



# Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ)-Themed Literature for Teens: Are School Libraries Providing Adequate Collections?

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## Abstract

*The purpose of this study was to determine if young adults have access through school libraries to LGBTQ-themed literature. The library collections in 125 high schools in one Southern U.S. state were examined for the inclusion of LGBTQ-themed fiction, nonfiction, and biographies, including a core collection of 21 recommended titles. Results showed that, in general, the school libraries were under-collecting LGBTQ-themed titles. Although LGBTQ teens are estimated to make up 5.9 percent of the students in American high schools, the average number of LGBTQ-themed titles held by these school libraries was 0.4 percent. Suggestions for further study are included.*

I'm betting almost everything available featuring gay characters in books for kids and teens is here—and they fit on these two tablets. You'd need all the rooms in this building, and more, to fit the books that feature heterosexual kids and their families. They have a much better chance of finding themselves or what they're interested in...but I just don't see myself here.

*anonymous gay teen (Crisp and Knezek 2010, 76)*

## Introduction

Under the very best of conditions, navigating adolescence can often be a confusing, lonely, and occasionally overwhelming experience, as teens seek to find their way between the expectations others have for them, both peers and adults, and the drive to lay claim to their newly independent self. Navigating adolescence is a process of exploration and experimentation, of tentative discovery and evolving self-understanding. Identity formation, the main task of adolescence, requires a relatively safe and supportive framework within which adolescents can come to know their true selves (Hughes-Hassell and Hinckley 2001). For heterosexual adolescents, many avenues of support exist: family, friends, school, and the community (Sears 1991). Identity formation is a much more difficult task for most lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth. These young adults often come of age in communities where few gay adults are visible, attend schools that have no openly gay staff, and interact with peers who use “fag” and “dyke” as the favored insult and “that’s so gay” as a common put-down (Kosciw et al. 2012; Sears 1991). In this environment LGBTQ adolescents struggle with the decision of not just who they are, but whether they are, and who they dare tell about it. Not surprisingly, many LGBTQ youth fear that candor will bring only rejection, and struggle through adolescence feeling completely isolated and alone (Ryan and Futterman 1998).

Compounding their feelings of isolation are often concerns for their safety. Despite increasing societal acceptance of gay rights, the LGBTQ community remains—by far—the minority most targeted in hate crimes (Potok 2010). According to the 2011 National School Climate Survey conducted by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), 63.5 percent of LGBTQ students said they felt unsafe in school because of their sexual orientation. Seventy percent had experienced anti-gay bullying, with 38.3 percent reporting that they had been physically harassed (e.g., shoved or pushed) and 18.3 percent reporting being the victim of physical assault. LGBTQ students in rural areas and small towns were less safe in school than students in urban and suburban areas (Kosciw et al. 2012).

The impact of homophobia and anti-gay bullying on LGBTQ students is not limited to their feelings of safety. The same 2011 National School Climate Survey (Kosciw et al. 2012) revealed that LGBTQ students who were harassed because of their sexual orientation and gender expression had significantly lower grade-point averages than their peers did (2.9 vs. 3.2). Increased victimization also leads to increased levels of depression and anxiety and to decreased levels of self-esteem in LGBTQ students. The isolation and despair LGBTQ youth experience places them at high risk for a variety of other problems including homelessness, substance abuse, and suicide (Ryan and Futterman 1998). One study found that LGBTQ teens were over four times more likely than their peers to attempt suicide (Massachusetts Dept. of Ed. 2009).

LGBTQ youth, just like heterosexual teens, must have opportunities for self-affirmation and socialization if they are to develop into healthy adults (Kosciw et al. 2012). Many local, state, and national organizations provide LGBTQ youth with opportunities to connect with other LGBTQ youth and to interact with positive gay adult role models, but locating these programs is often difficult for teens. Many LGBTQ youth are hesitant to ask adults for information about LGBTQ organizations, and in many communities, these organizations are nonexistent.

So where can young people who identify as LGBTQ turn for support, safe space, confidential access to information, and materials that speak to their lives? School and public libraries. Research by Linda B. Alexander and Sarah D. Miselis shows that the library is “the most important information source” for LGBTQ people (2007, 45). Library resources can provide self-

affirmation, offer characters with which to identify, and decrease the feeling of alienation (Rauch 2010). Additionally, studies show that “when a young lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning (LGBTQ) teen knows there is an affirming teacher, school nurse, clergy member or parent they can trust, they are much more likely to turn to them for help when they are bullied or depressed” (GLSEN 2010).

The mission of the school library is “to ensure that students and staff are effective users of ideas and information” (AASL 2009, 8). This mission can be interpreted narrowly to mean school libraries should collect primarily materials that support the classroom curriculum. While the increased national focus on the Common Core and Race to the Top, combined with budget cuts, may seem to justify this stance, research has shown that the “essence of teens’ everyday life information seeking is the gathering of information to facilitate their teen-to-adult maturation process” (Agosto and Hughes-Hassell 2006a, 1394). In a 2011 report, the National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention argues that schools must help youth “recognize and manage their emotions, appreciate the perspectives of others, establish positive goals, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations effectively” (2011, 6). Additionally, many school districts have mission statements that promote multiculturalism and diversity, both in the curriculum and the library (Curwood 2009). Thus, it would seem that to support the full range of teens’ information needs, school libraries must expand their collections beyond curricular-related materials to include resources that address teens’ social, emotional, physical, and sexual needs (Agosto and Hughes-Hassell 2006b). In “Access to Resources and Services in the School Library Media Program: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights,” the ALA Council concurs, stating that school library resources should “include materials that support the intellectual growth, personal development, individual interests, and recreational needs of students” (ALA 2008). As Elisabeth W. Rauch points out in a recent article in *Teacher Librarian*, school “librarians can provide [LGBTQ] materials and even programming with the knowledge that they are doing so out of professional responsibility” (2011, 14).

Unfortunately, few school libraries appear to be providing LGBTQ-themed resources. Less than half (44.1 percent) of the 8,584 students surveyed in the 2011 National School Climate survey reported that they could find information about LGBTQ-related issues in their school library. Students in the South were the least likely to report access to these resources (Kosciw et al. 2011).

How accurate are student perceptions? How well are school libraries providing resources for LGBTQ teens, especially at this critical transitional time in their identity development? Several studies have analyzed public libraries’ holdings of young adult LGBTQ resources (Boon and Howard 2004; Spence 1999; Rothbauer and McKechnie 1999; Stringer-Stanback 2011), yet none have focused on school libraries’ holdings (Clyde and Lobban 2001). The majority of school-library-related articles about LGBTQ issues and resources deal with censorship and policy issues (e.g., Schrader 2009; Storts-Brinks 2010), offer lists of recommended resources (e.g., Clyde and Lobban 2005; Rauch 2010), or provide strategies for making school libraries safe places for LGBTQ teens (e.g., Cuseo 2012; Manfredi 2009; Rauch 2010; Schrader 2007). To address this research gap, we analyzed the library collections of 125 high schools in one Southern U.S. state for the inclusion of LGBTQ-themed books (fiction, nonfiction, and biographies). This article discusses the issues underlying the research, and presents the methodology and results of our analysis. While our study focused on only high schools in one state, the research could easily be replicated in any other state or region using the same methodology.

## Literature Review

### Role of Books in the Lives of LGBTQ Teens

LGBTQ teens are at risk when they can't find materials to help them feel included in their community. Resources can provide self-affirmation, offer characters with which to identify, and decrease the feeling of alienation (Rauch 2011). Citing research by Linda B. Alexander and Sarah D. Miselis (2007), and Hillias J. Martin and James R. Murdock (2007), Elisabeth W. Rauch (2010) concluded that LGBTQ-themed literature provides LGBTQ teens with the opportunity to understand what it means to be queer, to learn gay social norms, to vicariously experience the coming out process, to know they are not alone, to connect with others like them, to find positive role models, and, perhaps most importantly, to affirm the fact that they are normal.

Annemarie Vaccaro, Gerri August, and Megan S. Kennedy (2012) have argued that when LGBTQ youth see themselves reflected positively in literature they feel a sense of belonging and inclusion. Alternatively, feelings of invisibility can occur in the absence of positive LGBTQ images. In addition to a lack of positive LGBTQ characters in literature, a lack of LGBTQ-themed books sends a message to youth that it is not okay to be gay, bisexual, transgender, or lesbian. These teens may have access only to literature that reinforces heterosexism and traditional gender stereotypes, sending additional messages that the teens' feelings are wrong. "Sometimes books can be the only safe place to learn about LGBT [Q] issues or to find role models" (2012, 19). To illustrate this point, Vaccaro, August, and Kennedy introduced "Laurie," who struggled with her same-sex feelings and had no one to talk to. She turned to her librarian for support and read everything the librarian gave her.

Having access to books with LGBT [Q] characters and positive LGBT [Q] messages was *invaluable* [emphasis added] to Laurie's safety and identity development. The stories helped her learn that she was not alone in her same-sex feelings...These fictional characters helped her persist in a home and school environment where she never fit in. In books, however, she always felt affirmed and safe (2012, 130).

Quality LGBTQ-themed literature can have a positive impact on the entire school community, not just teenagers with same-sex orientation. By collecting tales of friendship, companionship, and romance, school librarians can "help to create a more complete portrait of the life of an LGBT [Q] teenager" (Manfredi 2009, 28). Angie Manfredi has argued that familiarity with LGBTQ-themed literature can help all teens understand what it means to have gay friends, family members, classmates, peers, colleagues, and acquaintances. She outlined a process called "advocating and integrating" (2009, 8), in which school librarians do not just add LGBTQ-themed titles to the collection, but actively promote them by featuring them on reading lists, including them in displays, booktalking them, recommending them to teachers for inclusion in the curriculum, and including them in library-sponsored book clubs.

### Public Libraries' Holdings of LGBTQ Young Adult Books

A number of studies have looked at public libraries' holdings of LGBTQ young adult fiction and nonfiction. In 1999 Alex Spence checked a list of ninety-nine young adult novels with LGBTQ content recommended by Christine Jenkins (1993, 1998) against the holdings of ten U.S. and nine Canadian urban public library systems' Online Public Access Catalogs (OPACs). The

holdings varied across the libraries with some having substantial collections and others having only a few of the titles. His findings were supported by Paulette M. Rothbauer and Lynne E. F. McKechnie (1999) who used a random sample of forty titles from the same authoritative source to check the holdings of forty large- and medium-sized Canadian public libraries. The findings of their study showed that access to gay and lesbian fiction for young adults in Canadian public libraries was somewhat limited and inconsistent, even when the size of the library was considered. Additionally, more recent titles that presented the theme of homosexuality in a positive way were no more likely to be held than older titles that often portray negative stereotypes.

In 2004 Michele H. Boon and Vivian Howard published an article looking at the availability of thirty-five recent LGBTQ fiction books for teens compared to availability of a control group of randomly selected non-LGBTQ young adult fiction titles in nine Canadian public libraries. The randomly-selected titles were held in much greater quantities than LGBTQ titles. For example, a copy of a randomly-selected title without LGBTQ content was approximately 70 percent more likely to be purchased by these libraries than a copy of a title with LGBTQ content.

Shifting the focus to nonfiction, Kynita Stringer-Stanback (2011) examined the holdings of the public libraries in five southeastern U.S. states; she looked for availability of twenty-three young adult nonfiction titles, a group compiled from literary-award winners. She hypothesized that counties with anti-discrimination ordinances would be more likely to have young adult LGBTQ nonfiction materials in their libraries. She found that only 25 percent of the counties examined held 50 percent or more of the titles, and that the number of titles held was not related to whether the county had an anti-discrimination ordinance. While her findings did not validate her hypothesis, they did show that the public libraries in the more demographically diverse counties had more LGBTQ titles.

## Current Study

### Sample

The sample included 125 high schools, or roughly 28 percent of the public high schools in one Southern state in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> The state is described as in political transition. President Obama narrowly won the state in 2008, and Democrats hold eight of the state's thirteen Congressional districts. Thirty-three of the state's one hundred counties are considered to be "blue" counties. Although the state, like all Southern states, has a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage, the state is considered to be relatively moderate on social issues. For example, many municipalities and private businesses in the state provide benefits to domestic partners. In the 2010–2011 school year the state adopted a comprehensive reproductive health and safety program that promotes abstinence as the best method for avoiding pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), but also teaches about contraception, safe sex, and healthy relationships, effectively ending a decade-long policy of abstinence-only sex education.

The state's Department of Public Instruction divides the state into eight (unequal) geographic regions. For inclusion in the study, we selected every third school on a list of schools in each region, ensuring that our sample would equally represent all of the geographic regions of the

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<sup>1</sup> The sources of information included in this paragraph about the state are not cited because the authors do not wish to identify the state. The corresponding author may be contacted with questions or to provide further information.

state. If a school library's OPAC could not be searched remotely (or the school did not have an OPAC), we selected another school from the same region, ensuring that the sample still contained the same number of schools in the state and representation from each region.

## Methodology

After the sample was identified, we searched the OPAC of each of the 125 high school libraries to determine the number of LGBTQ-themed fiction, nonfiction, and biographies held. To identify the titles, we used the Sears (2010) subject headings: "homosexuality," "gay men," "lesbians," and "transsexualism." For each title found, we recorded (on a spreadsheet) the author, title, and copyright date.

We also checked for the inclusion of a core collection of highly recommended LGBTQ-themed literature as other researchers (Boon and Howard 2004; Spence 1999; Rothbauer and McKenchnie 1999; Stringer-Stanback 2011) had in their studies of public library holdings. The core collection was identified using *Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Teen Literature: A Guide to Reading Interests* by Carlisle K. Webber (2010). This volume was selected based on reviews in *School Library Journal*, *Young Adult Library Services*, and *Booklist* that described it as:

- "A sound purchase for public libraries but especially useful for high-school librarians" (Welton 2010, 74);
- "A welcome guide for librarians who want to diversify their collections with current materials" (Evans 2010, 112);
- A "well-written and relevant" resource that provides "core lists of five, ten, and fifteen recommended titles that will quickly round out collections" (Thogersen 2010, 42).

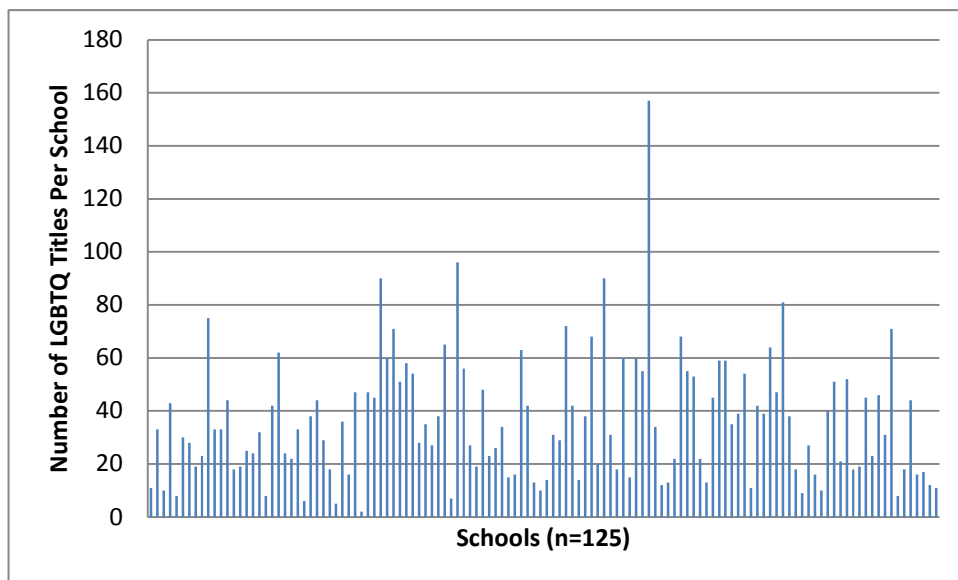
Webber's guide discusses the importance of selecting books that present positive and accurate portrayals of the LGBTQ community, and the book provides a recommended list of fifteen LGBTQ young adult fiction titles and six nonfiction titles that she believes every high school library should collect. The titles include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning themes or content. By searching the library OPACs, we determined which of these titles and how many copies of each title the school libraries in the sample currently hold.

For each school in our sample we also recorded the size of the school's student body, as well as the number of books in the library collection. This data was gathered from the Department of Public Instruction's website.

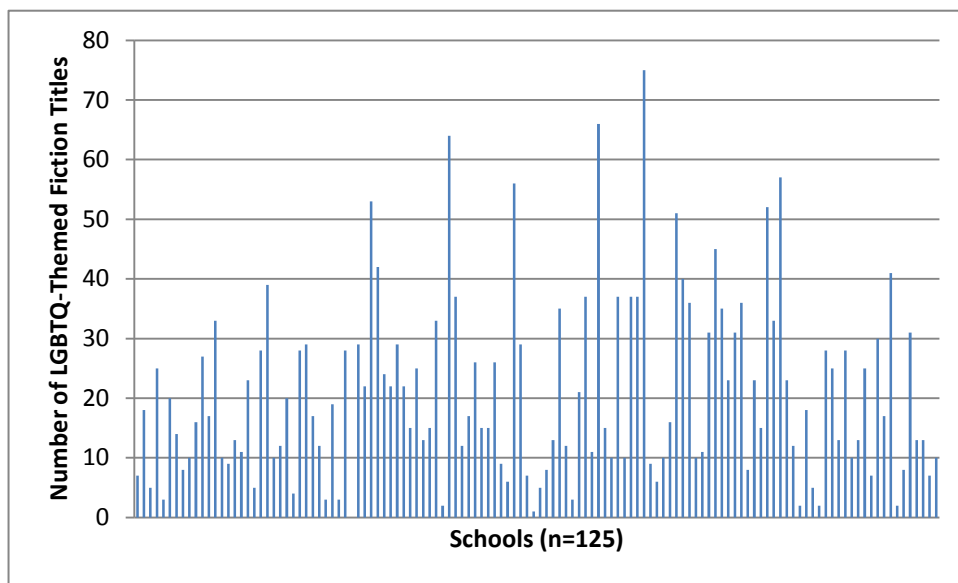
## Findings

### Number of LGBTQ-Themed Books in the School Library Collections

As figure 1 shows, the number of LGBTQ-themed fiction and nonfiction (including biographies) per school ranged from 1 to 157. Half of the schools (50 percent) held fewer than 31 titles; only 22 percent of the schools held more than 50 titles. The average number of titles held was 35.7. Across the sample, LGBTQ-themed titles made up an average of 0.4% of each library's total collection. Five outliers were identified. LGBTQ-themed titles made up 1.7, 3.9, 0.92, 1.4, and 2.3 percent of their collections. Three of the outliers serve small nontraditional high schools. The other two are located in communities that are considered to be liberal: one in a large metropolitan area, the other in a small university town.

**Figure 1: Number of LGBTQ-themed titles per school.**

As a whole, the schools collected more LGBTQ-themed fiction titles (2,616) than nonfiction (1,383) and biographies (285) combined. However, as figure 2 shows, while one school held 76 different LGBTQ-themed novels, another held none. Only 6.4 percent, or 8, of the schools had 50 or more LGBTQ-themed fiction titles in their collections. The average number of titles held was 20.8.

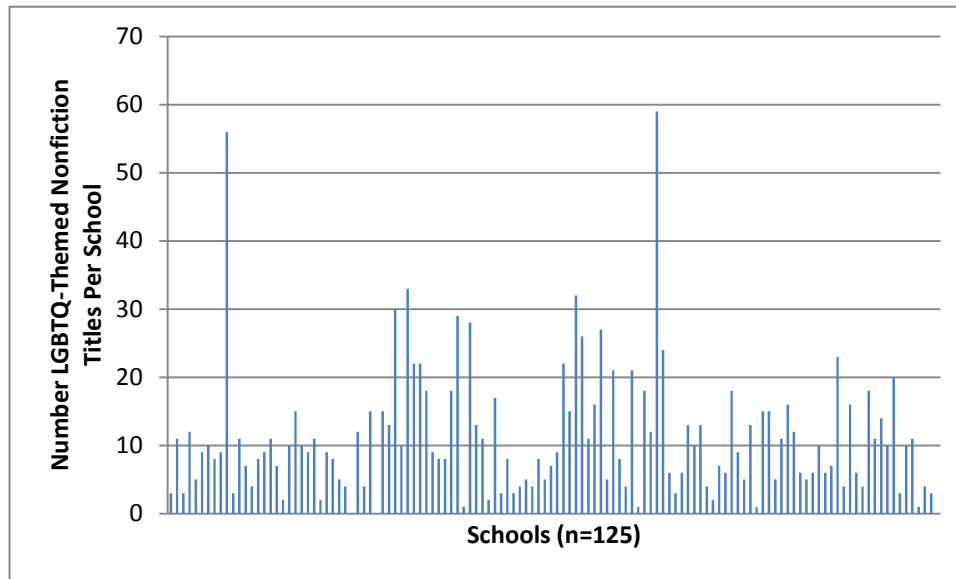
**Figure 2. Number of LGBTQ-themed fiction per school.**

Figures 3 and 4 show the number of LGBTQ-themed nonfiction titles and biographies held by each school. Of the schools studied, 52 percent held fewer than 10 LGBTQ-themed nonfiction titles, while 3 of the schools had no LGBTQ-themed nonfiction. Only 17 schools, or 13.6 percent, held 20 or more LGBTQ-themed nonfiction titles in their collection. The average number of titles held was 11.1.

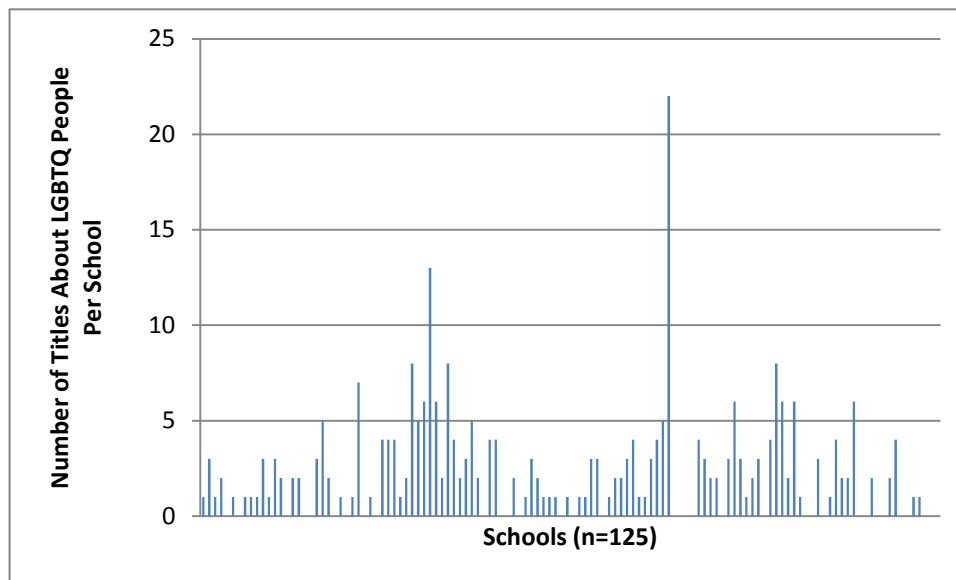
Of the schools studied, 109 (87.2 percent) had fewer than 5 biographies with subject headings indicating that they were about LGBTQ individuals, with over one-fourth (27.2 percent) holding

none. Only 2 schools had more than 10 LGBTQ biographies. The average number of titles held was 2.

**Figure 3: Number of LGBTQ-themed nonfiction titles per school.**



**Figure 4: Number of titles about LGBTQ people per school.**



## Number of Recommended Core Collection Titles

As discussed above, we also checked each OPAC for the inclusion of a core collection of highly recommended LGBTQ-related fiction and nonfiction, identified in Webber's *Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Teen Literature*.

The majority of the schools (65.3 percent) held fewer than 5 of the fiction titles. Almost one-fifth (19.3 percent) held none of the novels. Only 5.3 percent, or 7 schools, had more than 10 of the titles in their collections. As shown in table 1, the title that was held by the most schools (59.2 percent) was *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. The title that was held the least was *Down to the Bone*, a title that features a Cuban American lesbian teen.



**Table 1: Recommended LGBTQ young adult fiction held by the schools.**

Title	Recommended*	Number and Percentage of Schools that Held the Title
Chbosky, Stephen. <i>The Perks of Being a Wallflower</i> (1999)	Webber, YALSA BBYA, Senior High Core Collection	74 (59.2%)
Wittlinger, Ellen. <i>Hard Love</i> (1999)	Webber, Lambda Literary Award, Printz Award, SLJ Best Books, YALSA BBYA, Senior High Core Collection	64 (51.2%)
Freyman-Weyr, Garret. <i>My Heartbeat</i> (2002)	Webber, Printz Award, SLJ Best Books, YALSA BBYA, Senior High Core Collection	61 (48.8%)
Garden, Nancy. <i>Annie on My Mind</i> (1982, 1991, 1992, 2007)	Webber, YALSA BBYA, Senior High Core Collection	42 (33.6%)
Hartinger, Brent. <i>Geography Club</i> (2003)	Webber, Lambda Literary Award, Senior High Core Collection	35 (28.0%)
Levithan, David. <i>Boy Meets Boy</i> (2005)	Webber, Lambda Literary Award, YALSA BBYA	34 (27.2%)
Peters, Julie Ann. <i>Luna</i> (2004)	Webber, Rainbow List, Senior High Core Collection	34 (27.2%)
Bauer, Marion Dane. <i>Am I Blue? Coming Out from the Silence</i> (1994)	Webber, Lambda Literary Award, YALSA BBYA, Senior High Core Collection	29 (23.2%)
Sanchez, Alex. <i>Rainbow Boys</i> (2001)	Webber, Lambda Literary Award, YALSA BBYA, Senior High Core Collection	28 (22.4%)
Ryan, Sara. <i>Empress of the World</i> (2001)	Webber, Lambda Literary Award, YALSA BBYA	26 (20.8%)
St. James, James. <i>Freak Show</i> (2007)	Webber, Rainbow List, Lambda Literary Award, YALSA BBYA, SLJ Best Books	25 (20.0%)
Howe, James. <i>The Misfits</i> (2001)	Webber	19 (15.2%)
Burd, Nick. <i>The Vast Fields of Ordinary</i> (2009)	Webber, Rainbow List, Lambda Literary	19 (15.2%)

	Award, Stonewall Award	
Wittlinger, Ellen. <i>Parrotfish</i> (2007)	Webber, Lambda Literary Award, Senior High Core Collection	15 (12.0%)
Dole, Mayra Lazara. <i>Down to the Bone</i> (2008)	Webber, Rainbow List, Senior High Core Collection	12 (9.6%)

\*This is an abbreviated list of best book reading lists and award lists on which these titles have appeared.

As table 2 shows, even fewer of the schools held the recommended nonfiction young adult titles. *Gay America: Struggle for Equality*, which highlights the history of gays and lesbians in the U.S., was the most frequently held title, and it was collected by 12 percent of the schools. Only 6 of the schools appeared to hold any of the recommended titles that focused on issues, such as coming out or practicing safe sex, that are of concern to LGBTQ teens.

**Table 2. Recommended LGBTQ young adult nonfiction held by the schools.**

Title	Number and Percentage of Schools that Held the Title
Alsenas, Linas. <i>Gay America: Struggle for Equality</i> (2008)	15 (12.0%)
Levithan, David, and Billy Merrell, eds. <i>The Full Spectrum: A New Generation of Writing about Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, and Other Identities</i> (2006)	9 (7.2%)
Huegel, Kelly. <i>GLBTQ: The Survival Guide for Queer and Questioning Teens</i> (2003)	6 (4.8%)
Marcus, Eric. <i>Is It a Choice? Answers to the Most Frequently Asked Questions about Gay and Lesbian People</i> (1993, 1999, 2005)	6 (4.8%)
St. Stephen's Community House. <i>The Little Black Book for Guys: Guys Talk About Sex</i> (2008)	0
St. Stephen's Community House. <i>The Little Black Book for Girlz: A Book on Healthy Sexuality</i> (2006)	0

## Discussion

It appears that the high school librarians in the public schools we studied are currently under-collecting LGBTQ-themed young adult literature. This finding is consistent with investigations of public library holdings and supports the perceptions of students as reported in the 2011 School Climate Survey. Although LGBTQ teens are estimated to make up 5.9 percent of the students in American high schools (Massachusetts Dept. of Ed. 2009), the number of LGBTQ-themed fiction, nonfiction, and biographies held by these school libraries was minimal. 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.

A lack of LGBTQ-themed titles is not only potentially damaging to LGBTQ teens, but to all teens. As Rauch points out, “access to stories with characters who may be like his/her classmates or friends can help a teen reader be more empathetic and understanding as s/he experiences vicariously the struggles and confusion many GLBTQ teens go through” (2010, 217). Lack of

understanding and empathy can lead to insensitivity, bullying, and harassment, or even physical abuse.

Further research is needed to understand school librarians' attitudes toward the role of school libraries in providing LGBTQ literature, as well as school librarians' knowledge of the potential this literature has to make a difference in the lives of LGBTQ teens and in the overall climate of their schools.

Contrary to our expectations, no trends in collection development among school districts or regions of the state were identifiable, suggesting that district- or state-level selection policies were not at play in encouraging or preventing these school librarians from purchasing LGBTQ-themed titles. The high school that held 157 titles, for example, was in the same school district (in a "blue" region of the state) and served the same demographic as the high school that had only 34 titles. Similarly, one school library in a "red" region of the state held 75 titles while the school libraries in the surrounding "red" counties held on average only 27 titles. This finding was in contrast to Stringer-Stanback's (2011) finding that public libraries in more demographically diverse counties in Florida made more LGBTQ material available to their constituents.

Some reasons for a conservative approach to collection development for LGBTQ teens may include individual librarians' attitudes, fear of challenges, or a perceived anti-gay culture in the school and/or neighborhood surrounding the school. As Megan Schliesman (2009) explained, it is not uncommon for educators' personal responses to the issues raised in LGBTQ-themed literature, as well as real or perceived pressure from school administrators or the community, to interfere with the inclusion of LGBTQ titles in schools. Rather than risk the negative publicity that materials challenges bring, some school librarians may choose not to promote, or even to collect, LGBTQ-themed literature. Rauch has pointed out that this failure is unacceptable, stating "even if you or others in your community do not agree with a particular lifestyle, the materials about that lifestyle cannot be excluded from the library's collection" (2010, 217). Schliesman agreed:

...one of the first steps every educator can take is to acknowledge that books with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning characters aren't about "the other," they're about us—all of us. They're about teens walking down the hallways of every high school, and about the people walking down the streets of every community. They're about the world every teen, regardless of his or her sexuality, inhabits, and literature is one way to challenge readers to think critically about that world and their place in it. (2009, 39)

Few of the schools held the novels recommended by Webber, even though most of the titles were also featured on other lists of recommended LGBTQ titles, such as ALA's Rainbow List or had received awards such as the Lambda Literary Award and the Stonewall Book Award. Many of the titles had also appeared on lists that do not specifically focus on LGBTQ resources, such as YALSA's Best Books for Young Adults and *SLJ*'s Best Books for Youth, or were recommended in EBSCO's Senior High Core Collection (table 1).

Winning the Printz Award seemed to be the only recognition that impacted the rate with which these titles were collected. *Hard Love* (Wittlinger 1999) and *My Heartbeat* (Freyman-Weyr 2002), both Printz Award winners, were held by 51.2 percent and 48.8 percent, respectively, of the libraries studied. Curious to see what were the most frequently collected LGBTQ titles, we generated a list of the top ten LGBTQ titles held by the libraries (see table 3).

Interviews with librarians at the schools studied would help identify how they make selection decisions about which LGBTQ novels to purchase, explore what reviewing tools they use, gauge their ability to evaluate LGBTQ-themed literature, and determine how (and whether) they involve LGBTQ teens in the process. Related questions are: Have these school librarians purposely excluded the titles recommended by Webber? If so, why?

**Table 3. Top ten LGBTQ fiction titles held by the schools.**

Rank	Author/Title/Year	Number and Percentage of Schools that Held the Title
1	Chbosky, Stephen. <i>The Perks of Being a Wallflower</i> (1999)	74 (59.2%)
2	Wittlinger, Ellen. <i>Hard Love</i> (1999)	64 (51.2%)
3	Freyman-Weyr, Garret. <i>My Heartbeat</i> (2002)	61 (48.8%)
4	Frost, Helen. <i>Keesha's House</i> (2003)	58 (46.4%)
5	Kerr, M. E. <i>Deliver Us from Evie</i> (1994)	56 (44.8%)
6	Plum-Ucci, Carol. <i>What Happened to Lani Garver</i> (2002)	53 (42.4%)
7	Sones, Sonya. <i>One of Those Hideous Books Where the Mother Dies</i> (2004)	49 (39.2%)
8	Garden, Nancy. <i>Annie on My Mind</i> (1982, 1991, 1992, 2007)	42 (33.6%)
9	Homes, A. M. <i>Jack</i> (1989)	38 (30.4%)
10T	Garden, Nancy. <i>The Year They Burned the Books</i> (1999)	37 (29.6%)
10T	Woodson, Jacqueline. <i>From the Notebooks of Melanin Sun</i> (1995)	37 (29.6%)

Across the sample, the school librarians seemed to be under-collecting LGBTQ-themed nonfiction and biography. Few of the school libraries contained any of the nonfiction titles recommended by Webber. The nonfiction collections appeared to consist primarily of curriculum-related titles that might be used for assignments in history (e.g., *The Other Victims: First-Person Stories of Non-Jews Persecuted by the Nazis* by Ina R. Friedman, 1990) or social studies (e.g., *Homosexuality: Opposing Viewpoints* edited by Auriana Ojeda, 2004). Noticeable was the absence of nonfiction titles focused specifically on LGBTQ issues such as sexual health, bullying, or gay rights. Equally notable was the lack of biographies about LGBTQ individuals.

Some might argue that the primary purpose of the school library is to support the school curriculum; therefore, this focus is appropriate and to be expected. However, as discussed earlier, the state has adopted a comprehensive reproductive health and safety program that teaches about contraception, safe sex, and healthy relationships; thus, nonfiction resources that deal with these topics should be provided for all teens whether they self-identify as homosexual or heterosexual. Additionally, Article V of the *Library Bill of Rights* “mandates that library services, materials, and programs be available to all members of the community the library serves, without regard to sex, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation. This includes providing youth with comprehensive sex education literature” (ALA 2008a, 2008b). This provision is especially important for teens with questions about their identities or sexual orientation because they often lack community role models and honest perspectives on what it means to be homosexual. As nonfiction books may be one of the few safe places for LGBTQ youth to “meet” other LGBTQ individuals or to get accurate, supportive, unbiased information about their sexuality (Stringer-

Stanback 2011; Vaccaro, August, and Kennedy 2012), it is important to investigate how well school librarians understand the everyday life-information needs of LGBTQ teens, and the responsibility of the library to support the sex education curriculum in their schools. Since the comprehensive sex education policy was adopted only in the 2010–2011 school year, reexamining these library collections in two to four years would be useful to see if the nonfiction collections have changed in response to the policy.

Finally, in our study we noticed similar problems with subject headings that had been identified by previous studies (Boon and Howard 2004; Clyde and Lobban 2001). In many instances, books that clearly contained LGBTQ content or themes had not been assigned subject headings such as “homosexuality,” “gay,” or “lesbian.” This was the case for *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (Chbosky 1999) and *Hard Love* (Wittlinger 1999), as well as other titles. Additionally, the summaries of these books included in the libraries’ OPACs often did not contain any LGBTQ-related words either, also making it impossible to retrieve the titles using a keyword search. In other instances, we noticed the inappropriate assignment of LGBTQ-related subject headings. We believe this is the case for the book *Stained* (Jacobson 2005), which is about the sexual abuse of a teen boy by a Roman Catholic priest. The *Booklist* review (Engberg 2005) states: “The suggestion that Gabe is gay and that his relationship with Father Warren was partly consensual particularly begs further explanation.” As Laurel A. Clyde and Marjorie Lobban note, the OPAC can be a powerful tool to bring together readers and books, but “the failure to assign a subject heading such as Homosexuality—Fiction may mean that a book never connects with a potential reader” (2001, 27). The reverse is also true; an inappropriate subject heading assigned to a book may give LGBTQ teens the message that their sexuality is inherently wrong, or that they are deserving of the abuse they may experience. An analysis of the cataloging practices of school librarians would provide a picture of the strategies school librarians are using to increase or restrict access to teens wanting LGBTQ-themed literature.

## Conclusions

While schools should be safe and welcoming places for all teenagers, many schools do not acknowledge the unique issues that LGBTQ students face. LGBTQ teenagers are marginalized, discriminated, and even bullied on a day-to-day basis. School librarians are in a position to support LGBTQ teens by collecting and promoting young adult literature that portrays positive, realistic images of the LGBTQ community; however, the results of this study suggest that many school librarians are failing to do so. While some have developed sizable collections of LGBTQ fiction and nonfiction, the majority in the sample studied have not. A teen’s access to fiction and nonfiction with LGBTQ content appears to differ considerably depending on each individual school librarian’s collection-development practices.

The most recent U.S. Census data shows “that LGBTQ people live in *all* communities across the United States” (Rauch 2010, 216). School libraries, like public and academic libraries, are obligated to support the First Amendment rights of all library users “regardless of sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression” (ALA 2008c). As Terry L. Norton and Jonathan W. Vare have argued, books “may help subvert the culture of silence...and offer a supportive framework for self-understanding by gay and lesbian teens” (2004, 69).

Including LGBTQ-themed literature in the school library can also open a world of understanding and tolerance to other students, to teachers, to administrators, and even to the broader community, increasing the likelihood that more members of the school community will become allies and advocates for LGBTQ teens. The results of the 2001 School Climate Survey found that

teens who attended schools with access to resources that dealt with LGBTQ-issues, inclusive curriculums that included positive representations of LGBTQ people, and supportive staff felt safer, missed fewer days, and reported fewer incidences of verbal abuse and harassment (Kosciw et al. 2012).

We recognize that barriers to collecting LGBTQ-themed literature exist for school librarians. We also recognize that surmounting these barriers is difficult. Doing so takes “honesty, courage, and fortitude” (Schliesman 2009, 39). Surmounting these barriers also requires a comprehensive collection-development policy that refers to the *Library Bill of Rights*, includes statements such as, “supporting self-concept” or “supporting identity development,” and a reconsideration policy/procedure. As Schliesman notes, “in the end there are no guarantees, but if failure isn’t an option, then the response must be to try to advocate for including books that reflect the LGBTQ experience” (2009, 39). We believe it is time for school librarians to adopt “a failure is not an option” stance, to open their library shelves to the LGBTQ experience, and to provide “a lifeline to the teenagers who need affirmation and support in their lives most” (Manfredi 2009, 31).

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