has historically encompassed such subjects as pubertal development, reproduction, menstruation, contraception, and sexually transmitted infections, but a recent expansion of this listing includes subjects like sexual orientation, sexual assault, and interpersonal relationships.ⁱⁱ While sex education is seen as a vital component in the maturation of teens into adulthood, the risks of misinformation or information poverty in sex education are particularly high for the individual and society.ⁱⁱⁱ Chelton describes the vulnerability of people at this age as the consequence of reaching sexual maturity prior to mentally developing the cognitive capacity to fully comprehend the consequences of one's actions.^{iv} At even greater risk are youth coping with trauma, particularly survivors of sexual assault and queer teens, or those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who have limited Internet access.^v Moreover, sex education for young males is often overlooked in comparison to that of females. This is due to two factors: First, there exists a perceived lack of sexual behavior consequence for males, since the threat of pregnancy predominantly affects females; and second, there is a comparative lack of a "signpost" for sexual maturity in males, whereas young women have a clear indication once they have begun menstruating.^{vi}

The Internet as a Sex Education Information Source

Multiple studies have examined adolescent use of the Internet as a tool to find and retrieve sex education information.^{vii} As a resource platform, teenagers have praised the Internet for its ease of use, confidentiality, safety, convenience, anonymity, accessibility, and affordability.^{viii} Queer youth interviewed by Hillier, Kurdas, and Horsley reported that they considered Internet communities as supportive environments that permitted them to make inquiries they felt uncomfortable asking in real life.^{ix} On the other hand, questions of the quality and provenance of such resources is of concern to

health-care workers, and filters imposed by authority figures may limit access to educational resources.^x Pornographic websites, to which 70 percent of youth aged fifteen to seventeen have reported even unintentional exposure, are not created for educational purposes and have been noted to inspire feelings of inadequacy or negative behavioral expectations in youth.^{xi}

Formalized Sex Education in Schools

School sex education classes provide what Kerslake and Rolinson refer to as an “official” source of sexual health information.^{xii} The effectiveness of these programs is vulnerable to political influence, parental consent requirements, and propagation of dominant, heteronormative narratives that lack potential to individualize the educational experience.^{xiii} While governments and conventional wisdom suggest that parents should be the official source of sex education information, parents and students do not have a similar opinion, and the difficulty of approaching this sensitive topic leaves parents unlikely to fulfill their child’s information needs.^{xiv} Forrest, Strange, and Oakley studied thirteen- to fourteen-year-olds in England to ascertain what students wanted from sex education programs.^{xv} Although demand was highest for information on sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy—issues that typically receive coverage in sex education classes—responses also showed high interest in “how not to have sex when you don’t want to,” “sexual feelings, emotions and relationships” and “what people do when they have sex.”^{xxvi} The researchers noted in their discussion that school sex education programs’ focus on limited issues shapes societal discourses, possibly biasing the results of their questionnaire in favor of what the respondents might perceive to be the norm.^{xvii}

Adolescent Information Seeking

Case describes information seeking as “a conscious effort to acquire information in response to a need or gap in . . . knowledge.”^{xxviii} The engagement of information seeking behavior is further explained in Dervin’s sense-making theory of communication.^{xix} In this theory, she considers information seeking behavior as an activity that is undertaken to construct sense, and she views information as a subjective element that is used to guide behavior based on personal and interpersonal observations of reality.^{xx} The theory relies on a contextual dependence of sense making that is informed by the user’s situation, and thus precludes predictive assumptions and connections between information and its use.^{xxi} Dervin’s sense-making theory has been applied to a number of studies on adolescent information seeking behavior and provides the theoretical framework within which this study is positioned.^{xxii}

This pilot study focuses on life-concern information needs. These types of information needs—which encompass drug, health, and career concerns—are germane to adolescent social environments and do not merit in-depth focus in schools; consequently, most information seeking occurs outside the classroom.^{xxiii} Life-concern information needs feature prominently in Todd and Edwards’ study on adolescent drug information seeking, in which the participants viewed their environment to be devoid of desirable information sources, despite inhabiting a world that was in fact rich in potential information sources.^{xxiv} Information encountering, which involves unexpectedly discovering information that the user finds useful or intriguing, has numerous applications to life-concern information needs due to the user’s inherent, self-derived interest in the information need.^{xxv}

In the context of adolescent life-concern information needs, “social norms and the social landscape help to define and shape information seeking,” and information is sought from people with similar circumstances and thus “known to be experiencing comparable needs.”^{xxvi} Moreover, research has suggested that young users attempt to simplify the search process to find sufficient information through minimal effort, seldom question the accuracy or quality of information, and overestimate, or fail to consider, the level of expertise of an interpersonal source.^{xxvii}

The Library as a Source for Sex Education

The consideration of the library as a neutral, community-oriented public space has led to a reexamination of its role in teenage sex education.^{xxviii} School libraries, however, have been perceived by adolescent girls as extensions of authority that only carry socially sanctioned or curricular materials.^{xxix} Creating a supportive environment, selecting a diversity of materials, identifying community resources, and providing displays and programs have been identified as some areas in which librarians can improve their role in adolescent sexual health.^{xxx} Cohen's study focused on "how public libraries serve adolescents in the area of sexuality education" and involved interviewing eleven librarians and library directors from three small public library districts in the western United States.^{xxxi} She found that many librarians "view the role for the public library as a peripheral source for sexual-health information for young adults," and none of the libraries, at the time of the study, provided programs or marketing of collection items relating to sex education.^{xxxii} Cohen's study exposed librarians' prejudices against engaging in programming or materials promotion of and for sexual education, as well as institutional and political barriers to providing those services to the community.^{xxxiii} Adding to this is the generalized discomfort that teenagers have reported with using the library due to the perceived unhelpfulness of librarians; in this regard, Julien describes the need for librarians to focus on providing compassionate help that is rooted in the trust of having the adolescent patron's best interests at heart.^{xxxiv}

While Cohen's research considered library barriers for teenage sex education purposes, she reported opinions of library staff and did not focus on impediments from a teenager perspective.^{xxxv} Additionally, research on adolescent information seeking behaviors has predominantly focused on one source—the Internet—or, conversely, comprehensive studies are too dated to consider the Internet as an option among other information sources. This study researches contemporary barriers to the use of library sex education information sources within the greater context of source-inclusive information seeking behavior. By taking a user-centered approach, these interviews provided insight on barriers to sex education from the teenagers' perspective, which can potentially improve the educational sources offered by teachers, libraries, and other sex education service providers.

Methods

Upon receipt of ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office, teenagers aged thirteen to eighteen years old were recruited for participation. This age group was chosen for its emergent sex education information needs as a result of puberty, formal sex education instruction in schools, and statistical age of first sexual experience.^{xxxvi} Participants were also required to be proficient in English to avoid the logistical and financial complications related to translation services. Recruitment efforts included posting on local university campuses, Listserv e-mails to sexual minority and other youth groups, and word of mouth, while convenience sampling augmented the final recruitment of the study participants.

As all participants in the study were younger than eighteen years old, guardian consent was obtained for each. Although some pre-interview contact was organized through e-mail or telephone conversation with parents, the researcher also offered his phone number to participants for texting. This method of communication was more successful at retaining contact with some participants who may have felt greater vulnerability in a telephone conversation, particularly with an adult stranger. Comfort, relaxation, and trust were of particularly high concern for interviews due to the sensitive subject matter, and thus the location of the interview was made adaptable for the participants. In each case, the interviews took place at local coffee shops that were convenient for the participants. In addition to the initial provision of letters of consent, assent, and information, the researcher held conversations with participants to discuss the concept of informed consent, the voluntary nature of participation, and the right to withdraw up to one week following participation.

Data were collected via semi-structured interviews comprised of open-ended questions. This method was chosen for its balance of flexibility and structure, and to permit for deeper conversation and data retrieval. While a series of questions was addressed, at a minimum, the study did not necessitate strict adherence to a script and permitted for follow-up probes that ultimately improved insights to the research questions. Trust between researcher and participant was of paramount importance to the retrieval of complete and honest responses, and a pre-interview activity was conducted to ease nerves and improve rapport. This process included a request that the teenager discuss one of her or his interests with the researcher; the ensuing conversations were very effective at improving the researcher-participant relationship and increasing comfort with the situation. Furthermore, the interviews were structured to first ask less potentially embarrassing or uncomfortable questions in order to settle nerves associated with the process. Interviews lasted between twenty and thirty minutes and were digitally recorded for later transcription, coding, and data analysis. A short demographic questionnaire was distributed after the conclusion of the interview to provide context to the data. Of the four interview participants, three were male and one was female, and their ages ranged from fourteen to seventeen years old. Three participants were heterosexual and cisgender (their self-identified gender corresponds with the sex they were assigned at birth), and one participant identified himself as a bisexual, trans male. Participants were asked to select a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality of identity, and these are the names that will be used in this paper.

Findings

Teenagers Use a Variety of Sources to Find Sex Education Information

The participants discussed certain information sources with greater affinity than others, but each of them sought sex education information from multiple sources. Health classes in junior high school (ages twelve to fourteen) were mentioned by each of the participants as a base-level information source from which they and most, but not all, of their peers had derived sex education information. Albertan high school-level (ages fifteen to seventeen) courses, including Career and Life Management (CALM) and Psychology, were also noted for inclusion of sex education instruction, with the latter including specialized instruction on sexual minorities and gender variants as a specific aspect of sex education. Conscious, personally initiated information seeking was often done on the Internet, and sources mentioned include *Wikipedia*, health or sex education organization websites, fan fiction, advertisements, queer community websites, and papers from academic scholars. While some of these sources were described as not credible, there remained a conscious admission that information was nonetheless extracted from the exposure. Most Internet sources were not identified specifically, with the exception of *Wikipedia*, Google, and a local reproductive health center. Google was frequently noted as the search engine from which information search processes were initiated. Interpersonal sources were also frequently mentioned as sex education information sources. The range of interpersonal sources was large and included peers, parents, teachers, sex education presenters, members of the queer community, siblings, and therapists. Film and television media, including news stories, were also noted as information sources, while books received peripheral mention for their discussion of relationship information or role in incidental information encountering.

Information Seeking Behavior Was Discussed Abstractly

In discussing habits or type of sex education information sought, participants often gave responses that took the form of hypothetical abstractions rather than concrete examples. Participants displayed difficulty in responding to recollection-based questions. For example, when Regina was asked to recall a time she came across sex education information despite not looking for that type of information, she said, “No, [I can’t] really [recall] any time that happened.” Rephrasing to a scenario or invitation to respond in more general terms typically would help to elicit a response, but at a low level of specificity. In Regina’s case, she responded to the rephrased question with, “Um, maybe watching the news and . . . when we watch the

news, [there are] sometimes sexual assaults that happen. And so I see . . . what's happened there.” As with her case, other participants had difficulty providing examples for serendipitous exposure to sex education information, and they rarely recalled incidental exposure as impactful or memorable to their information environment.

Internet as the Most Frequently Used Source

The Internet was named by three of the four participants as the information source where they most frequently obtain sex education information, with the fourth participant mentioning teachers as the most frequent information source. Despite its ubiquity as an information source, John reacted negatively to the Internet by stating:

I would say the Internet [is where I get most information about sex] but, like, I mean . . . not willingly. So like, the Internet . . . There [are] always [ads] like . . . “10 ways to get your girlfriend into bed.” It's all these, like, pop-up ads. I don't want that information, but that's where I get the most information from.

This incidental exposure to information on the Internet, piqued by curiosity, contributes to the frequency of its use as an information source. Other participants, however, would actively engage in information seeking on the Internet as a source to learn from and research sex education. This confirms previous research findings that teens praise the Internet as a sex education information source for a variety of reasons, including ease, confidentiality, and convenience.^{xxxvii}

Wide Range of Factors That Attract Teenagers to Sex Education Information

The teenagers in this study attributed the appeal of sex education information sources to a variety of factors. Quite often the Internet was a preferred source due to the ease with which information seeking was facilitated, and participants also mentioned personal devices through which this searching might be fulfilled in a private manner. Similarly, comfort was described as a factor that improved information seeking conditions. Although comfort was attained in the privacy of Internet searching, it was also described as an essential element to the information retrieved from interpersonal interactions. John describes conditions in Health class that would improve information seeking:

I know that some people don't feel comfortable talking about sex . . . and that's totally fine . . . but I feel like Health class should make a person feel comfortable and . . . open and . . . like [the] classroom is safe enough to talk about their personal opinion and personal experiences.

The comfort that John describes in classroom discussion enhances the opportunity for what Stuart referred to as “parameter [readjustment] to get . . . more accurate information,” or further information seeking that is engaged as a result of a conducive atmosphere. On the contrary, discomfort described by participants or their peers led to strained, off-topic Health classes. While Health classes were viewed as a major information source, they were also criticized for a redundant curriculum that may not have maintained age-appropriate material reflective of the students' maturation in their progression through junior high school.

Intrinsically aligned with the feeling of comfort in interpersonal information seeking was the facilitation of an open atmosphere. Interpersonal information sources who were able to convey an open atmosphere of honesty and participation were viewed favorably by interview participants. This quality was attributed to presenters from the queer community, as mentioned by Ryan: “It was easier to talk to people at Queer Prom about sex than it would be to talk about sex with other people that I know mainly because there's a tendency in that LGBTQ community, that they're a lot more open with sex.” Presentation of an open, frank perspective also fostered an appearance of credibility, assessed by Stuart as positive here: “If they

don't dance around the topic and if they just answer the question . . . that makes me feel they understand the material more.”

Personal experience with the subject matter was mentioned as another important factor in assessing positive information sources for sex education. The participants considered people to be experienced based on factors such as age, disposition, position, and hearsay, and they evaluated experienced sources as credible and “trustworthy.” These interpersonal credibility assessments were also described as easier when the source was someone whom the participant knew well, and thus was able to make more sophisticated, contextualized evaluations of the information based on their knowledge about that person. John described the complex manner with which he assessed these interactions: “I can take their viewpoint and see what they're trying to say, kind of analyze it, and think, ‘OK, well, if they're trying to say this, that means this, and I believe in that so I guess maybe it is true.’” Regina also added, “I think . . . if you know them better, then you can trust them more because you've had a connection with them for a longer time and you've shared more things with them.” Interpersonal sources were also viewed favorably and as more trustworthy if they exhibited similar values to the participants.

Some of these source-credibility assessments were accredited to skills learned in school, such as searching for grammar and vocabulary accuracy as well as language that implied a bias of opinion. Health organizations and academics were also considered to be authoritative sex education information sources based on credentials or specialized knowledge. Participants expressed skepticism with the provenance of information on the Internet, as well as an awareness of the ephemeral, editable nature of some sites, including *Wikipedia*. Two of the participants engaged in reliability checks of information across sources as a way to verify credibility of newly presented material. Regina recounted this scenario: “I think of everything else that I've . . . learned, and so if I see something that . . . goes against everything I've already learned, then I'm thinking maybe that's not completely right.” Sometimes these reliability assessments involved a more internal process, while other times they inspired seeking out additional sources in order to assess the consistency of the new information.

Libraries Were Not Used as a Sex Education Information Source

None of the four participants used the library as a sex education information source. While some of the participants used their school library for academic resources and education-related assignments, most had not even considered using the library to find sex education information. One participant described himself as an active patron of public libraries, and another bemoaned the obsolescence of libraries in today's technologically driven world.

Privacy and Awareness as the Largest Barriers to Library Use

Privacy and confidentiality were cited as major concerns to using the library for sex education information. One participant, Ryan, commented on the perceived lack of confidentiality at library computers as a barrier to use:

Usually [they keep Internet histories.] I mean, with the way a lot of computers that are open to the public are used . . . there will be someplace where they can actually track everything, even if you delete it . . . they would be able to track back who logged on and when, and what they searched up.

Two respondents referred to the awkwardness of browsing or selecting a physical resource related to sex with peers in proximity, and comments also described wanting to avoid the sensitive interaction of having a library staff member signing out a resource relating to sex education. John discussed the potential for automated, self-checkout stations to ameliorate this embarrassment. Stuart mentioned these self-checkouts

as a reason why privacy did not concern him in considering the public library as a sex education information source.

Being unaware of sex education items within the library's collection was also noted as a barrier to use. The school library, in particular, was viewed by John as a literature repository as opposed to a space for nonfiction or "information" books, whereas others noted the inclusion of nonfiction books at their school library but were not aware of books related to sex education. In order to improve awareness, a participant suggested that a more thorough introduction to the school library and its diverse materials be completed. Moreover, one participant discussed the addition of sex education materials to the library as a potential solution to normalize the use of the collection, and thus to alleviate potential embarrassment.

The difficulty of using the library to seek sex education information, as compared to the relative ease of using alternative methods such as the Internet or people in close proximity, was described as another barrier to library use. Stuart described a preference for the Internet over physical materials from the public library's collection: "I just find it a lot easier to look it up online. . . . I don't have to go anywhere or do anything. It takes five minutes as opposed to an hour to go to the library, take out a book, bring it home and read it, and take it back." In addition to its inconvenience, the library was perceived to have a focus on one type of information source. Ryan mentioned his aversion to using books as a sex education information source and attributed a "funny" writing style as another hindrance to library use.

Discussion

As described in Dervin's sense-making theory, the teenagers in this study expressed a contextualized construction of knowledge from the sex education information they viewed.^{xxxviii} When exposed to sex education information in educational settings or through the media, for example, the participants described evaluating the reliability of information in two ways: by taking external action to verify with other resources, and by making internal comparisons with previously constructed knowledge. The relevance of the information to their searches was only valuable if it aligned with their sense-making processes and context-dependent situation; as such, the sex education information attained was highly subjective and held no objective value. This extended to the perceived bias of the information source, since information that confirmed established personal values was preferred because it could be more easily related to the participant's situation.

Credibility assessments that took place appeared to vary between information sources. While fairly extensive reliability evaluations were described for Internet or media sources, class presentations and interpersonal conversations were not evaluated in the same way. Rather, interpersonal sources derived their credibility from the participant's endowment of cognitive authority. Wilson describes a cognitive authority as a person whose hearsay is considered to be credible, reliable, and valid for an individual's purposes.^{xxxix} Cognitive authorities were often considered by participants to have experience in the field as a result of their age, perceived honesty, or professional position; it is possible that this valuation of experience over other factors was due to the participants' perceived and communicated sexual inexperience. Once granted this status of cognitive authority, minimal effort was expended to question the accuracy or quality of the information source, which confirms Shenton and Dixon's findings on teenagers' evaluation of interpersonal sources.^{xl} While the participants' interpersonal sources were still subjected to credibility evaluations, they expressed less formal, time-consuming assessments of those sources than for Internet or media sources.

Although participants were unable to articulate specific examples of serendipitous information encounters, they were able to broadly discuss encountering sex education information that had in turn stimulated further information seeking behavior. These interests ranged from the desire for novel information, stemming from diversive curiosity, to the desire for deeper understanding, a result of epistemic curiosity.^{xli} The presence of either of these curiosities presents a rich opportunity for libraries to

raise awareness and provoke serendipitous discoveries of sex education information sources. The participants' unanimous lack of awareness of sex education items in library collections implies that, as Cohen found in her study, librarians are not engaging in promotion of collections or programming relating to sex education.^{xliii} While the librarians interviewed by Cohen may have viewed sex education as peripheral to their work, the participants of this study affirmed the importance of the topic to their lives.^{xliiii} By crafting displays to showcase collection materials, providing community resources, and experimenting with programming, library staff can commence work on Levine's best practices for sex education in libraries.^{xliiv} One participant's suggestion that libraries devote a part of the library website to information on sex education resources, along with call numbers, would ameliorate unease with asking library staff to locate books on the topic and might also be extended to the promotion of digital sex education resources. Moreover, interests expressed by participants in sex education that do not directly pertain to their behavior should encourage library staff to take greater risks in diversifying their collection of sex education resources; while these will aid those in circumstances outside of hegemonic discourse, it is likely to reach other curious individuals as well. Overall, a more open and candid approach to sex education service provision would help to establish the library as a credible information source for this topic.

This forthright approach to promoting materials should be balanced with the consideration that privacy and confidentiality were also described as barriers to library use. The addition of self-checks within school libraries was suggested as a measure to improve confidentiality, but this solution is too high a cost for most schools. Library orientations for new students can be used as opportunities to discuss the availability of sex education materials along with an explanation of how confidentiality and respect guide the staff's professional ethos. Privacy should be improved by placing sex education collections in a quieter, more hidden area of the library, and efforts should be made to remove filters and purge Internet history records. If Internet browsing is a truly confidential experience for library patrons, this should be explicitly identified to teens in order to remove doubt and cultivate information seeking that is unfettered by fear of reprisal.

Conclusion

As a pilot study, this project has limitations that could be improved upon by further work in this subject area. Time limitations necessitated recruitment through convenient means, and a lengthier study would permit for an increased number of participants with greater heterogeneity, particularly in terms of socioeconomic and racial diversity. Additional benefits of a lengthier project include increased testing of the interview instrument to reduce social desirability bias, and multiple meetings with participants to further improve interviewer-participant rapport and trust.

The findings of this study have implications for the approach to provision of sex education information by educators, health professionals, and library staff. Consideration of the diversity of sources used for sex education information, in addition to the factors used to appraise those sources, should indicate potential service improvements to help teenagers find credible sources that respond to their unique circumstances. For libraries in particular, attention should be paid to reducing barriers by raising awareness about collections and taking measures to improve privacy for teenage patrons.

Notes

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ⁱⁱ Rebecca J. Cohen, “Sex Education and the American Public Library: A Study of Collection Development, Reference Services, and Programming for Young Adults,” *Young Adult Library Services* 6, no. 3 (Spring 2008): 40–45, http://yalsa.ala.org/yals/yalsarchive/volume6/6n3_spring2008.pdf; Debra W. Haffner, “Towards a New Paradigm on Adolescent Sexual Health,” *Siecus Report* 21, no. 2 (1992): 26–30, http://www.siecus.org/_data/global/images/SIECUS%20Report%202/21-2.pdf; Evelyn Kerslake and Janet Rolinson, “In the Name of Innocence: Adolescents and Information about Sex,” *New Review of Children’s Literature and Librarianship* 2, no. 1 (1996): 57–73, <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rcell20/2/1>; Amy Levine, “Providing Information on Sexuality: Librarians Can Help Youth Become Sexually Healthy Adults,” *Journal of Youth Services in Libraries* 15 no. 2 (2002): 45–48.

ⁱⁱⁱ Kerslake and Rolinson, “In the Name of Innocence.”

^{iv} Mary K. Chelton, “The Public Library as a Sex Education Resource for Adolescents,” *Collection Building* 3, no. 1 (1981): 31–42, <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/toc/cb/3/1>.

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^{vii} Kenneth Carswell et al., “Integrating Psychological Theory into the Design of an Online Intervention for Sexual Health: The Sexunzipped Website,” *JMIR Research Protocols* 1, no. 2 (2012): e16, doi:10.2196/resprot.2114; Juliette D. G. Goldman and Lisa E. McCutchen, “Teenagers’ Web Questions Compared with a Sexuality Curriculum: An Exploration,” *Educational Research* 54, no. 4 (2012): 357–73, doi:10.1080/00131881.2012.734722; Gray and Klein, “Adolescents and the Internet”; Lynne Hillier, Chyloe Kurdas, and Philomena Horsley, ‘It’s Just Easier’: *The Internet as a Safety-Net for Same Sex*

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- ^{ix} Hillier, Kurdas, and Horsley, ‘*It’s Just Easier.*’
- ^x Gray and Klein, “Adolescents and the Internet.”
- ^{xi} Balme and Gunn, “Sex Information for Boys”; Kanuga et al., “Adolescent Sexuality and the Internet.”
- ^{xii} Kerslake and Rolinson, “In the Name of Innocence,” 60.
- ^{xiii} Goldman and McCutchen, “Teenagers’ Web Questions”; Kerslake and Rolinson, “In the Name of Innocence”; Levine, “Providing Information on Sexuality.”
- ^{xiv} Kerslake and Rolinson, “In the Name of Innocence”; Virginia A. Walter, “The Information Needs of Children,” *Advances in Librarianship* 18 (1994): 111–29, <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/book/10.1108/S0065-2830%281994%2918>.
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- ^{xvi} *Ibid.*, 341.
- ^{xvii} *Ibid.*
- ^{xviii} Donald Case, *Looking for Information: A Survey of Research on Information Seeking, Needs, and Behavior* (Boston: Elsevier/Academic Press, 2007), 5.
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- ^{xx} *Ibid.*
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- ^{xxii} Rosalie J. Amos et al., “Developing a Strategy for Understanding Adolescent Nutrition Concerns,” *Adolescence* 24, no. 90 (1989): 119–24; Heidi Julien, “Adolescent Career Decision Making and the Potential Role of the Public Library,” *Public Libraries* 37, no. 6 (1998): 376–81; Luka Lucić, “Use of Evaluative Devices by Youth for Sense-Making of Culturally Diverse Interpersonal Interactions,” *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 37, no. 4 (2013): 434–49, doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2013.04.003.
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^{xxv} Sandra Erdelez, "Information Encountering: A Conceptual Framework for Accidental Information Discovery," in *Information Seeking in Context: Proceedings of International Conference on Research in Information Needs, Seeking and Use in Different Contexts*, ed. Pertti Vakkari, Reijo Savolainen, and Brenda Dervin (London: Taylor Graham, 1997), 412–21.

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^{xxviii} Cohen, "Sex Education and the American Public Library"; Levine, "Providing Information on Sexuality."

^{xxix} Barbara Poston-Anderson and Susan Edwards, "The Role of Information in Helping Adolescent Girls with Their Life Concerns," *School Library Media Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (1993): 1–6.

^{xxx} Levine, "Providing Information on Sexuality."

^{xxxi} Cohen, "Sex Education and the American Public Library," 41.

^{xxxii} Ibid., 44.

^{xxxiii} Ibid.

^{xxxiv} Julien, "Adolescent Career Decision Making."

^{xxxv} Cohen, "Sex Education and the American Public Library."

^{xxxvi} Michelle Rotermann, "Sexual Behavior and Condom Use of 15- to 24-Year-Olds in 2003 and 2009/2010," *Health Reports* 23, no. 1 (2012): 1–5, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-003-x/2012001/article/11632-eng.htm>.

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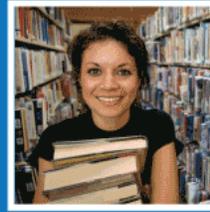
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^{xlii} Cohen, “Sex Education and the American Public Library.”

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^{xliv} Levine, “Providing Information on Sexuality.”



The Curriculum Materials Library as a Hub of Resources, Literacy Practices, and Collaboration: Expanding the Role of the Library to Support Foster Youth

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Abstract

This paper describes a three-year case study of collaboration between a university library, a research lab, and an NGO to provide college courses in digital, media, and information literacies to high school foster youth. The library staff and instructors expanded one another's literacy knowledge and explored best practices to teach the at-risk students. Data includes self-reflection based on observations and interviews of each other. Using narrative analysis, the team used four variables to showcase their collaboration: (1) vision and relationship, (2) structure, responsibilities, and communication, (3) authority and accountability, and (4) resources and rewards. Students' achievements reflected an increase in their literacy skills. This was strong evidence for the successful collaboration among the three entities. Each partner contributed by bringing digital, media, and information literacies to students, equipping them with rich skills pertinent in today's society.

Keywords: collaboration, media literacy, digital literacy, information literacy, foster youth, academic library, curriculum materials library, at-risk youth

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Introduction

For the past twenty years, libraries have been modifying the various services they provide to continue to adequately support a shifting society.¹ In order to address the expanding definitions

of literacy and new literaciesⁱⁱ along with the social role that libraries play, YALSA's task force developed nine core guiding values in 2015: accountability, collaboration, compassion, excellence, inclusion, innovation, integrity, professional duty, and social responsibility.ⁱⁱⁱ YALSA's focus on collaboration, inclusion, innovation, and social responsibility closely align with our work and the research described in this paper.

The Curriculum Materials Library (CML) at the University of Rhode Island (URI) has been designed and has evolved to meet the growing needs of its patrons. Our research describes the benefits of our collaborative partnerships, which combined library resources with expanded literacy frameworks to support high school foster youth with their college readiness. The CML, a facet of the larger university academic library, provides educational materials and resources to pre-service and in-service teachers along with the School of Education faculty. By collaborating with the University's Media Education Lab, which advances media literacy education through research and community service, and First Star, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to improving foster youths' lives, the CML became a site that offered innovative academic courses for foster youth. As a result of the collaboration and subsequent courses, the library was able to make a positive impact on the youth participants.^{iv}

Literature Review

Why Foster Youth?

According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway, there are over 400,000 children in foster care in the United States.^v These children have been removed from the custody of their parents or guardians by the juvenile court as a result of severe abuse, neglect, abandonment, or family conflict. Teenagers who are under the custody of the state in the foster care system are less likely to succeed academically than any other population in the United States.^{vi} Foster youth who were neglected or abused face social and emotional challenges that influence their ability to trust.^{vii} Furthermore, the changes in their environments from moving frequently and their subsequent changing school placements manifest negatively with a decrease in their academic performance and skills.^{viii}

Research has shown that foster youth have among the poorest educational outcomes of all student populations. Of the nearly 250,000 foster children who are of school age, only 50 percent graduate or earn a general educational development (GED) credential by age eighteen.^{ix} That is 20 percent less than the general population.^x While 84 percent of foster youth want to go to college, only 20 percent actually go, and less than 9 percent obtain a bachelor's degree.^{xi}

In 2009 Reardon and Noblet addressed the need for an academic intervention for foster youth by creating a college-readiness program to increase their academic achievement.^{xii} Through the nonprofit First Star, they founded the first academy in 2011 at the University of California, Los Angeles.^{xiii} High school foster students from the state lived on campus for a month and took accredited classes to learn about academic disciplines while experiencing college life.

In the summer of 2012, First Star created the second summer academy at the University of Rhode Island (URI).^{xiv} The Media Education Lab at URI was asked to create the curriculum and teach the media education courses. As members of the Media Education Lab, we collaborated with the CML staff in carrying out the courses. We decided to conduct research to evaluate the effects of our curriculum and pedagogy.

Academic Summer Camps as Resources for Foster Youth Needs

Current literature presents some promising collaborative models between education and community leaders, social organizations, and programs that aim to support foster youth in graduating from high school and going on to college or the workplace.^{xv} One notable model, the California Academy, is believed to be the nation's first comprehensive residential education program created specifically for foster youth.^{xvi} Another exemplary collaboration at Michigan State University entailed a summer program designed to assist transitioning foster youth pursuing a college education. Led by the School of Social Work in collaboration with other colleges and disciplines, the program provided peer support, mentoring, and active learning sessions that helped foster youth increase their understanding of college life, scholarship, and admissions procedures while also providing models for life purpose and resilience.^{xvii}

Addressing the needs of youth who aged out of foster care, other researchers have examined campus support programs designed to provide financial, academic, and other types of assistance to help foster students graduate from college. Focusing on resiliency among former foster youth can promote their healthy functioning.^{xviii} Moreover, Dworsky and Pérez called for exploration of “the ways in which the relationship between program participation and educational outcomes varies depending on the characteristics of the former foster youth and the types of services and supports students receive.”^{xix} While we found different programs that addressed the academic, social, and emotional needs of foster youth, we were not able to find examples of college or university libraries as partners in these collaborations.

The Public Library as a Resource for Foster Youth Needs

Libraries can play an essential role in furthering support for foster students because they are spaces that can provide access to books, literacy materials, and services not always available to

disadvantaged youth.^{xx} The public library is seen as a neighborhood resource center that offers a sense of community, where foster youth can benefit from social services and take part in literacy activities, college clubs, and career programs that empower them to transition to young adulthood.^{xxi} We were able to find only two studies that mentioned a public library in relation to foster youth services. The first one was a quantitative survey that Courtney, Lee, and Pérez administrated with 732 foster youth in Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin.^{xxii} They were looking to see if the foster youth received the services they needed, including one item about job searches at the library. Only 28.8 percent felt that they were given the necessary services to live independently. The second one, a qualitative study by Snow, described how an Oakland (CA) public library provided the author and a ten-year-old foster child she mentored a place to meet weekly.^{xxiii} She listed her recommendations for librarians who want to support their patrons who are in foster care. One of these recommendations was to collaborate with agencies, schools, and online resources. When we looked at school or academic libraries, we did not find any information

about the role of any on-campus libraries in assisting high school foster youth with acquiring new literacies.

This article addresses this gap in the literature and provides an original model of collaboration between the CML and the Media Education Lab at URI to teach information, digital, and media literacies to high school foster youth.

The Library as a Hub for Information, Digital, and Media Literacy

The American Library Association defines information literacy as the ability to recognize when information is needed and the ability to locate, evaluate, and use the needed information effectively.^{xxiv} The digital tools and online media provided by libraries have expanded the literacy practices of the patrons. Thus, libraries need to add digital and media literacy to information literacy because such a framework more directly acknowledges this span of resources and services their patrons' needs.

Adding on to this, digital and media literacy emphasize the connection between analyzing and producing media messages as well as the social responsibility and civic engagement of consuming and composing media. The two literacies combined advance the multiliteracies advocated by the New London Group.^{xxv} However, as stated before, not many programs provide this combination, especially for underprivileged and at-risk youth. Many nonprofit organizations offer media literacy programs to underprivileged and at-risk youth, but these programs focus on providing agency to participants and can neglect the academic side of media literacy.^{xxvi}

Many scholars combined information and media literacy, as pointed out by Martens' meta-analysis.^{xxvii} In 2010 Hobbs published a white paper reframing the different literacies into the access, analyze, create, reflect, and act (AACRA) model. She explained how in the digital age, everyone should be able to *access* information, *analyze* information, *create* messages, *reflect* on media influences, and *act* in a socially responsible way.^{xxviii} In this paper, we will address information, digital, and media literacy according to the five media literacy competencies listed above that our collaboration addressed at the CML.

Cultivating information, digital, and media literacy is a high priority in today's educational policy of the Common Core State Standards.^{xxix} At the same time, underprivileged and at-risk students such as foster youth do not receive equal experiences as students who attend influential formal schools. More and more media literacy programs advance social justice with underprivileged populations.^{xxx} The YOUMedia initiative combines practices of information, media, and digital literacy for urban adolescents in public libraries and community centers across the country by providing open, flexible, and highly creative spaces where young people can "hang out, mess around, and geek out" with the support of mentors and community partners.^{xxxi}

When it comes to academic libraries, little is known about the transcendence of library services beyond the institutions they are located within. In our work, we looked at the opportunity to combine the advantages of academic libraries with other partners to benefit high school students in the foster care system. Teenagers who are in the foster care system frequently change locations and schools, and they are often in unstable emotional and behavioral situations. It is

usually too challenging for them to keep coming on a regular basis to a program within the library.

For these reasons, Reardon and Noblet advocated to organize a month-long summer academy followed by a monthly meeting to assure sustainability.^{xxxii} When we were approached in 2012 to provide the college-level media classes, we wanted to collaborate in order to bring media literacy to the most underprivileged population in the United States. We were interested in exploring the following question: How could the available resources and our collaborative work at the Curriculum Materials Library enhance the foster students' information, digital, and media literacy skills?

Method

The purpose of this case study^{xxxiii} is to explore the collaboration between First Star, the Media Education Lab at the University of Rhode Island (URI), and the Curriculum Materials Library (CML) at URI to enhance high school foster students' information, digital, and media literacies

during a month-long summer academy spanning three years. Each partner took responsibility for different aspects of program design and delivery, and together we collaborated to enhance the students' information and media literacies. We applied Mattessich, Murray-Close, and Monsey's constructs of collaboration to define our own: (1) vision and relationship, (2) structure, responsibilities, and communication, (3) authority and accountability, and (4) resources and rewards.^{xxxiv} Students' information, digital, and media literacy competencies were defined as the ability to access, analyze, create, reflect, and act.^{xxxv} As we saw the impact on the students, we wanted to examine how our resources and collaboration were part of the successful program.

Participants

The three authors, Yonty Friesem, Kelsey Greene, and Mona A. Niedbala, collaborated for three years during the summers of 2012–2014 to provide an information and media literacy program to foster youth. Both Yonty and Kelsey worked at the Media Education Lab at the University of Rhode Island, doing research and providing community service via media literacy education and specifically media production activities. Yonty and Kelsey have experience in media production as professionals and educators. Yonty was pursuing his PhD in education at URI at the time with an emphasis on media literacy education, and Kelsey had just finished her BA in documentary studies and production. After the third year of the program, Kelsey completed her MA in educational technology and new literacies, from the State University of New York at Buffalo. Mona, the head of the CML since 2007, created the resource collection to serve the instructional and research needs of students and faculty in the School of Education. Dr. Julie Coiro from the School of Education connected the three authors during initial preparation for the first summer academy.

The first cohort of twenty-two students came to campus in the summer of 2012. All the students were under the guardianship of the Rhode Island foster care system. The students had to apply and went through a set of interviews for enrollment. The following year, a new cohort of eight students joined the continuing seventeen students. In 2014 there were twenty returning students. In total, we looked at the media literacy practices of thirty students (N = 30). The managing team

included one program director and two assistants, who were working on the program logistics and discipline. In addition, the program mentors were undergraduate students who provided support for the students' academic, behavioral, and emotional challenges. For every five students, there was one mentor. During the three years, the staff changed. In total, programmatic collaboration was between eight adults (N = 8).

Context of the Study

The program was offered each July on URI's campus for four weeks. Besides the media classes, the students had intensive classes in English and math along with field trips and physical activities. Once we established the CML as our place of instruction, the students identified the URI academic library as a comfortable, safe space for media production and academic learning.

The CML had many resources to offer the students, including interactive whiteboards, tablets, laptops, and cameras. Each year we extended the access to different CML resources, as seen in table 1. The collaboration grew as we learned to identify the needs of the students and the depth of support we could get. Mona provided guided tutorials on online resources for us as the instructors using the university server and for the students using free resources beyond class time. In the third year, the CML became the month-long classroom for English and math classes.

The collaboration evolved as we developed our programs to better meet the students' needs and better understand what resources were available to us.

Table 1. Yearly Use of the CML Resources

	Technology	Tech support	Instructional support
2012	Smartboards Internet Flip cameras Desktop computers	Mona helped address tech malfunctions.	CML staff were actors in the videos.
2013	Smartboards Internet Flip cameras Desktop computers Individual laptops	Mona addressed tech malfunctions, gave software tutorials, and pointed to online resources.	Mona gave a session on evaluating online information and using online resources.
2014	Smartboards Internet Flip cameras Desktop computers Individual laptops Canon Vixia cameras	Mona addressed tech malfunctions, gave software tutorials, and pointed to online resources.	CML used for other classes (math); Mona provided support during the media sessions.

Procedure and Data Collection

The planning for the first program started in the spring of 2012. Yonty and Kelsey worked on the lesson plans using Hobbs' digital and media literacy framework, which included information literacy.^{xxxvi} Mona provided the technology-rich environment at the CML, and also the option to incorporate information literacy with her support. As Yonty, Kelsey, and Mona planned the program, they met with the organizers to make arrangements for the particular characteristics of the first summer academy cohort.

Each interview consisted of reflective questions about the students' experience of the program. We used AudioNote on an iPad to record and write notes for the interviews and observations. Each interview took between ten and twenty-five minutes, according to the answers of the staff members.

Yonty made most of the observations, as Kelsey was the main instructor for the second and third years. Research assistants from the Media Education Lab made additional observations when available as well. Each year the final class held a group reflection that was videotaped. Additionally, at the end of each summer program, we had a public screening of the students' projects. As we reflected after each year on our work and analyzed the observation notes, interviews transcripts, and the student artifacts, we modified the variables and our data collection technique.

For ethical issues, and upon IRB approval, all adult participants, legal guardians of the youth participants, and youth participants signed consent forms on a yearly basis. All staff members agreed to participate. However, some students did not want to participate (four students asked not to be included). They were not interviewed and their artifacts were not included.

Variables of Interests

Our research explored the nature of our collaboration as it related to the students' information, digital, and media literacy skills. For the purpose of analyzing the data, we choose to use Mattessich, Murray-Close, and Monsey's definition of collaboration:

Collaboration connotes a more durable and pervasive relationship. Collaboration brings previously separated organizations into a new structure with full commitment to a common mission. Such relationships require comprehensive planning and well-defined communication channels operating on many levels. Authority is determined by the collaborative structure.^{xxxvii}

Further, they distinguish collaboration from cooperation and coordination by four variables: (1) vision and relationship, (2) structure, responsibilities, and communication, (3) authority and accountability, and (4) resources and rewards.

Data Analysis

As recommended by Merriam, we used a narrative analysis to analyze our case study.^{xxxviii} We looked at the three years of collaboration between First Star, the Media Education Lab, and the CML using a narrative analysis of our observations, interviews, and reflections. We were able to capture the process and human experience that we had in those three years. Our analysis evolved during that time frame. As we analyzed our collaboration, we looked at students' outcomes as evidence of the success of our mutual work. In our narrative analysis, we were looking to connect our collaboration with the students' learning outcomes. Previous publications^{xxxix} have explored and described the development of the information, digital, and media literacy skills of the students in each year (see table 3.). In order to analyze the nature of our collaboration, we looked at Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba's participatory method to ensure trustworthiness.^{xi}

Lincoln and Guba used the term *trustworthiness* instead of *validity* for naturalistic inquiry.^{xii} Looking at each variable for each year, we examined three different data sources (self-reflection, interviews, and observations) to make sure our data was showing a connection between the students' development of literacy skills and our collaboration. Our case study findings are context based and cannot be generalized. However, according to Creswell, data can be transferable to other settings; therefore, our findings can help other libraries see the value of this collaboration and how it can advance the media literacy skills of at-risk and underprivileged students, and especially foster students.^{xliii}

Findings

The three of us, Yonty, Kelsey, and Mona, worked together to introduce information, digital, and media literacy to our students as part of the First Star summer academy. Working in collaboration with the nonprofit organization's administration staff members were Yonty and Kelsey, as instructors and researchers from the Media Education Lab, and Mona, as the CML head. Using Mattessich, Murray-Close, and Monsey's definition of collaboration, we describe our personal process as it unfolded during the three years of the summer academy.^{xliiii} We looked at four variables: (1) vision and relationship, (2) structure, responsibilities, and communication, (3) authority and accountability, and (4) resources and rewards. As discussed below, we collaborated on different levels to support the information, digital, and media literacies of the foster youth students.

Vision and Relationship

Each partner applied its mission to the shared goals of promoting college and career readiness for foster youth students. First Star's mission is to improve the lives of America's abused and neglected children.^{xliiv} The Media Education Lab's mission is to advance media literacy education through research and community service.^{xliv} The CML's mission is to support the URI School of Education and the university curriculum by assisting education majors in the development of lesson plans, instructional materials, and activities through the provision of appropriate resources, technologies, and library services.^{xlivi}

Yonty and Kelsey were the instructors and researchers of the media classes. In their academic courses, they applied educational practices to promote the students' digital and media literacy competencies in order for them to experience college-level classes in communication. Mona provided the space, equipment, and support to teach the digital and media literacy courses to the foster students. First Star staff were in charge of students' discipline and providing emotional support. Having the courses at the university library allowed the foster youth to explore and experience college-level studies and resources.

The relationship of the three organizations—the Media Education Lab, the CML, and First Star—was established on the basis of their shared goal. The vision of the First Star URI Academy combined the three missions by providing a year-long program that aimed to provide some of Rhode Island's foster youth with improved access to college through education and exposure.^{xlvii} First Star was the initiator of the academy and the organization that partnered with the University of Rhode Island and local agencies to provide the summer academy for the foster youth. First Star and the University of Rhode Island founded the First Star URI Academy by combining donations and sponsorship from local organizations and the university's funding.

Being part of the university's Media Education Lab, Yonty and Kelsey were hired by the university to provide the digital and media literacy classes. They reached out to Mona as the CML director to ask for space, equipment, and support. As part of the CML mission to support the university's educational initiatives, all of those were provided for free. Yonty, Kelsey, and Mona were in daily contact with the program director to coordinate the times and the organization of classes, and to address issues if necessary. The structure of the courses allowed for shared responsibilities as we communicated on a daily basis.

Structure, Responsibilities, and Communication

The structure of the digital and media literacy course evolved each year. As seen in table 2, each year had a different emphasis as we built upon the previous year.^{xlviii} Each year Yonty and Kelsey conducted research on the students' information, digital, and media literacies competencies. The number of students changed from year to year as did the students who volunteered to participate in the research. The first year we taught for thirty-six hours while in the following two years only eighteen hours. The outcomes varied as we practiced different types of media production. First Star URI Academy had one administrative director and two assistants who were in charge of the whole summer academy. Yonty and Kelsey were hired to provide the digital and media literacy class. The CML was the place where the class took place. In the third year of the program, the CML became the place for all academic classes.

Table 2. Structure of First Start URI Academy Class in Digital and Media Literacy

Year	Students	Participants	Course Hours	Analysis	Production
2012	20 (2*)	20	36	Videos, social networks	Video production: 7 ads, 6 music videos, 7 manifestos (PSAs), 4 video games—total of 24
2013	25	22	18	Online resources	Website design: 15 websites, 7 blogs—total of 22 web design projects
2014	16 (1*)	13	18	Multimedia messages	Digital campaign: 5 PSAs, 1 song

Note: Adapted from Yonty Friesem and Kelsey Greene, “Tuned In: The Importance of Peer Empathic Feedback in a Media Literacy Class with Foster Youth” (Washington, DC, 2016).

*Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of students who started the program but did not finish.

The responsibilities of each partner overlapped since the definitions of their roles were not always clear. While the Media Education Lab provided the content of the digital and media literacy course along with the pedagogy and research, the CML provided the space, equipment, and support. And First Star provided the logistics and funding for the program. The

responsibilities were established back in 2012 when the Media Education Lab staff were hired and provided a report to capture the nature of the different partners’ responsibilities.^{xlix}

In order to address students’ emotional and behavioral issues, we established communication through in-person follow-ups, e-mails, text messages, and phone calls over the years. Before starting the summer academy, we conducted interviews with the staff to ensure we had shared goals, responsibilities, and ways of communicating. And yet the communication between each partner was challenging, due to tight schedules and many responsibilities outside of classes. The students needed personal attention that was difficult to give when they were in a group of sixteen to twenty-five students. Yonty, Kelsey, Mona, and First Star mentors were in classes most of the time. However, Yonty did research on other classes of the academy, Kelsey had responsibilities in the School of Communication and Media, and Mona had other patrons at the CML. In order to address these challenges, we had daily reflection sessions. Though as instructors, Yonty and Kelsey were not always informed of sensitive information that led to emotional breakdowns in class. Eventually, due to our communication with First Star staff, we were able to understand how occurrences outside of class influenced students’ learning and behavior.

Authority and Accountability

Each one of us had different responsibilities, and therefore we also had various authorities over

the content and research (Yonty and Kelsey), the space and equipment (Mona), and discipline and emotional support (First Star staff). Yet the authority over students' behavior was ambiguous and sometimes led to misunderstandings. For example, when one student started to answer rudely to our instruction, we asked her to calm down. When that did not work and she continued to interrupt the instruction, one of the academy staff members accompanied her outside. It was only the next day with the intervention of the First Star program director that we all got together. The student apologized for her behavior, and we created ground rules to address behavioral issues. The ambiguity of who had authority over the student's behavior led to confusion and indecisiveness in coping with her interruptions and misbehavior.

Our accountability was measured by students' performances. First Star staff made sure to address any behavioral and emotional issues, while Yonty, Kelsey, and Mona used Hobbs's AACRA model to develop students' competencies.¹ We were able to assess their development in information, digital, and media literacy. We used activities that enhanced the students' five digital and media literacy competencies in each class, for each year. Table 3 shows the evolution of our tools to be accountable for the students' learning.

Table 3. Information, Digital and Media Literacy Competencies in Our Classes

	Access	Analyze	Create	Reflect	Act
2012	Using laptop and cameras, Internet and desktop, iMovie, social networks	Media messages: 3 times (ad, music video, documentary)	Ad, music video, manifesto	Peer feedback	Facebook group, State House screening
2013	E-mails and website design platforms	Websites	Personal websites	Peer feedback and group discussion	Websites used as high school credits
2014	E-mail, social network marketing	Campaigns	Digital campaign	Peer feedback and group discussion	Videos and public screening

In the first year, we taught students to access computers and cameras that were donated to each of them. Using editing software such as iMovie and social network sites such as Facebook, the students learned to access and curate information. Via instruction and interactive work in media analysis, students learned to interpret and evaluate commercials, music videos, and online personal videos that we called manifestos. As they were analyzing these genres, they also created their own versions of ads, music videos, and manifestos. They used peer empathic feedback to share their praise of and suggestions for their peers' work.ⁱⁱ Their work was shared publicly at the closing night and at a special event at the Rhode Island State House.

In the second year, students learned to use their computers for finding and assessing information online along with learning web design. They analyzed other websites and learned how to gather and summarize information as well as how to deconstruct online interfaces. They created personal blogs and web pages to address personal concerns or interests. They used the peer empathic feedback and group discussion to reflect and modify their work. The websites were shared in their exhibit in the closing ceremony and also were used as high school credits.

In the third year, we accessed the technology to look at marketing techniques and information literacy. We analyzed digital campaigns using videos, websites, and social networks to convey a message. In groups, students created their own campaigns for their social workers and the foster care system. Building upon suggestions they had written in their first year of the program, they chose to focus on one issue to create an online campaign. They practiced once again the peer empathic feedback in groups and had a discussion about it. The videos were shared in the closing ceremony but were not published online since the administration was afraid of the social workers' reactions to it. It was only after one of the students received an award that the video was released online to share with others.

Resources and Rewards

One of the biggest draws to the first-year summer academy for the foster youth was the computer and flip camera that each one received upon arrival to the campus. With a generous donation from Hasbro (a play company in Rhode Island), students could film and edit with their own cameras and laptops. Students were able to use their devices in and out of the class due to the collaboration between the CML, the Media Education Lab, and First Star. Nonetheless, some technical issues made it very challenging, such as the university's Wi-Fi connection, students' inability to retrieve their own passwords, and the fact that the low-quality PC computers were not able to connect to the high-quality cameras. We were fortunate to have Mona as the CML director; she offered her high-end resources and allowed the students to profit from this equipment in the month-long academy. Yonty was hesitant to use the CML Apple computers since the students would not have them at home, but Kelsey convinced him that it was for the best so that the students would not be frustrated that their cameras did not work with their new PC computers.

Our professional rewards included the students' growth during our program and the acknowledgment of program success by the greater community. In the first year, the media courses had their own screening to showcase the students' work and progress. In the following years, the screening was consolidated into one graduation ceremony of the whole academy. In addition, Rhode Island state senators and representatives celebrated the accomplishment of the summer academy by inviting the students and us to the State House and showcasing one of the videos the students had produced during the program. Our personal rewards from our collaboration revolved around seeing see how important our work was. With social networks, we easily stayed in touch and learned from the students about the impact we had made on them. They received school credits, improved their grades, and demonstrated their information, digital, and media literacies skills growth every year as they came back.

Discussion

“[An] expanded definition of literacy impacts the types of services, programs, and collections that libraries provide, as well as the nature of the work that library staff perform.”^{lii} Indeed, our three-year experience of working with the First Star URI Academy taught us how our collaboration could advance the foster youth students’ information, digital, and media literacies. Each partner had a significant role in the collaboration. While Yonty and Kelsey alternated between being instructors and researchers, Mona supported the classes with her CML space and equipment, and the First Star staff were in charge of both the logistics of the program and providing behavioral and emotional support for the students. The students experienced the CML as their summer learning home and would run into the academic library with excitement, eager to enter the CML section. The students enjoyed working on media production and analyzing media messages. Each year the class was rated high in their preferred activities during the month-long summer academy.

For us, having a sense of shared vision that combined our mission together with a clear structure and relationship allowed us to explore our pedagogy of digital and media literacy. Our authority, accountability, resources, and communication evolved during the years to positively impact the cognitive, but mostly social and emotional, needs of the foster youth.

Though we had challenges to address, including the students’ behavioral issues, we were able to use the creative format of production to have them express their emotions and voice. Combining AACRA as a model to acquire information and media literacy allowed us to overcome the communication challenges, the technical malfunctions, and overlapping responsibilities over students’ behavior.

Together, we were able to make a safe space at the library for the students to learn and enhance their various literacy skills. Having a daily debriefing of the staff after each class helped us to better communicate and modify our next day’s lesson plans in order to reach our educational goals and be more accountable. Over the years, our authority was established in regards to our instruction, but we still had no authority over the sharing of the students’ artifacts. For us, we would like the collaboration with the administration to be better, especially around understanding how our shared vision contributes to each separate mission. Further research should explore how an organization can collaborate with other contributors for having foster youth students on campus for a college- and career-readiness summer academy.

Conclusion

With the growing number of foster youth^{liii} and their challenges to being accepted to or graduating from college, the First Star URI Academy offered a unique opportunity for these at-risk students. Our collaboration with the NGO First Star and the University of Rhode Island’s Media Education Lab and Curriculum Materials Library allowed us to promote the students’ information, digital, and media literacy competencies. The significance of our collaborative effort can be seen in their artifacts (videos, websites, digital campaign), but mainly in the fact that three of the five academy graduates started their first year in college. Having a positive

experience at the CML allowed them to see themselves at a university as they took college-level classes in information, digital, and media literacy.

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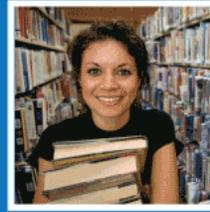
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“It’s Woefully Inadequate”: Collections of LGBTQ* Fiction for Teens in English Public Library Services

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Abstract

Academic and professional literature in the field of library and information science (LIS) has increasingly recognized the need to provide LGBTQ*-inclusive materials for children and teens. However, little research has been carried out in the United Kingdom on collections of these materials in public libraries. This study used a checklist approach to assess the holdings of LGBTQ* teen fiction in thirteen English public library services. The findings showed room for improvement in library collections, with particularly low holdings of titles in accessible formats. Moreover, titles from a recommended list made up less than half of LGBTQ* teen fiction holdings in all but one of the participating services. No relationship was found between annual book budget and number of LGBTQ* teen fiction titles held, although there was an apparent correlation between book budget and number of copies held.

Introduction

Recent North American literature in the domain of LIS (library and information science) has increasingly recognized the need to provide LGBTQ*-inclusive materials and services to children and teens in librariesⁱ (see the following subsection for a discussion of the acronym “LGBTQ*”). However, the topic has not received an equivalent amount of attention in the United Kingdom (UK), in either scholarly or professional literature, or in practice.ⁱⁱ The relatively small amount of extant research—much of which is thesis research carried out at a master’s degree level—has focused either on school librariesⁱⁱⁱ or on materials and services for adults.^{iv} There is thus a gap in the literature regarding LGBTQ* materials and services for children and teens in public libraries.

A Note on Terminology

The acronym “LGBTQ*” is used in this paper to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, and queer or questioning individuals and communities. The asterisk signals inclusion of other groups that may be marginalized even within queer communities, such as people who are intersexual or asexual. However, we sometimes use other terms when discussing existing literature to reflect varying content and approaches.

There is an ongoing debate within trans(*) communities as to whether an asterisk should be used after the word trans(*).^v Those in favor of its use argue that it broadens the term to include people who might otherwise feel that the term does not apply to them, such as some non-binary people (i.e., people who do not identify with a binary male or female gender).^{vi} However, others argue that it is important to retain the word “trans” (without the asterisk) as a disruptive and non-exclusionary term in its own right.^{vii} Both of the present authors identify as cisgender women—that is, women whose gender identity matches our sexes assigned at birth, and who thus are not part of a trans(*) community.^{viii} Consequently, we feel the asterisk is not ours to criticize, and we have thus opted to use it in this paper in order to be as inclusive as possible. In future work, we will be guided in our use of terminology by the consensus emerging from within trans(*) communities.^{ix}

For the purposes of the study reported here, “LGBTQ* fiction” was defined as fiction containing at least one character who was identified as LGBTQ* or who was in a recognizably LGBTQ* relationship (e.g., a family with two mothers). Books with only a brief mention of LGBTQ* background characters were not included within the scope of the research. We also did not take the sexuality or gender identity of the author into account when defining “LGBTQ* fiction,” focusing instead on the content of the book.

Statistics and Context

It is difficult to gather reliable data on the number of LGBTQ* people in the UK, as people may be unwilling to declare their sexuality or gender identity through official channels; moreover, the concepts of sexuality and gender identity are complex and fluid, rendering measurement difficult. In a survey of UK adults carried out in 2015 by polling organization YouGov, 6% of the sample self-identified as gay or lesbian, with 2% identifying as bisexual and 1% identifying as “other.” These figures rose to 10%, 2%, and 2%, respectively, for the 18–24 age group.^x Furthermore, preliminary findings from the Equality and Human Rights Commission suggest that around 1.0% of the UK population have undergone some part of a gender reassignment process, while 0.4% identify as something other than “male” or “female.”^{xi} The 2014 Youth Chances survey—which surveyed over 7,000 young people aged 16–25 in England and is the largest and most representative UK research of its kind at the time of writing in 2016—found that just over half of LGBQ respondents (53%) knew they were LGBQ by the age of thirteen, while a slightly higher proportion of trans* respondents (58%) knew they were trans* by the same age.^{xii} The statistics thus suggest that there is a substantial population of LGBTQ* young people in the UK, and that many are aware of their LGBTQ* identity by the start of the teenage years. Librarians therefore need to be aware of the needs of this user population and to provide them with relevant materials.

UK opinion poll data, gathered in 2012, suggest that attitudes toward LGB people are becoming more positive; however, negative attitudes persist among a substantial minority of the population, and three in five respondents felt that society in general was prejudiced against LGB people.^{xiii} In a 2009 review of the literature on attitudes toward trans* people, the authors concluded that “large sections of the British population hold negative and discriminatory views towards trans people, though there is evidence of positive change.”^{xiv} Moreover, research into young LGBTQ* people’s experiences, carried out in 2012, shows that these young people continue to experience stigma, bullying, and discrimination.^{xv} Some studies suggest that over 70% of young LGBTQ* people have experienced homophobic, biphobic, or transphobic bullying, with young trans* people experiencing particularly high rates of bullying.^{xvi} There is thus a strong moral argument for providing materials that will help young LGBTQ* people to develop positive LGBTQ* identities, and/or combat prejudice among others.

Research Rationale

In both the UK and the US, there is increasing awareness among authors, publishers, librarians, and the general public of the need for teen books to feature diverse characters—including LGBTQ* characters.^{xvii} Authors who write LGBTQ* fiction for teens report receiving hundreds of letters, e-mails, and Twitter messages from LGBTQ* teens who have been helped by their books, as well as from straight, cisgender teens who say that the books opened their eyes.^{xviii} There is also a small but increasing body of empirical research with young LGBTQ* people that demonstrates the unmet need for LGBTQ*-inclusive books and resources, including fiction.^{xix} However, there is a lack of existing research on collections of LGBTQ* materials for children and teens in UK public libraries; the study reported here aimed to go some way toward addressing this.

UK Public Library Services

UK public library services, or “public library authorities,” are administrative entities that comprise multiple library branches or outlets (broadly equivalent to the US term “public library systems”). At the time when the research was carried out, there were 148 public library authorities in England.^{xx} Throughout the remainder of this paper, we have used the term “public library services” as this is more widely understood beyond the UK context.

Library services are generally run by local authorities, also known as “councils,” which are local government administrative structures. Local authorities (or councils) fall into four different administrative categories—namely, county authorities, unitary authorities, metropolitan boroughs, and London boroughs (see <https://www.gov.uk/understand-how-your-council-works/types-of-council>). The characteristics of local authorities vary within as well as between these categories, although some tentative generalizations can be made. Metropolitan boroughs and London boroughs cover urban areas, whereas county authorities are often (but not always) larger and more rural. Unitary authorities may cover either rural or urban areas, or both; the term “unitary” means that services are provided by a single tier of local government.

Literature Review

LGBTQ* Teens' Library Usage and Satisfaction

The small amount of UK research on young people's information needs and library usage has identified various types of LGBTQ*-related information sought out by young people, including fiction. Bridge found that around 60% of respondents wanted gay community information and factual coming-out information, with just over half looking for fiction with gay characters and around two-thirds looking for sexual health information.^{xxi} In contrast, the top five types of information sought out by Walker's respondents were LGBT-related political information, sexual health information, LGBT history, fiction, and general advice.^{xxii} A previous piece of non-scholarly research carried out with teens in the US identified similar topics, although in a different order of priority, with (auto)biographies of LGBTQ* people ranking highest, followed by coming-out stories, activism "how-to" information, fiction, community resources, and so on, with sexual health information ranking lowest.^{xxiii} The different rankings of information types in the three studies are unsurprising, as each surveyed a different population (in Northern Ireland, the wider UK, and the US), and none of the samples were large enough to be statistically generalizable.

In both Bridge's and Walker's studies, only a minority of respondents looked for the information they needed in the library, with just one respondent to Bridge's survey ($n = 42$) using the library as an information source.^{xxiv} Twenty-two percent of respondents to Walker's survey ($n = 104$) said they had looked for LGBT-related information in their school library, and over half of these had not found anything. Reasons for not using the library to look for this information included fear and the assumption that the library would not have anything relevant.^{xxv} However, the library emerged as an important "safe space" for LGBTQ* pupils in both pieces of research. Participants in Walker's research also made suggestions for how to improve the library service. In order of popularity, these were as follows: increase the availability of LGBT resources; improve the promotion of resources; ensure that access to LGBT materials is not restricted; and work to improve awareness of LGBT issues at a schoolwide level.

A number of studies in the UK and North America have surveyed LGBTQ* adults about their information needs and library usage. Findings differ significantly in terms of the frequency with which respondents used libraries in their efforts to locate information, with earlier studies showing higher levels of library use.^{xxvi} More recent studies (from the mid-2000s onward) show lower library use by LGBTQ* participants, who cited negative perceptions of libraries, fear of homophobia or transphobia, and the assumption that the library would not have anything useful as reasons for not using the service.^{xxvii} Even where libraries were used, satisfaction levels were low, with respondents criticizing both the collections and the attitudes of the staff.^{xxviii} Norman's UK-based research on the Brighton and Hove LGB collection bucked the trend of the extant literature, with most respondents rating the collection as "good" or "satisfactory."^{xxix}

Library Holdings

A number of studies have been carried out that assessed holdings of LGBTQ* materials in public libraries, although few were UK-based. The majority of studies have used various forms of a checklist approach.^{xxx} Within this literature is a body of work focusing on holdings of LGBTQ*

teen materials in public libraries.^{xxxii} One study was located that used a checklist approach to investigate school library holdings of LGBTQ* fiction and nonfiction,^{xxxiii} while a UK study by Wright asked school librarians to assess their own LGBTQ* holdings.^{xxxiii}

Those studies that made a value judgment concluded that holdings of LGBT-related fiction for children and teens in public/school libraries were limited.^{xxxiv} Spence, and Rothbauer and McKechnie, working in the North American context, both noted substantial variation in holdings between library services, resulting in an inconsistent level of service.^{xxxv} The latter study also found that older titles were just as likely to be held as more recent ones, despite the fact that older titles are more likely to contain negative stereotypes. Boon and Howard compared holdings of LGBT titles with a control group of non-LGBT titles, finding that LGBT titles were less likely to be held.^{xxxvi} Moreover, there were fewer copies of LGBT titles (40.57 copies on average) than of control titles (68.14 copies on average). More recently, Williams and Deyoe found that 326 public libraries in the US (out of 2,507 listed on Worldcat.org) did not hold any of the titles from the ALA's "Rainbow List of GLBTQ Books for Children & Teens."^{xxxvii} In the school library context, Hughes-Hassell, Overberg, and Harris found that around two-thirds of the 125 school libraries in the sample held fewer than five titles from a recommended list of LGBTQ* fiction; total holdings of LGBTQ* titles made up just 0.4% of collections, on average.^{xxxviii}

Little research has been carried out on this topic in the UK. A study on LGBTQ* materials and services in UK secondary school libraries (which serve pupils aged 11–18) asked respondents to estimate the number of LGBT books in their collections.^{xxxix} On average, LGBT books made up 0.24% of library holdings. However, as this relies on self-reported figures, it may say as much about librarians' knowledge of their collections as about LGBTQ* holdings.

Chapman's own master's thesis research, which was carried out in 2007, looked at holdings of LGBT-related fiction for children and teens in public libraries in the UK.^{xl} Checklist research carried out in two case-study library services found room for improvement in comparison with a library service that had a good reputation for LGBTQ* collections and services. It was also notable that few titles were available in alternative formats, and no titles with trans* content were held. Moreover, a questionnaire distributed nationally tentatively suggested that holdings might be limited in other libraries across the UK, and the thesis recommended further research to investigate this.

Budget and Collection Development

One potential factor that could affect holdings of LGBTQ* materials for children and teens is budget. There is little previous literature on this area. However, Williams and Deyoe found a mild relationship between collection size and number of LGBTQ titles ($R^2 = 0.22$) and between collection expenditure and number of LGBTQ titles ($R^2 = 0.3$).^{xli} However, the impact of this in practice was not substantial, with the number of LGBTQ titles increasing by 1.6 for every \$100,000 spent on the collection, and by 0.3 for every additional 10,000 volumes in the collection. Rothbauer and McKechnie looked not at budget but at the potentially related variable of library size, and found no significant relationship between size and number of titles held.^{xlii}

Qualitative research supports the hypothesis that budgetary considerations may affect holdings of LGBTQ* materials. Some of the library directors surveyed by Pruitt expressed a reluctance to support gay men's reading groups for budgetary reasons or, relatedly, due to an expectation that

circulation figures would be poor.^{xliii} Similarly, a more general study of attitudes relating to collection management found that materials were expected to provide value for money, leading to a focus on mainstream materials that were likely to be checked out frequently.^{xliv}

The present study fills a lacuna in the extant literature. Previous research suggests that young LGBTQ* people cite fiction among their top information needs but are unable to find materials to meet their needs in school or public libraries (or anticipate that they will be unable to). However, very little research has been carried out to investigate actual holdings of LGBTQ* fiction for teens in UK public libraries. There is also little extant literature—and none from the UK—that addresses the potential relationship between budget and holdings of LGBTQ* fiction for children and teens.

Methodology

The research reported here formed part of a larger doctoral study, carried out between 2008 and 2015. The findings discussed in this paper relate to the following research question:

To what extent is LGBTQ* fiction aimed at children and teens provided in English public library services?

Additional research questions, not discussed in this paper, related to the procurement and management of LGBTQ* fiction for children and teens; librarians' attitudes toward this material; and other factors potentially affecting holdings.^{xlv} Some of the findings relating to librarians' attitudes have been presented in a previous paper,^{xlvi} and the remaining findings will be discussed in forthcoming papers.

The study as a whole employed a mixed-methods approach, the design of which was informed by Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner's definition of such research as

. . . the type of research in which a researcher . . . combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration.^{xlvii}

The mixing of methods took place at both the data collection and analysis stages. The research design combined a checklist study to assess fiction holdings (discussed further below), questionnaires for staff members involved in collection development, and interviews with staff members involved in collection development at selected library services. Descriptive statistics were generated from quantitative data collected through the checklist study and through closed-ended questions on the questionnaires. The findings from the checklist study and questionnaires were used to inform the design of the interview schedule, and the qualitative data from the interviews and open-ended questionnaire responses were subsequently explored using thematic analysis.^{xlviii} This paper presents the findings of the checklist study, although the subsequent interview study method and findings are mentioned where appropriate.

The mixed-methods approach was based on a pragmatic philosophy. Pragmatism “endorses eclecticism and pluralism (e.g., different, even conflicting, theories and perspectives can be useful; observation, experience, and experiments are all useful ways to gain an understanding of people and the world).”^{xlix} Ontologically and epistemologically speaking, pragmatists believe in the existence of both a single physical world and multiple realities that are experienced differently by individuals; similarly, knowledge is both constructed and based on the “real world.”^l

This ontological and epistemological stance informed the choice of methods used in the research. Books are countable objects, which either are or are not held by the library; it was therefore appropriate to assess holdings using a quantitative method. However, the ways in which individuals view and interact with these books are highly subjective; therefore, in order to gain a thorough understanding of librarians’ attitudes and decisions regarding this material, it was necessary to have a qualitative element to the research. Pragmatism thus provided an eminently appropriate philosophical background for this mixed-methods study.^{li}

Pragmatism emphasizes action, usefulness, and theory, which supports effective practice or transformation. Moreover, pragmatists argue that research is inevitably value-laden, and that a pragmatic approach upholds values such as equality and social justice.^{lii} The research reported here was intended to be transformative and to make a positive contribution to developing libraries’ collections of LGBTQ* fiction for children and teens. The authors believe that when conducting and reporting research, it is preferable to be open about one’s personal and political stance rather than to claim scientific objectivity, as one’s values will inevitably affect the way that knowledge is constructed in the research process. Moreover, positions that are supposedly “neutral” often translate in practice to support for established systems.^{liii} However, despite the transformative intention of the research, we sought to minimize the potential impact of bias on the data analysis by critically reflecting on our possible biases and through peer debriefing with one another and with a colleague from a somewhat different disciplinary background.^{liv}

Sampling

Thirteen library services across England were selected for this research. The goal was not to make statistical generalizations from the sample—which would have necessitated a much larger number of library services—but to include a range of services with different characteristics, to increase the likely transferability of the findings.^{lv} Descriptive summaries of each library service were included in appendix O of the dissertation,^{lvi} to help readers ascertain the extent to which findings could be transferable to other, similar library services.^{lvii}

The sample selection process was based on two variables, the first being number of book acquisitions (as a proxy measure for annual book budget), as reported in the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy’s Public Library Statistics for that year.^{lviii} The second variable was the type of local authority. As noted in the introduction, UK library services are generally run by local authorities, which fall into four categories: county authorities, unitary authorities, metropolitan boroughs, and London boroughs. Although the characteristics of local authorities vary within as well as between these categories, we felt that the use of this variable for sample selection would give us a varied sample in terms of size, geographical location, and rural/urban authorities. The composition of the final sample confirmed this hypothesis.

Thus, for each of the four types of local authority, we randomly selected library services with high, medium, and low numbers of book acquisitions, resulting in a non-proportional stratified random sample.^{lix} In addition to these twelve library services, one service that had a good reputation for LGBTQ* collections and services was selected based on existing knowledge. To maintain anonymity, the library services were coded as shown in table 1:

Table 1: Codes used for participating library services

Category	Code
Bottom quintile for book budget, County authority	BC
Middle quintile for book budget, County authority	MC
Top quintile for book budget, County authority	TC
Bottom quintile for book budget, London borough	BL
Middle quintile for book budget, London borough	ML
Top quintile for book budget, London borough	TL
Bottom quintile for book budget, Metropolitan borough	BM
Middle quintile for book budget, Metropolitan borough	MM
Top quintile for book budget, Metropolitan borough	TM
Bottom quintile for book budget, Unitary authority	BU
Middle quintile for book budget, Unitary authority	MU
Top quintile for book budget, Unitary authority	TU
Purposively selected authority (happens to be bottom-quintile unitary authority)	BUP

To facilitate the reading of the charts presented in the “Findings” section, the stratified sampling is also reflected in the color-coding. Bottom-quintile library services are shaded light gray, middle-quintile services are shaded medium gray, and top-quintile services are the darkest gray.

Checklist

A checklist of LGBTQ* fiction for children and teens was used to assess holdings of LGBTQ* fiction for children and teens at the participating library services. There was no comprehensive list of LGBTQ* fiction for these age groups available in the UK, and we therefore developed our own checklist of titles, which were then looked up in each library’s catalog to ascertain whether they were held. There is a consensus in the literature that checklist studies are an appropriate method of assessing holdings of LGBTQ* materials,^{lx} and the present research arguably improves on previous studies in that the checklist is more comprehensive and was validity tested with key professionals from LGBTQ* librarianship, research, and activism (discussed further below).

The checklist was compiled based on existing book lists, bibliographies, and other literature on LGBTQ* fiction for children and teens; a full list of sources consulted can be found in appendix C of the dissertation.^{lxi} The following criteria were used to assess whether each title should be included on our checklist:

- *Must be published for children or teens.*
To determine whether titles were published for youth or for adults, we used the Nielsen BookData and Global Books in Print bibliographic databases; Amazon.com and Amazon.co.uk; and, where necessary, publisher and author websites.
- *Must contain recognizably LGBTQ* characters.*
Characters had to be clearly identifiable as LGBTQ* in order to merit inclusion. Books in which an LGBTQ* character appeared only very briefly were not included.
- *Must be in print and available for purchase in the UK.*
This was assessed using the Nielsen BookData and Global Books in Print bibliographic databases and Amazon.co.uk.
- *Must not be a graphic novel or poetry.*
These formats were excluded from the scope of the research for practical reasons, as at the time there was relatively little information available on graphic novels/poetry with LGBTQ* content for children and young people.

The cutoff point for inclusion on the checklist was May 2011. Once the checklist was complete, it was sent to eight key professionals in LGBTQ* librarianship, research, bookselling, and activism to gather their opinions on the checklist and to identify any books that had been omitted. Five of these experts responded, and a number of additional titles were added in response to their suggestions. The final checklist comprised 556 titles. The large majority of these were teen fiction titles (476 titles), and this paper will focus on that category.

We then compiled a shorter list of “recommended” titles, as it became apparent that many libraries held titles that were outdated, had relatively little LGBTQ* content, or contained negative depictions of LGBTQ* people. To assess whether a book should be included on the “recommended” list, titles were read by one of the researchers wherever possible (254 titles were read in total). Where this was not possible, we based our judgement on existing recommendations and book reviews (see appendix C of the dissertation^{lxiii}). The final checklist of “recommended” books comprised 203 titles, including 168 teen fiction titles; an updated version can be found on the first author’s website at bit.ly/lgbtfiction. Titles that do not appear on the recommended list are not necessarily titles to avoid but were felt to be insufficient to constitute an adequate LGBTQ* collection in themselves. For example, they could include relatively little LGBTQ* content but be excellent books in other respects.

Finally, we used Nielsen BookData, Global Books in Print, and Worldcat.org to assess whether checklist titles had been published in accessible formats (large print, audiobooks, e-audiobooks and e-books).

Catalog Checking

The catalog-checking stage of the research was carried out between December 2010 and July 2011. Each title on the full checklist (of 556 titles) was checked against the Online Public Access Catalogues (OPACs) of the thirteen participating library services, and the following information was recorded in a spreadsheet:

- 1) Whether the title was held by the library service;
- 2) The number of copies held by the library service;

- 3) Whether the title was held by the library service in the following formats: large print, audiobook, e-audiobook;
- 4) The number of copies held by the library service in these formats.

Data on titles on the recommended checklist were subsequently extracted from the spreadsheet and analyzed separately. Analysis of both data sets primarily involved the generation of descriptive statistics in the form of charts and tables. Although the sample was not large enough for the findings to be statistically generalizable, charts were created to visually map the number of titles held against the number of book acquisitions. This allowed potential correlations to be tentatively identified, forming a useful starting point for future research.

Interviews

Interviews were carried out with staff members involved in collection development at four of the participating library services, plus pilot interviewees; a total of eighteen individuals were interviewed. As part of this stage of the research, interviewees were presented with summary data on holdings of LGBTQ* fiction in the thirteen participating library services and asked to respond to it. This enabled us to collect empirical data to supplement our own value judgment on the adequacy (or otherwise) of collections. Here, as elsewhere in the research, we endeavored to minimize the potential impact of interviewer bias. The initial question was extremely open and simply asked the interviewees for their thoughts on the data. This was followed by a prompt specifically asking whether the interviewees felt holdings were adequate, in the event that they had not already discussed this. No opinion was expressed by the interviewer until after participants had fully explained their own thoughts, and then only if an interviewee asked for her opinion.

Limitations of the Research

As stated in the “Methodology” section, the research reported here formed part of a larger doctoral study involving further empirical research, and as a result it was not feasible within the scope of the dissertation to study the libraries in more than thirteen local authorities. As a result, the sample for the present study is not sufficiently large for the findings to be generalized to the wider population of English public library services. However, it has been possible to identify some potential trends that may be transferable to other library services.

It was also not possible within the scope of the research to read all the books included on the full checklist or the recommended checklist. This meant that in many cases we had to rely on other people’s assessments of the content and quality of the books in order to determine whether they should be included on (a) the full checklist and (b) the recommended checklist. The research also did not make any quantitative assessment of holdings of titles featuring groups that are underrepresented within LGBTQ* teen fiction and may be especially underserved by libraries (e.g., bisexual and trans* people, and people with multiple marginalized identities). However, the recommended list provided to libraries highlighted a number of titles that represented these groups.

Findings

Figure 1 shows the library holdings of titles from the full checklist of 476 LGBTQ* teen fiction titles. To facilitate the reading of the charts, the stratified sampling is reflected in the color-coding. Bottom-quintile library services are shaded light gray, middle-quintile services are shaded medium gray, and top-quintile services are the darkest gray. BUP, on the far right-hand side of the chart, is the library service that was purposively selected owing to its good reputation for LGBTQ* collections and services; it is thus unsurprising that it held substantially more titles than any of the other library services. However, even BUP held only 107 of the 476 available titles, or 22.5%. The remaining library services held between 55 and 89 titles, or between 11.6% and 18.7% of the total available titles.

Figure 1

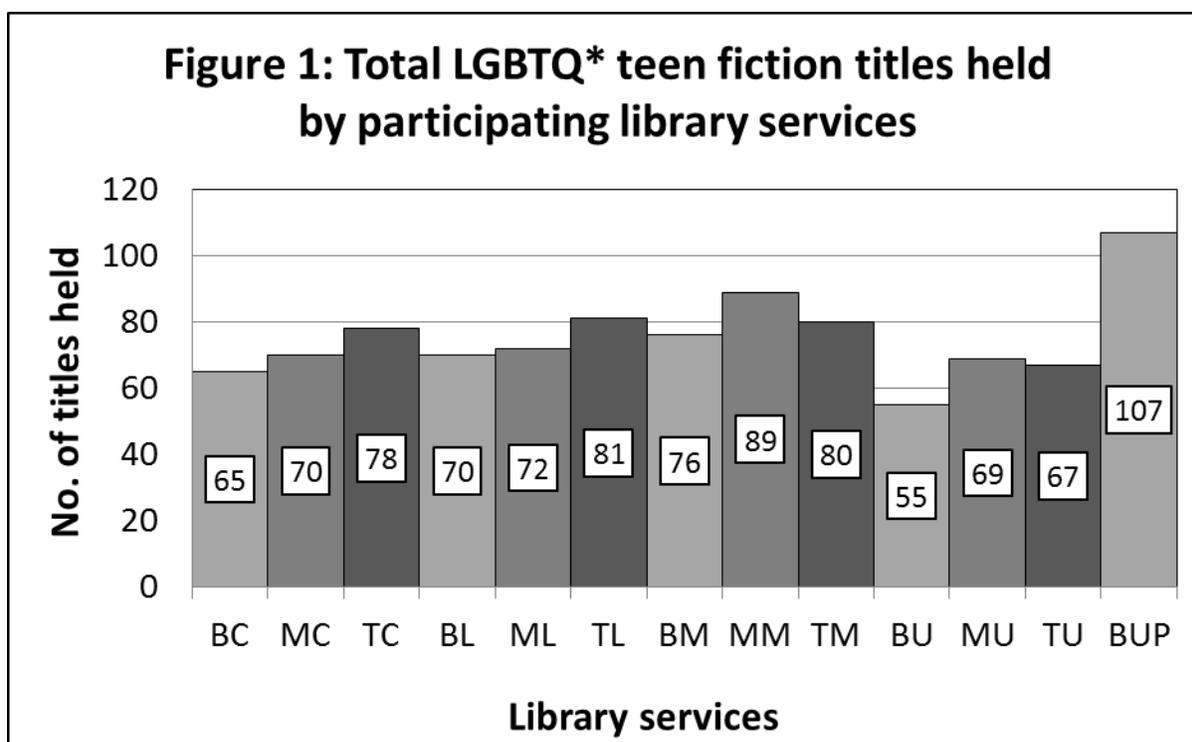
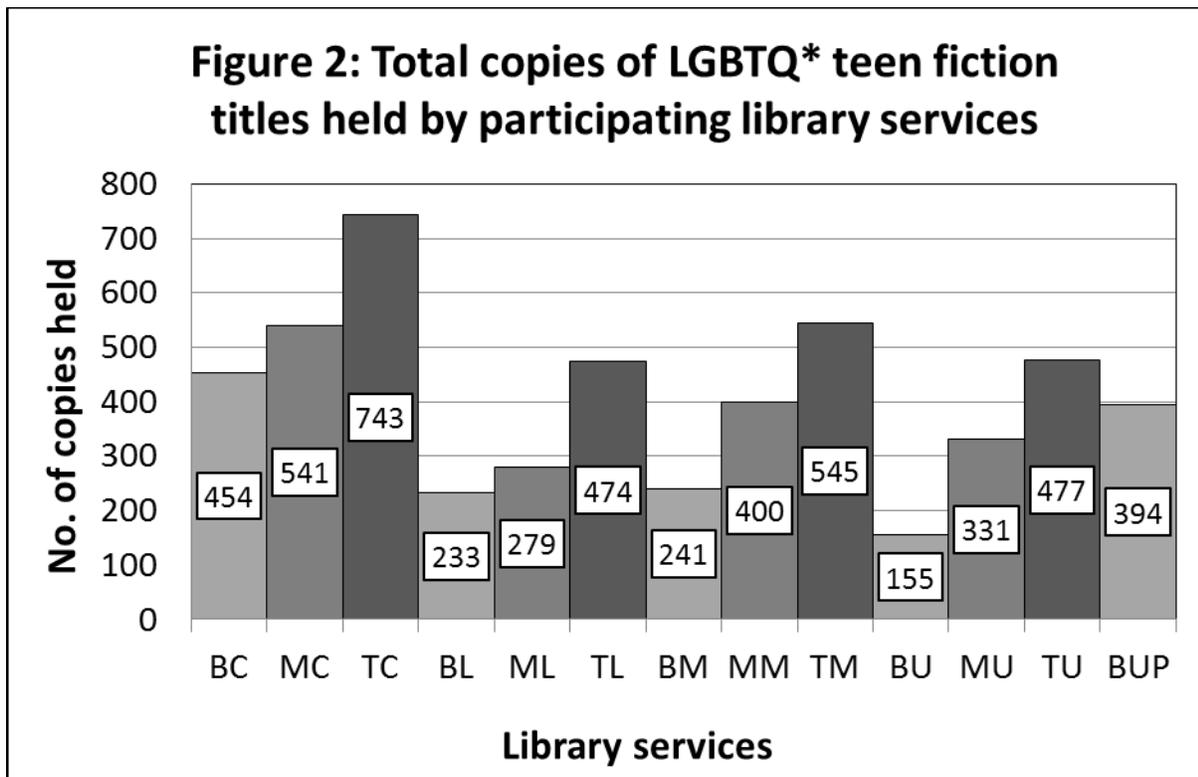


Figure 2 shows the number of copies of LGBTQ* teen fiction titles held by the participating library services. On this measure, BUP performs less well despite its reputation for good LGBTQ* collections and services, reflecting its smaller budget. The chart also suggests a potential relationship between book budget and number of copies held: the library services with large annual book budgets (TC, TL, TM, and TU) held a consistently larger number of copies than their counterparts with medium or small book budgets. This potential relationship is discussed further below.

Figure 2



Holdings of Titles in Accessible Formats

Data were also gathered on holdings of titles in different formats, in order to assess the availability of LGBTQ* fiction for children with visual impairments or other reading difficulties. As discussed in the “Methodology” section, the first step was to ascertain how many titles were available in these formats. Table 2 shows the availability of the teen fiction titles on the checklist in different formats. Although not all e-books are fully accessible, the font size can be increased to improve legibility, and increasing numbers of e-book readers provide text-to-speech options.^{lxiii} Furthermore, remote availability of e-books or e-audiobooks facilitates access for people with mobility difficulties.^{lxiv}

As shown in table 2, a large number of checklist titles were available in e-book format (268 titles, or 56.3% of the total teen fiction titles on the checklist). However, far fewer were available in other accessible formats. This is consistent with broader research by the Royal National Institute of Blind People on availability of titles in accessible formats.^{lxv}

Table 2: Availability of LGBTQ* teen fiction titles in different formats

Format	No. of titles available in this format
Large print	16
Cassette	27
CD	68
e-book	268
e-audiobook	45
Prerecorded e-audiobook on player	25

Library holdings of titles in accessible formats were thus constrained by the limited number of LGBTQ* teen fiction titles published in these formats. However, even where titles were available, holdings in accessible formats were limited. The two most widely held formats were CD and large print, but no service held more than ten titles on CD (14.7% of total titles available in this format) or seven titles in large-print format (43.8% of titles available). Four library services held a single title in cassette format, with the remaining nine holding none in this format. This is unsurprising, as the cassette format is increasingly rarely used.

Six of the participating library services did not provide any titles in either of the e-audiobook formats, and none of the library services held more than seven titles in this format. This may reflect a general lack of take-up of this format by library services; however, an investigation of this lay beyond the scope of the research. Similarly, none of the participating library services held any of the titles in e-book format, despite the large number of titles published in this format. It may be that none of the library services offered an e-lending service at all when this phase of the research was carried out in 2010–11. Alternatively, the lack of e-book titles may reflect the restrictions on e-lending by public libraries. Research carried out by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) in 2014 found that 90% of the fifty most borrowed print books had been published in e-book format, but only 7% were available to public libraries for e-lending.^{lxvi}

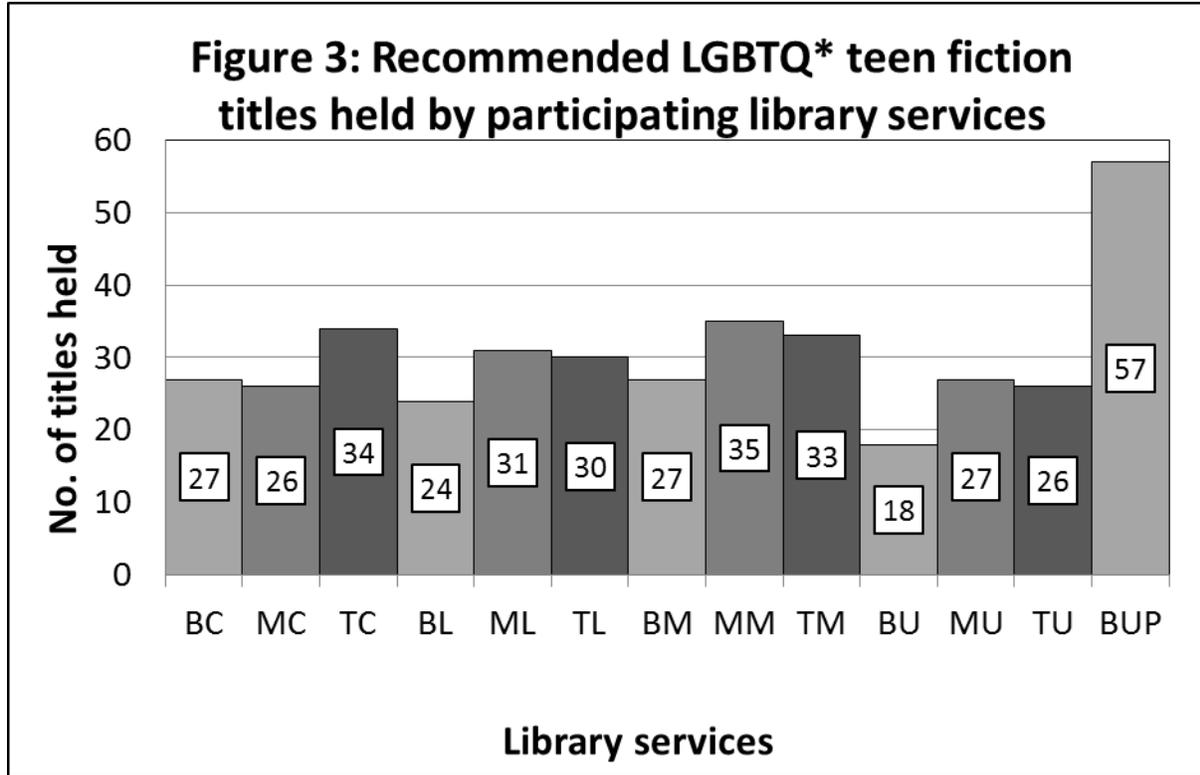
The checklist study also showed that the participating library services did not generally hold multiple copies of titles in large-print or e-audiobook formats. The exception to this was TC, which held twenty-four copies of large-print titles (an average of four copies for each of its six titles). However, the library services performed better in terms of the number of copies of titles on CD, with several holding multiple copies.

Holdings of Recommended Titles

As noted in the “Methodology” section, a shorter list of recommended titles was compiled, comprising 203 titles in total, including 168 teen fiction titles. Figure 3 shows the total holdings of recommended teen fiction titles at the thirteen participating library services. Once again, BUP—which has a reputation for good LGBTQ* collections and services—stands out, with 57

titles. However, this is still only 33.9% of the 168 recommended teen fiction titles available. The remaining library services held between 18 and 35 titles, or between 10.7% and 20.8% of the titles available.

Figure 3



Interestingly, the titles on the recommended checklist were proportionally slightly more likely to be selected, in relation to the total titles available in each category. (BL and BU were the only exceptions to this rule.) At BUP, the library service with a reputation for good LGBTQ* collections and services, recommended titles were substantially more likely to be selected. This is shown in table 3.

Table 3: Relative likelihood that recommended and non-recommended titles will be selected

Library service	Proportion of non-recommended titles held, as % of total teen fiction titles not on recommended checklist	Proportion of recommended titles held, as % of total recommended teen fiction titles
BC	12.3	16.1
MC	14.3	15.5
TC	14.3	20.2
BL	14.9	14.3
MM	13.3	18.5
TL	16.6	17.9
BM	15.9	16.1

MM	17.5	20.8
TM	15.3	19.6
BU	12.0	10.7
MU	13.6	16.1
TU	13.3	15.5
BUP	16.2	33.9

However, in terms of the *number* of titles held by each library service, the majority of services held more titles that are not on the recommended list than titles that are, as demonstrated in figure 4. BUP is the only participating library service that held more recommended titles than non-recommended titles.

Figure 4

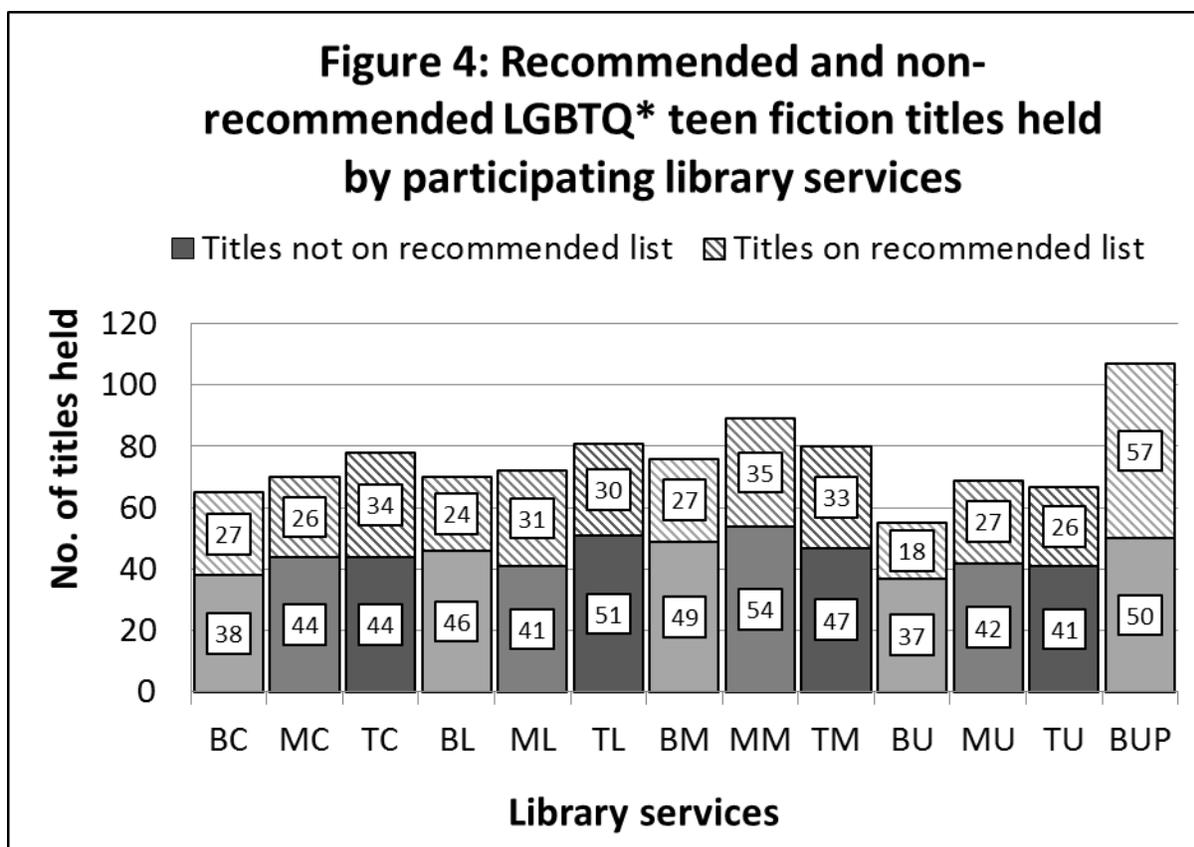
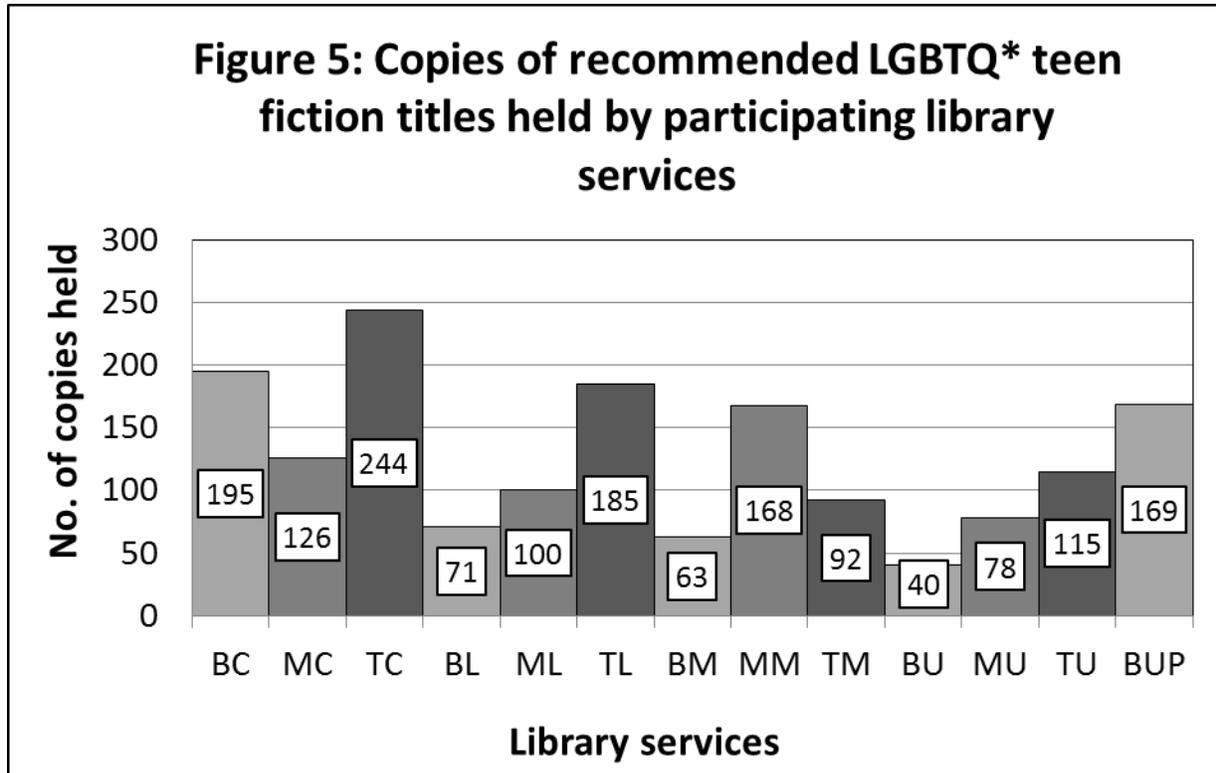


Figure 5 shows the number of copies of recommended titles held by participating library services. The pattern is rather different from that shown in figure 2 (total copies of checklist titles), suggesting that the number of copies of *recommended* titles is not simply a function of budget (discussed further below). In the discussion of figure 2, we noted that BUP does not show the same dominance in terms of copies as it does for titles, which is unsurprising considering its relatively small budget. However, as shown in figure 5, it appears in the top five for copies of *recommended* titles. This suggests that a concerted effort may have been made to provide more

copies of high-quality LGBTQ* fiction for children and young people, rather than simply procuring more copies of mainstream fiction that may have a relatively small amount of LGBTQ* content.

Figure 5



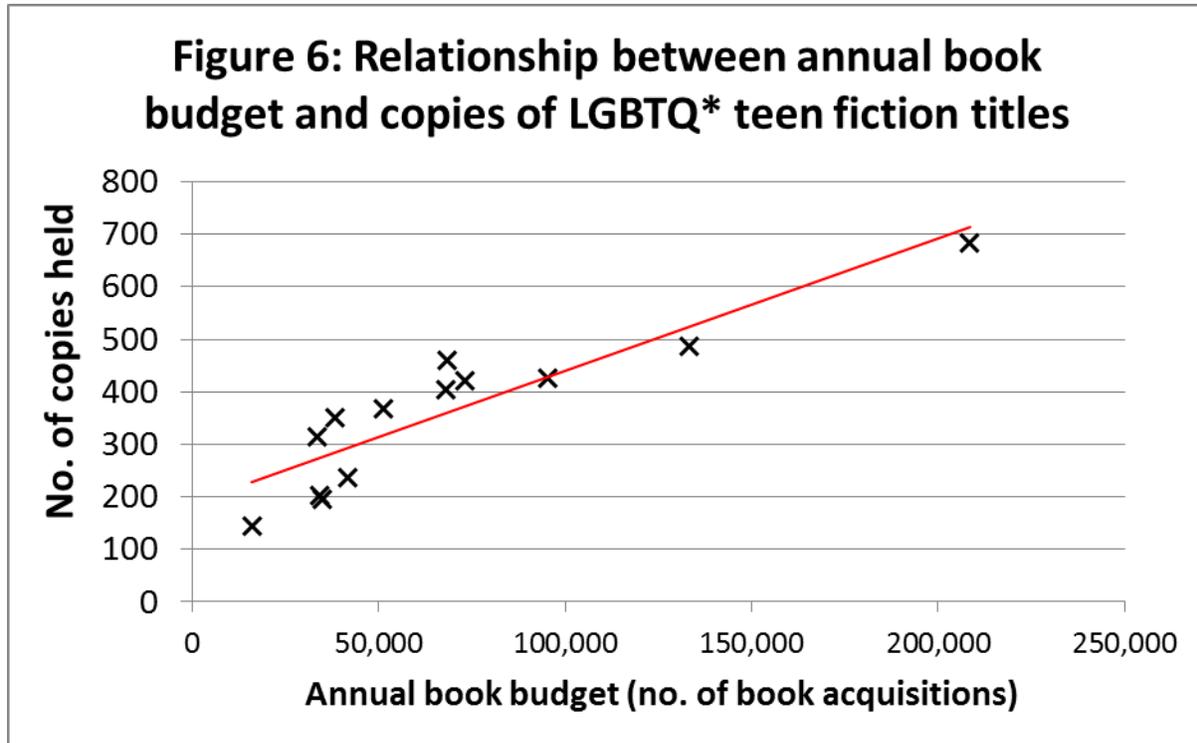
Relationship between Annual Book Budget and Library Holdings

As discussed in the “Methodology” section, annual book budget (specifically the number of book acquisitions) was used as one of the variables for selecting the sample of participating library services, as it could have a direct impact on the service’s ability to purchase LGBTQ* fiction for children and teens. Although the sample was not large enough for the findings to be statistically generalizable, we nonetheless felt that it would be useful to map the number of titles held against the number of book acquisitions, with a view to tentatively identifying any potential correlations. The number of book acquisitions for the 2007–8 financial period was visually mapped against (a) the total holdings of LGBTQ* teen fiction titles and (b) the holdings of recommended LGBTQ* teen fiction titles, by using Microsoft Excel to create a scatterplot and insert a line of best fit. No correlation was apparent in either case; in other words, there was no evidence that budget had an impact on the holdings of LGBTQ* teen fiction titles. Indeed, it should be noted that BUP, which had the highest figures for both total holdings and holdings of recommended titles, actually had a relatively small budget.

In contrast, when the number of book acquisitions was mapped against the number of *copies* held, the data suggested a strong correlation (figure 6). As noted above, the sample was not large

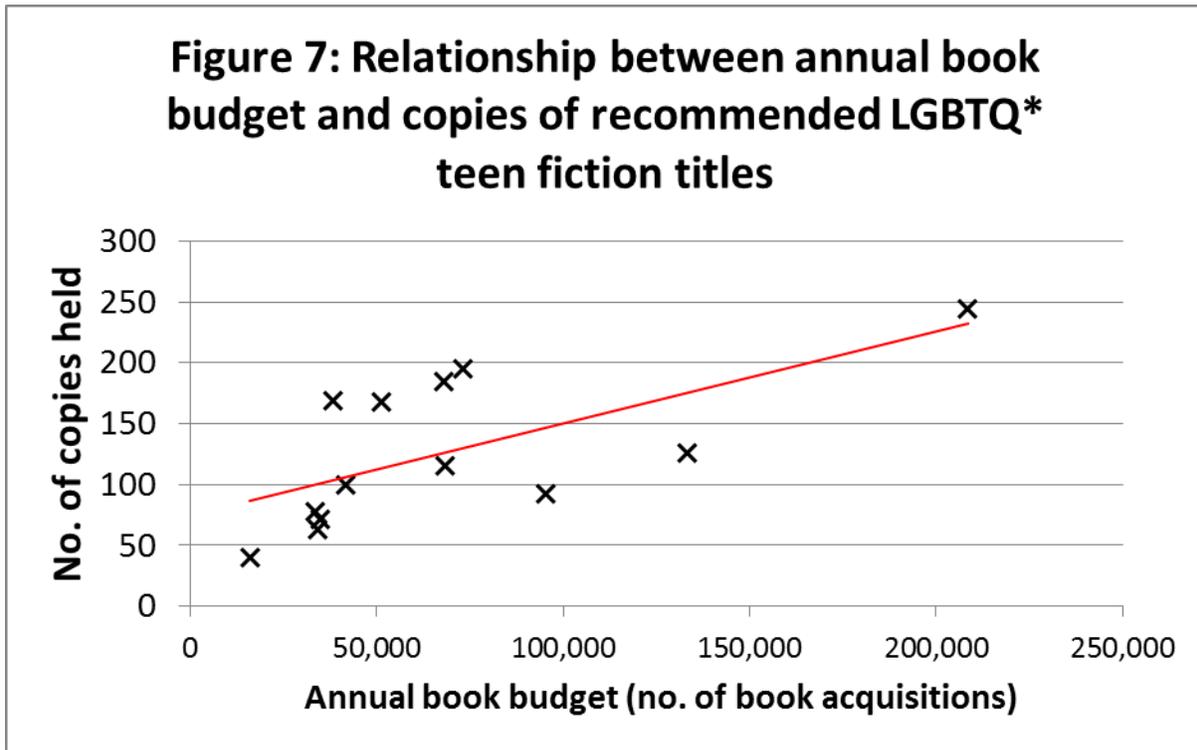
enough for the findings to be statistically generalizable, and statistical tests were thus not carried out. However, the existence of an apparent correlation is supported by logic: library services with larger book budgets are able to buy more copies of the titles selected.

Figure 6



Finally, we mapped the relationship between the number of book acquisitions and the copies of recommended titles held; the results are shown in figure 7. Once again, the data suggest a correlation. However, when compared with figure 6 (which shows the relationship between the number of book acquisitions and the copies of checklist titles held, whether recommended or not) the correlation appears to be weaker. In other words, the charts suggest that the library services with larger book budgets are buying more copies of checklist titles, but not necessarily those on the recommended list. This may suggest that the richer library services are simply buying lots of copies of the more mainstream books, which may be both well-written and popular, but may not necessarily constitute an LGBTQ* collection on their own. For example, there were 137 copies of Kevin Brooks' *Black Rabbit Summer* across the participating library services. This excellent novel was shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal in 2009; however, it has a relatively small amount of LGBTQ* content, and we therefore did not include it on the recommended list.

Figure 7



Discussion

Holdings of titles in the participating library services were quite limited, with even the best-performing service (BUP) holding less than a quarter of the total titles available (and just over a third of the recommended titles). In other words, many more titles are available than are held by libraries. The limited holdings cannot, therefore, be ascribed solely to a lack of published material. The research also showed that the participating library services held few of the checklist titles in accessible formats, although holdings of large-print titles, audiobooks, and e-audiobooks were constrained by the low numbers of titles available in these formats in the UK.

One limitation of checklist studies is that frequently no indication is given of what could constitute a “good” or “adequate” collection of LGBTQ* fiction.^{lxvii} Martin and Murdock suggest that even the smallest branch library should hold at least ten LGBTQ* teen titles; however, while this has implications for the number of copies held, it does not say anything about the range of titles required across the library service as a whole.^{lxviii} We therefore opted to collect opinion data from research participants, as described in the “Methodology” section, to supplement our own value judgment as to the adequacy (or otherwise) of collections.

The large majority of interviewees felt that provision was not adequate, with many expressing disappointment or even shock.^{lxix} One interviewee responded with the observation, “It’s woefully inadequate” (Pilot 2), while another commented, “I’d say it makes quite disappointing reading” (Interviewee TL4). The only library service where interviewees expressed some satisfaction with

their collection was, perhaps unsurprisingly, BUP. However, even the interviewees from this authority felt there was room for improvement.

Titles on the recommended checklist were proportionally slightly more likely to be purchased than titles that did not appear on the checklist, in relation to the total titles available in each category. However, in terms of the *number* of titles held by each library service, BUP was the only one to hold more recommended titles than non-recommended titles. With the exception of BUP, there is little evidence here to suggest that librarians are using their expertise to develop high-quality collections of LGBTQ* teen fiction. It is also worth noting the number of titles on the recommended list that were *not* held, despite the fact that the entire recommended list is quite short relative to the total number of teen fiction titles held by any given library service. As one participant commented, “Considering there’s, what, not even 550 books on [the full] list, that’s not a big budget for the whole collection to be developed” (Interviewee TL6). The budget to purchase all the titles from the recommended list would, evidently, be substantially smaller.

There has been very little previous research on holdings of LGBTQ* fiction aimed at children and teens in public library services in the UK. Chapman’s previous MA research found room for improvement in the two case-study library services, particularly in terms of materials in accessible formats, and tentatively suggested that “provision may be limited in other authorities [across the UK].”^{lxx} The present research appears to confirm this. In addition, studies from the US and Canada have also concluded that public library holdings of LGBTQ* fiction for children and teens are limited,^{lxxi} while UK research on school libraries has found a similar lack of attention to LGBTQ* materials.^{lxxii} The findings of the present study are thus in line with the extant research, while also presenting new data on the situation in English public library services.

The small amount of extant quantitative research suggests that budget has, at most, a limited impact on holdings of LGBTQ* materials for teens.^{lxxiii} However, qualitative research suggests that budgetary concerns may affect holdings indirectly, through the focus on titles that will generate high circulation figures and provide “value for money.”^{lxxiv} Over the period between 2007–8 and 2012–13, eight of the thirteen participating library services experienced cuts to their book budgets, and three saw substantial cuts of around 50%.^{lxxv} This may exacerbate the tendency to focus on circulation figures to the detriment of diverse collections.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that there is substantial room for improvement in the holdings of LGBTQ* teen fiction in the participating public library services. When asked to comment on a summary of holdings data, the large majority of interviewees felt that collections were inadequate. Holdings of titles in accessible formats were particularly low, and there is scope to improve collections in this area by boosting holdings in e-book and e-audiobook formats. While the sample was not large enough to be statistically generalizable, the consistently low holdings, coupled with the small amount of previous research on the topic, suggest that holdings may also be limited in other public library services in England and the wider UK. Furthermore, there was little evidence that librarians in the participating services had sought to develop high-quality

LGBTQ* teen fiction collections by seeking out titles with realistic, positive, and up-to-date depictions of LGBTQ* characters in major roles.

Librarians in many services are facing cuts to book budgets, together with concomitant pressures to generate high circulation figures.^{lxxvi} However, the present study showed no correlation between book budget and number of LGBTQ* teen fiction titles held. Indeed, BUP, which had a relatively small budget, performed better in terms of both the total number of titles held and the number of titles from the recommended list. It can thus be inferred that it is possible, even on a small budget, to provide a collection that is at least somewhat better than is currently the case in most of the participating library services, in terms of the range and quality of titles. In other words, a small budget does not preclude the development of an LGBTQ* teen fiction collection and should not be used as an excuse for inadequate holdings. Librarians may need to consider alternative ways of measuring and communicating value and impact, beyond circulation figures alone.^{lxxvii}

As stated in the “Methodology” section, the present research was intended to be transformative and to make a positive contribution to developing libraries’ collections of LGBTQ* fiction for children and teens. Once the research was completed, we sent summary data on library holdings to all participants and the Head of Service at each library service, together with a summary of all findings and recommendations for practice. In at least one of the participating services, this has already resulted in the purchase of additional items and increased efforts at promoting these materials. The recommended checklist has been distributed to public and school librarians and other interested parties beyond the participating library services, and it has been used by some of these individuals to boost LGBTQ* library collections for children and teens. An updated version can be found on the first author’s website at bit.ly/lgbtfiction.

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Notes

ⁱ See, for example, Hillias J. Martin and James R. Murdock, *Serving Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning Teens: A How-to-Do-It Manual for Librarians* (New York: Neal-Schuman, 2007); Jamie C. Naidoo, *Rainbow Family Collections: Selecting and Using Children’s Books*

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http://www.ala.org/alsc/sites/ala.org.alsc/files/content/ALSCwhitepaper_importance%20of%20diversity_with%20graphics_FINAL.pdf (accessed October 30, 2015); Alvin M. Schrader and Kristopher Wells, “Queering Libraries and Classrooms: Strategies to Build Inclusive Collections and Services for Sexual Minority and Gender Variant Youth,” in *Serving LGBTIQ Library and Archives Users*, ed. Ellen Greenblatt (Jefferson, NC: MacFarland & Co., 2011); Carlisle K. Webber, *Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Teen Literature: A Guide to Reading Interests* (Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited, 2010).

ⁱⁱ Elizabeth L. Chapman, “Provision of LGBT-Related Fiction to Children and Young People in English Public Libraries: A Mixed-Methods Study” (PhD diss., University of Sheffield, 2015); Elizabeth L. Chapman, “‘We Have Made a Start but There Is a Long Way To Go’: Public Library LGBTQ* Provision to Children and Young People In the Current UK Context,” in *Queer Library Alliance: Global Reflections and Imaginings*, ed. Rae-Anne Montague and Lucas McKeever (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, forthcoming); John Vincent, *LGBT People and the UK Cultural Sector: The Response of Libraries, Museums, Archives and Heritage since 1950* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2014).

ⁱⁱⁱ Sally Bridge, “No Place on the Shelves? Are Northern Ireland’s School Libraries Addressing the Information Needs of Their Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Students?” (master’s thesis, Aberystwyth University, 2010), <http://cadair.aber.ac.uk/dspace/handle/2160/5714> (accessed October 30, 2015); Elizabeth L. Chapman and Caroline Wright, “Provision of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGBT) Materials for Young People in UK Public and Secondary School Libraries,” in *Forbidden Fruit: The Censorship of Literature and Information for Young People*, ed. Sarah McNicol (Boca Raton, FL: BrownWalker Press, 2008); Janine Walker and Jo Bates, “Developments in LGBTQ Provision in Secondary School Library Services since the Abolition of Section 28,” *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science* (January 18, 2015), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0961000614566340> (accessed October 30, 2015).

^{iv} Laura Armstrong, “Do Personal and Institutional Anxieties within Sheffield Central Library and Norwich Millennium Library Affect the Promotion of Particular Genres (Black British/Asian and Gay/Lesbian Fiction)?” (master’s thesis, University of Sheffield, 2006), http://dagda.shef.ac.uk/dispub/dissertations/2005-06/External/Armstrong_Laura_MALib.pdf (accessed October 30, 2015); Phil Brett, “Politics and Public Library Provision for Lesbians and Gay Men in London,” *International Journal of Information and Library Research* 4, no. 3 (1992): 195–211;

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^v Avery Tompkins, “Asterisk,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, nos. 1–2 (2014): 26–27.

^{vi} Sam Killermann, “What Does the Asterisk in ‘Trans*’ Stand For?,” *It’s Pronounced Metrosexual*, <http://itspronouncedmetrosexual.com/2012/05/what-does-the-asterisk-in-trans-stand-for/> (accessed October 30, 2015).

^{vii} CN Lester, “Why I Use ‘Trans’ and Not ‘Trans*,’” *A Gentleman and a Scholar*, June 30, 2011, <https://cnlester.wordpress.com/2011/06/30/why-i-use-trans-and-not-trans/> (accessed October 30, 2015); CN Lester, “Question Twelve: Is Trans* the Preferred Term?,” *A Gentleman and a Scholar*, April 10, 2013, <https://cnlester.wordpress.com/2013/04/10/question-twelve-is-trans-the-preferred-term/> (accessed October 30, 2015).

^{viii} B. Aultman, “Cisgender,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, nos. 1–2 (2014): 61–62.

^{ix} Chapman, ““We Have Made a Start but There Is a Long Way to Go.””

^x YouGov, “YouGov Survey Results” (London: YouGov, 2015), https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/7zv13z8mfn/YG-Archive-150813-%20Sexuality.pdf (accessed February 21, 2016).

^{xi} Fiona Glen and Karen Hurrell, *Technical Note: Measuring Gender Identity* (Manchester: Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2012), http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/documents/technical_note_final.pdf (accessed October 30, 2015).

^{xii} METRO Youth Chances, *Youth Chances Summary of First Findings: The Experiences of LGBTQ Young People in England* (London: METRO, 2014), http://www.youthchances.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/YC_REPORT_FirstFindings_2014.pdf (accessed October 30, 2015).

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