

“In all areas, I cater to the majority”: An investigation of LGBT+ provision in school libraries from the librarian’s perspective

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Snapshot

This study looks at LGBT+ provision in school libraries from the perspectives of librarians, 15 years after Section 28 was abolished, a piece of legislation which limited promotion of homosexuality in local authorities in the UK. It aims to assess the awareness and knowledge of LGBT+ issues amongst school librarians, to explore LGBT+ provision in school libraries, librarian’s self-perception of this provision and how proactive school librarians are on this topic.

Introduction

Section 28 was a piece of UK legislation that actively combatted the ‘promotion of homosexuality’ within local authorities. While it was abolished in 2003 in England and Wales, it ascertained “a local authority shall not - intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality; promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship” (HM Government, 1988). As a result, schools actively avoided engaging with LGBT+ (i.e., Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and other sexual orientations and gender identities outside of the cis-heteronormative) topics. The restrictive handling of sexuality or gender identity, alongside the common belief that there would be legal consequences should staff offer any LGBT+ provision, had a significant impact on LGBT+ pupil (Burton, 1995; Ellis & High, 2004; Walker & Bates, 2015). However, there has been little examination of the influence and ongoing ramifications of this legislation upon school libraries in the UK, 15 years since the abolition of Section 28. As LGBT+ rights become enshrined in UK law, it is important to examine school library LGBT+ provision in more detail.

Research Question

This study will address this lack of research by exploring school librarians’ perceptions and engagement with LGBT+ issues. The research question that this study seeks to address is:

- How do school librarians perceive that they are addressing LGBT+ provision in school libraries?”

In answering this question, this study will employ a descriptive survey method to explore awareness and knowledge of LGBT+ issues amongst school librarians, including awareness of LGBT+ issues and provision in school libraries. This research will expand Walker and Bates (2015), and Wright (2007) studies. While these studies were useful, geographic and methodological limitations meant an update was necessary.

Literature Review

Law

UK legislation has seen vast changes in protection for LGBT+ people since the abolition of Section 28. These include: The Employment Equality Regulations (2003); Civil Partnership Act (2004); Gender Recognition Act (2004); changes to The Criminal Justice Act (2005); The Criminal Justice and Immigration Act (2008); The Equality Act (2010) and The Marriage Act (2013). The shift in social acceptance of the LGBT+ community and their needs, reflected by law, means that some of the issues facing provision in past research may have been alleviated.

Need for LGBT+ Provision in School Libraries

Role of the school library in supporting LGBT+ pupils

Researchers (Chapman, 2007; Walker & Bates, 2015; Wright, 2007) have consistently asserted that LGBT+ users need better provision across the library spectrum because library support benefits LGBT+ users in a number of ways. For some, the provision of LGBT+ materials support users' identity formation, allowing them to read materials that reflect them and their experiences, proof

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they are not alone (Chapman, 2007; Whelan, 2006; Hughes-Hassell & Hinckley, 2001; Alexander and Miselis, 2006). Others found that LGBT+ materials support users' health and well-being and helped with the coming out process. Having positive LGBT+ resources helped with telling friends/family about their sexuality or could be given directly to friends and family to read. (Currant, 2002; Mehra & Braquet, 2006; Wright, 2007).

LGBT+ resources also help to fight prejudice and homophobia within education institutions (Clyde & Lobban, 2001; Forrest, 2000). Research demonstrates that LGBT+ provision, support or policies create a healthier school environment (Black, Fedewa, & Gonzalez, 2012), which, in turn, decreases negative outcomes for LGBT+ pupils, such as truancy, declining school performance, substance abuse, suicide and prostitution (Birkett, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009; Elias, et al, 1992; Palmer, Kull, & Greytak, 2013; Rivers, 2000; Savin-Williams, 1994). LGBT+ provision also allows exposure to resources for users outwith the LGBT+ community allowing for increased empathy, acceptance and understanding of LGBT+ issues (Blackburn & Clark, 2009; Clyde & Lobban, 2001). In turn, this may make students more inclined to read or use the library space as a 'safe space' (Wexelbaum, 2017).

Role of the librarian in supporting LGBT+ pupils

There has been considerably less attention paid to the role of the librarian in supporting LGBT+ pupils. Several organisations outline the 'role' of a librarian, including both pastoral and academic elements (ALA, 2018; CILIP, 2012; SLA, 2016) but assessment of whether librarians see the library as a 'safe space' for LGBT+ pupils is lacking. Heterosexism in schools (Jensen, 2004) may additionally create an environment where librarians are unaware of LGBT+ demand,

assuming the users must be heterosexual or satisfied with existing heteronormative service (Alexander & Miselis, 2007). Similarly, Walker and Bates (2015) found significant inconsistencies between the opinions of school librarians and the wishes of LGBT+ users, demonstrating clear disparity between some librarians' confidence in their service and their understanding of LGBT+ teenagers' needs. At the same time Wright (2007) suggested that, although LGBT+ provision can be improved by librarians themselves, many areas of influence are beyond the librarian's control.

Poor provision

Materials and resources

Beyond exploring the positive role that school libraries and librarians can play in supporting LGBT+ pupils, research also highlights several areas that still require improvement. These include quantity and range of library resources, both in terms of ages targeted and sexual orientations/gender identities covered (Boon & Howard, 2004; Bridge, 2010; Clyde, 2003; Wright, 2007). McNicol (2005a) concluded that homosexuality was not too controversial for school libraries, which could alter the amount of 'adult' texts that could then be included into school stock.

At the same time, researchers (Walker & Bates, 2015; Wright, 2007). have demonstrated a lack of suitable LGBT+ publications. At the time of Section 28's abolition, Clyde (2003) identified a lack of materials addressing bisexual and transgender issues. Researchers (Boon & Howard, 2004; Bridge, 2010; Wright, 2007) have also demonstrated that LGBT+ materials do not appear on major publication lists and often do not contain any indicator of their LGBT+ content if they do. There is also a lack of materials in alternative formats, including easy-readers, audio and online materials (Chapman, 2007). While most schools do have some LGBT+ items in their collection, this was found to be small and insufficient (Wright, 2007). These issues may be accentuated by the inclusion of new terminology in the LGBT+ spectrum such as asexuality, non-binary, and genderqueer.

Cataloguing and organisation

How resources appear within a library catalogue can also be detrimental to access. Unhelpful subject indexing, including dated language and existing bias, was found to be a problem in LGBT+ provision (Bates & Rowley, 2011; Mehra & Braquet, 2006; Wright, 2007). The implication was that, if used well, appropriate indexing and keywords would substantially improve LGBT+ provision and access. Wright (2007) found the majority of school librarians did use keywords in their catalogue but that these were often inconsistent or used outdated terminology such as "homosexuality." Collection organisation, the idea of separate housing for LGBT+ collections, has also been underexplored in school libraries whether this is due to space, intention or other motivations. The imposition of filters means that access to LGBT+ online resources has long been an issue in school libraries (Bridge, 2010; Wright, 2007).

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Promotion and outreach

How LGBT+ resources are utilised and promoted in school libraries is an equally important aspect of provision. Research has identified limited promotion of LGBT+ services and resources, either

in the form of displays or promotion of books (Bridge, 2010; Clyde, 2003; Mehra & Braquet, 2006; Wright, 2007). Lack of training in LGBT+ issues was also an issue (Bridge, 2010; Wright, 2007). While initiatives have since been established to address this, it remains to be seen whether librarian awareness has improved (CILIP, 2011; Clyde, 2003; Government Equalities Office, 2018). Brett (1992) found that a lack of policy can lead to the provision-by-demand method, which may be unarticulated and, consequently, unprovided for in the case of LGBT+ users. It is also important to recognise that while face-to-face interactions may be cited as a solution by librarians for all users, research has found that LGBT+ users may not want interactive help, seeking privacy above potential assistance (Walker & Bates, 2015).

Neutrality

The concept of neutrality remains a final challenge for LGBT+ provision in school libraries. When historically disadvantaged groups are faced with 'neutral' service, the existing disadvantage remains to be overcome. Therefore, if school librarians are acting in a 'neutral' manner when considering LGBT+ provision, this will translate into poor provision for LGBT+ pupils. There has been substantial debate around the idea of a neutral professional; as Lewis summarises "neutrality" no longer means "impartiality" or "objectivity," but too often lapses into what might be better termed "indifference." (Lewis, 2008). The debate ranges from what neutrality actually looks like, to whether neutrality is indeed a positive of the information profession (Lewis, 2008; Burton, 1995; Good, 2006; McMenemy, 2007; Jensen, 2006).

There are several reasons the library profession has aligned itself with neutrality, one of which is the UK's Ethical Framework (CILIP, 2004), which expects librarians to balance the needs of users and employers, whilst also stating the need for "Impartiality, and avoidance of inappropriate bias, in acquiring and evaluating information and in mediating it to other information users" (CILIP, 2004). LGBT+ provision therefore can be directly impacted by a librarian's personal interpretation of the framework. Motivations for neutrality could also be impacted by fear of complaint or reprimand from superiors (Wright, 2007).

Methodology

Research Methods and Data Collection

A descriptive survey method was used to collect data. This method was chosen because it allows for "Open-ended questions [which] allow for a greater variety of responses from participants" (Jackson, 2009), something necessary for examination of librarians' perspectives. The specific questionnaire instrument employed closed, multiple choice, Likert scale and open questions. Open questions asked respondents about various aspects of LGBT+ provision in their school library (see Appendix B). Participant demographics were also collected.

Questions were developed through a careful analysis of existing literature as well as gaps in this body of research. The survey was piloted thoroughly before and after input into the online survey tool before being released to the wider audience. An online questionnaire was chosen

because it meant that participants who disagreed with any aspects of the questionnaire could self-censor and remove themselves from the data set.

The questionnaire link was disseminated via email to ensure a large pool of respondents. The link was kept open for 70 days. A reminder email was sent to the mailing list on which the questionnaire was distributed after 14 days to encourage librarians to fill in the questionnaire.

Participants

This study's demographic was school librarians in the UK, the inclusion criteria means this includes anyone who works in a school library. The questionnaire was disseminated on the School Library Network email list, which is a British email discussion list that focuses on school libraries. The researcher also approached personal connections who may not have been on the mailing list.

Out of 115 librarians who began the survey, 75 respondents completed the survey fully. Demographics from all 115 librarians are included to illustrate the breadth of respondents, who worked at different levels of management, in differing team sizes, in different sized schools. As no question was obligatory, respondent numbers fluctuate between each question. Most respondents were female (93%) with only 7% indicating that they were male. The age of respondents was far more varied with most falling into the 40-55 age range (40%). 29% of respondents were aged between 25 and 39, and another 29% were aged between 56 and 65. In contrast, only 6% of respondents indicated that they were LGBT, with most indicating that they were heterosexual (43%) or failing to provide a response (47%)

The type of school represented was split largely between three categories; 35% worked in an academy, 31% worked in a state school and 30% worked in an independent school, beyond this colleges and faith schools were mentioned. These schools were co-educational (80%), female single-sex (16%) and male single-sex (4%). The school populations of these schools included 44% with 1001-1500 pupils, 34% with 501-1000 pupils, 10% with 0-500 pupils and 12% with 1501 or more pupils. Non-fee-paying schools made up (70%) and fee-paying schools made up (30%).

The schools covered a range of Key Stages; 28% covered KS3 and KS4, 23% covered KS5, 8% covered KS2, 6% covered KS1, 5% covered KS0 and 2% responded other. Table 1 detailed which year groups are within which Key Stage, as ages in year groups differ across the UK.

Table 1. School Year Groups.

Age on entry (in years) (sept entry)	English (Year group)	English (Key Stage)	Scottish
4	Reception	Foundation	-
5	Year 1	1	-
6	Year 2	1	-
7	Year 3	1	P3
8	Year 4	2	P4
9	Year 5	2	P5
10	Year 6	2	P6
11	Year 7	3	P7
12	Year 8	3	S1
13	Year 9	3	S2
14	Year 10	4	S3
15	Year 11	4	S4
16	Year 12	5	S5
17	Year 13	5	S6

Data Analysis

Data from these open-ended questions of the questionnaire were coded using a thematic analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method allowed me to surface several key themes found in the data. Data analysis consisted of two stages; in the first round of analysis, I employed an open coding process to establish an initial coding scheme and structure. I then returned to my data to conduct a second round of coding. Through this second round of coding, I consolidated, split and added further coding to refine my initial coding scheme and create the final themes that are presented in this study's findings. During this process, I read each participant's answers carefully to ensure my codes represented each participant's original statement as accurately as possible.

Limitations

The results from this study have a number of limitations. Firstly, these results are limited because they are based on an optional survey disseminated via a limited email chain that did not encompass all UK based school librarians. The use of a mailing list as a dissemination tool limited recruitment to librarians who were subscribed to this resource. The questionnaire was also limited through the reliance on a questionnaire method, which restricted the data that I was able to collect; all 'provision' is perceived, and all data and interpretations rely on the perceptions of the librarians questioned. This method also limited responses to school librarians rather than to users of school libraries. In addition, participants were allowed to partially complete the survey, which led to an unfair weighting of the earlier questions. The survey was not accompanied by extensive follow up conversations to allow for greater understanding of participant responses.

Findings

LGBT+ and the Library

Resources format

The first question was about the format the LGBT+ resources took within their libraries. Figure 1 shows that physical resources were the most popular categories, where 'other' encompasses leaflets, websites and graphic novels.

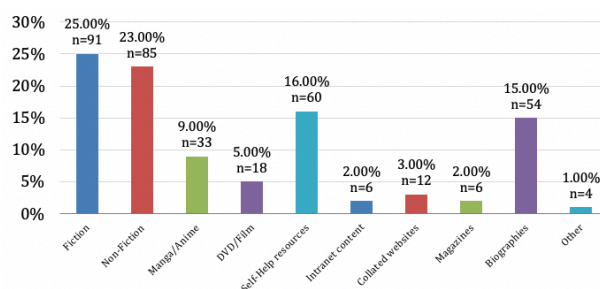


Figure 1. LGBT+ resources used/owned by school librarians in study.

These findings show a reliance on traditional physical formats, which means that LGBT+ access is dependent wholly on the publishing industry and a substantial library budget.

Budget

Fifteen respondents highlighted budget as a limiting factor in their LGBT+ provision. This was either because budget was too low or due to competing priorities. Some respondents mentioned that budget was the reason that intended action, such as purchasing more books, could not be enacted. One participant stated that specialist, LGBT+ books were more expensive. Another specifically attributes an ability to improve stock to changes in their budget:

With a budget that fell by 80% in the last couple of years, we have almost no opportunity to restock any areas of the library

Other respondents had specifically combatted this issue by seeking specific funding for improvement or ringfencing current budget.

Five respondents directly mentioned having a good budget and freedom to use it however they wished. However, responses indicated that a healthy budget did not always equate to increased LGBT+ provision.

Age-appropriateness

In order for librarians to ensure good LGBT+ provision they need to have access to age-appropriate material. Responses indicate that all age ranges are not catered for, as resources are deemed either too old or too young for pupils. One respondent did express wanting more “knowledge of what is available and suitable for a variety of age groups” but the majority of respondents who mentioned age appropriateness shared the opinion that age appropriate LGBT+ resources did not exist for one or more age groups. One admitted feeling nervous that they would get this provision wrong:

With a full range of ages, I am a little nervous about getting the wrong stock.

Respondents defined the most prominent examples of ‘inappropriate’ content as sexual activity and language:

LGBT+ fiction books that are suitable for younger years. It's not the content but sometimes the language that is a concern...I track new teen fiction and try to buy more when the sexual or other content is not too explicit for this age group... books by Juno Dawson for instance, are not appropriate for our age group.

Consensus exists amongst respondents that there is poor availability of LGBT+ resources for all age groups. However, there is disagreement about which age groups are easiest to cater for. A few responses highlighted that KS2/3 is well catered for, whilst others highlighted this age range as the least catered for.

Very little in terms of information books and especially fiction for middle grade (8-12 years old) students. A lack of books on the market appropriate to KS2/3 on the LGBT+ theme. We have a reasonable collection... although mostly geared towards years 7-8.

At the same time, a lack of LGBT+ resources is not always due to availability. Instead, librarians demonstrate that they censor books already within their collections based on how appropriate the librarian feels they are, meaning younger readers would not be allowed access. It is not possible from this research to define what “appropriate” constitutes and what criteria would mean a book was inappropriate.

I tend to place non-fiction LGBT+ resources at the upper school [Years 10-13 years]. I do have some LGBT books in KS5 section

Catalogue

Responses indicated that library catalogues are utilised as tools for LGBT+ provision. Responses mentioned key-wording, tagging or subject indexing to ensure access to LGBT+ resources. Keywords are considered important as they provide independent access to LGBT+ resources. While some respondents had implemented LGBT+ keywords in the catalogue, others had not considered it at all. Few respondents who claimed they keyworded, tagged or subject indexed their LGBT+ resources expanded what terminology they used. When keywords were mentioned, LGBT was one of the most popular terms used:

They can use the catalogue - there are subject entries for: - LGBT fiction, LGBT issues...I have catalogued all LGBT NF books under 306.76 to keep collection together. They are all tagged as LGBT on the catalogue, often with more specific markers like f/f romance or trans protag.

Other respondents grouped their LGBT+ titles with other topics such as well-being, or mental health. Only one respondent explained this choice was to ensure privacy and discretion for those browsing while other respondents did not specify why this was the case.

I have also collated displays and collections on wider themes (such as 'Health and Wellbeing') to make LGBT+ resources available to all but not exclusive. I have also done similar collections with other topics such as mental health, eating disorders etc. In this way students can browse a range of material without necessarily being seen to be looking in a specific LGBT+ collection.

Of the respondents that had included some form of keywording in their catalogue, some recognised this was insufficient without users being trained to use it proficiently:

I'm concerned that if a child didn't know how to keyword search - or know that this was even an option - it would be down to sheer luck that they stumbled across what they might be looking for.

The catalogue was often the only thing cited when asked how students could access LGBT+ resources without interaction with library staff. Few other methods arose for pupils to independently locate LGBT+ resources that would uphold their privacy. Limitations in technology consequently leads back to the discussion about budget and the restrictions therein. Librarians are limited to whichever software they already use, despite existing flaws, unless extra funding can be sourced.

Demand

Demand was cited most often in response to questions about barriers to provision. Responses included the perception that there is no demand or that no one explicitly asks for these resources. This is sometimes extended to say that there are no LGBT+ students at the school who would require such resources, or that they would provide LGBT+ resources if they were requested or asked for.

I'm sure there are other resources I could purchase if asked by students or staff but there's no great need at present. Until there appears to be a requirement this will only expand at the same rate as the other stock. It has never been raised as an issue.

There was the perception by respondents that the demand is adequately met by current provision, either because demand is so low or due to good provision. One respondent indicated that they had collected feedback on their library collection, however it is not known how this feedback was collected or which pupils were asked.

Provision is sufficient and proportional to other areas. Provision can always be improved but feedback from students would indicate that at present they are happy with our collections.

Although there were many that said they would supply resources if asked for it, one respondent wrote:

There's a limited interest in it. We do have pupils of different gender identities who've asked for resources but we're a small school with a small library so don't feel it's a priority.

This idea that there is not 'enough' demand is reflected in the following responses, where priorities have to be considered due to budget:

Also, I cannot afford to buy resources 'in case' a student is of a less commonly identified sexuality... in all areas, I cater to the majority. As a school library it is practically impossible to provide appropriate targeted resources for every type of sub group and specific need.

Display

Display materials were the most commonly mentioned method of LGBT+ provision beyond physical resources. Answers included: wall displays, noticeboard displays, posters, postcards, leaflets and signage. One mentioned having a "rainbow flag on my desk!" as a way for students to feel the library was a safe space for LGBT+ people. Despite the popularity of displays, a small proportion of respondents mentioned lack of display space as limiting their LGBT+ provision. Using display materials was discussed by providing access to external help, resources and organisations with LGBT+ provision. The only external organisation mentioned by name was Stonewall, an organisation which campaigns for the equality of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people across Britain

Displays of helplines...In discussion with LGBTQ+ group about possible leaflet of safe websites for information about binding etc.

Some librarians have included pupil collaboration in their provision, incorporating their knowledge and perspectives.

Currently working with a group of students to put together some displays. A wall display promoting LGBTQ fiction titles featuring heart decorations based on the gay pride flag which were made by students.

These displays or display materials were often tied in with temporary initiatives, or events through the year, such as LGBT+ History Month or Pride. National initiatives justify displays beyond the librarian's impetus.

Some respondents did find creative ways to tie LGBT+ promotion to times of the year that are not known for their focus on sexuality and gender identity, whilst others specifically tied them to the curriculum or school themed events:

Make cross-curricular links during school events (e.g. profiling LGBTQ scientists and engineers during STEM week)...we had a Valentine's display, and I made sure that the fiction on display represented a range of relationship types, both straight and LGBTQ+.

One respondent used the impetus of Gay Pride but focussed on similar techniques to the displays tied to curriculum content.

Displays inside and outside the library February through to Easter holidays. complete with rainbow bunting and the history of the gay pride movement; biographies of achievers of all races, ages, sexual orientation from the LGBT community; information on attitudes to gender from around the world.

Many respondents mentioned mental health and LGBT+ provision as related; in response to other questions and displays as well, where "mental health displays have included LGBT+ items." This link appears to be one way in which LGBT+ is being associated with year-round provision.

LGBT+ and the Librarian

Training

Training pertaining to LGBT+ provision appears to be a key source of information and support for the respondents. Respondents indicated that the external training that they completed was often focused broadly on 'Diversity', suggesting LGBT+ was only a minor part of the training. Relevant internal training appeared to vary in depth or regularity, with some claiming it was regular and others referring to one-off events.

LGBT+ friends

20.6% (n=20) of the respondents cite interaction with LGBT+ people as a reason for increased confidence in their provision, including being LGBT+ themselves, having LGBT+ family, friends and knowing LGBT+ students.

In response to the questions “How confident do you feel in your knowledge of the LGBT+ spectrum?” respondents used the scale from 1 (not confident at all) to 10 (completely confident), as shown in Figure 2.

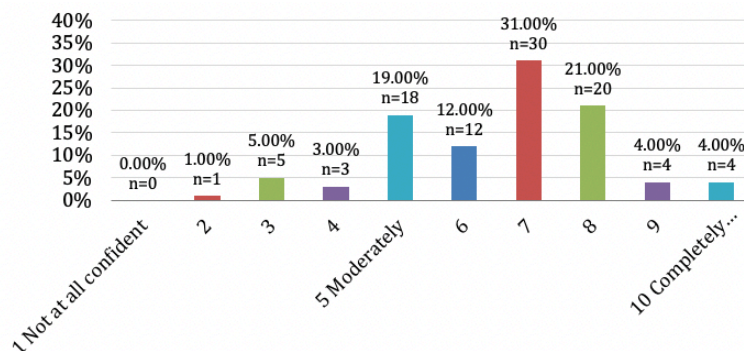


Figure 2. School librarians' confidence in their knowledge of the LGBT+ spectrum.

The respondents that were LGBT+ themselves, who had LGBT+ family, who had LGBT+ friends or who knew LGBT+ responded with a 6-10. In contrast, responses varied from 1-10 for those who did not mention knowing anyone LGBT+. There were many respondents who admitted that they were ignorant of certain aspects of LGBT+ provision; whether there was a spectrum, that they did not know what the “+” encompassed, that terminology changed rapidly and that new definitions are created that they wouldn't know about.

Improvement/Repeat

One question was repeated at the beginning and end of the questionnaire, “Do you think your library's LGBT+ provision needs any improvement?”, scale 1 (no improvement needed) to 10 (complete improvement needed), as seen in Figure 3. This question showed if opinions had changed after completing the survey and whether reflection throughout had changed the librarian's perspective about their library's LGBT+ provision.

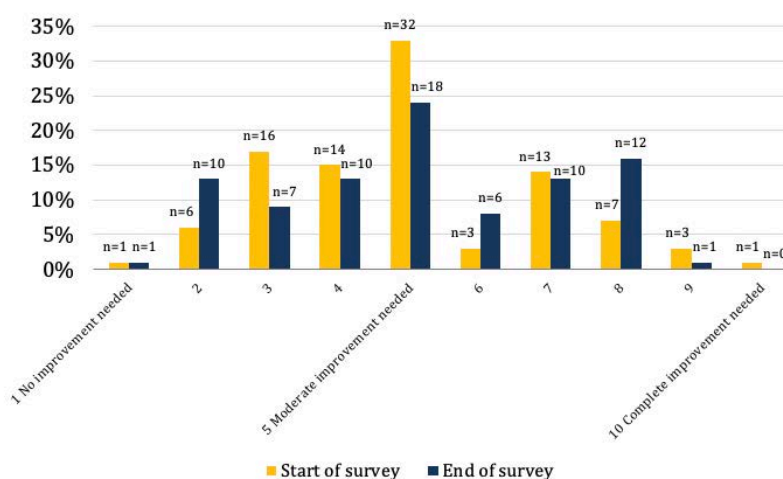


Figure 3. Responses to “Do you think your library's LGBT+ provision needs any improvement?”

As Figure 3 shows, the responses varied, 53.9% (n=41) of librarians selecting the same number both times. 25% (n=19) had selected a higher number by the end of the questionnaire. This could be respondents recognising the size of this issue and the true scale of what could be provided by school libraries. 21.05% (n=16) had selected a lower number by the end of the questionnaire.

This largest of these changes, was 8 to 1, a change of 7, a shift to “no improvement needed”. This could be due to respondents being forced to reflect on their provision and being reassured that they do more than they thought they did previously.

More librarians that changed rating chose a number that still meant more improvement was needed at the end of the questionnaire. This could be due to LGBT+ provision still being an evolving area.

Internal/External Influence

This study found that external influences affected library provision both positively and negatively. A positive is how school librarians source LGBT+ resources, including social media, publisher information, online research, local bookshops, newspaper content, press coverage and librarian sources such as School Library Service (SLS), the LGBT+ community, pupil requests, mental health services, visiting authors, and specific sources: Stonewall, YA pride, WeNeedDiverseBooks, Diversity in YA, TES, and Gays the Word. These include educational supplements, websites, charitable organizations and largescale social events. The location of the school was noted as a positive influence of LGBT+ provision:

It is a vibrant inclusive city. We are in a caring and cosmopolitan city so feel that we will always be supported

Negative influences on LGBT+ provision were community groups. The first group was parents, specifically the threat of parent intervention or complaint. Any mentions of religion were related to the parents’ beliefs as opposed to the school’s status as a faith school.

Cultural and religious objections from school demographic families: 90% Bengali Muslim... Concern of parents and SLT about the appropriateness of some resources...do live in fear of complaints from parents of either mollycoddled year 7's or some of our Muslim parents.

The second group mentioned by respondents is Senior Leadership Team/Senior Management Team (SLT/SMT) and governors/stakeholders, who were seen to use their position and influence to limit LGBT+ provision:

Governors being assholes about it. One of our governors (a prominent local businessman and busybody) objected to the “Some People are Trans-Get Over It” posters before declaring himself gender blind and colourblind and everything else terrible about white men. LGBT awareness and provision was scaled back a bit after that.

Another admitted that having support from senior members of staff can counter these problems, allowing LGBT+ provision to go beyond the library space. One librarian highlighted SLT restriction but that other external groups helped alter this dynamic. Having a support network with some influence allows a librarian to work without fear impeding the outcome.

I would like more support for LGBT+ issues from SMT so that it is given a wider platform...until very recently have been restricted by SLT. However with the support of our PFS (pupil family support), I have been able to substantially increase resources and provide more prominent displays.

Many respondents talked about how changes in public attitudes towards LGBT+ themes impacted their provision. Others cited society and politics as a reason for their own engagement with the topic and as reasons they were so confident about the LGBT+ spectrum:

I have always (since Thatcher and Section 28) had a political interest in LGBTQ+ issues...As a UK citizen it is also at the forefront of public consciousness

The school itself was also mentioned, often in relation to the school's ethos as having both positive and negative effects on LGBT+ provision or the librarians' knowledge. One limiting factor to LGBT+ provision was faith school status.

We are a Catholic school, in which context not saying much is a fairly liberal approach. We do quietly support people of various sexualities.

Others suggested their schools were supportive, whether due to School Champion (Stonewall, 2018) status or having supportive policies, LGBT+ as a school focus, or an inclusive environment. The final quote highlights how the librarian feels the management have had to be proactive when cultivating an accepting environment:

We are inclusive... Tolerance and understanding are promoted school wide for all backgrounds, religions and sexuality...I do know that huge emphasis is put into dealing with anti LGBTQ+ language and bullying.

A few respondents believed that the wider school ethos could be improved, due to LGBT+ issues being "barely mentioned" or not having "a particularly high profile in our school". There was a significant number of respondents who were unable to mention any activities or acknowledgement of LGBT+ provision in the school. 32.05% (n=25) of respondents did not mention anything when asked what areas affect their LGBT+ provision. This omission is significant in itself.

Discussion

A primary aim of this research was to assess the awareness and knowledge of LGBT+ issues amongst school librarians. Findings demonstrate that confidence is a key factor in the assessment of school librarians' awareness and knowledge of LGBT+ issues. The basis for their confidence is often due to knowing someone who is LGBT+, which, as Wright (2007) acknowledges, can impact LGBT+ provision by reminding librarians of LGBT+ issues. Only one respondent acknowledges that this may not be enough, describing that a depth of knowledge is necessary to support LGBT+ needs.

Increased LGBT+ awareness could also be due to societal changes, such as the UK's partial decriminalisation of homosexuality (1967) and the increased visibility and acceptability of LGBT+ individuals in British society. However, until Section 28 was fully abolished in 2003 these societal changes could not be freely discussed within school walls. The stigma therefore remained even after the decriminalisation of LGBT+ status and actions. This study suggests that librarians may feel more comfortable including LGBT+ content in their libraries as well as seeking information for their users on the topic due to broader social changes. However, this remains a sporadic method for improvement of service.

This research demonstrates that school librarians' understandings of neutrality plays a major role in LGBT+ provision. Many librarians see neutrality as a positive trait of their service, despite questions being raised as to how adequately neutrality serves users in discussions concerning race and other issues of diverse representation (Burton, 1995; Good, 2006; Jensen, 2006; Lewis, 2008; McMenemy, 2007). Several respondents claimed to work equally with LGBT+ and non-LGBT+ pupils; initially this approach appears positive by avoiding favouritism. However, when historical disadvantage (Jarrett, 2011) is taken into account, as well as ongoing problems associated with being LGBT+ in school such as bullying, neutrality with no effort to address historic inequalities will still leave LGBT+ pupils comparatively less well provided for.

Neutrality in school librarianship can be harmful...

Neutrality in school librarianship can be harmful: by believing they are beyond issues like homophobia, librarians can inadvertently propagate it. Similarly, by not actively seeking LGBT+ content and making efforts to connect it with potential users, neutrality allows historical disadvantage to remain and ignores barriers LGBT+ pupils may face when trying to access content.

There is no 'neutral' when it comes to collection management and tokenistic amounts can sustain the idea that LGBT+ is 'other' and insignificant, hence continuing its underrepresentation within school library collections (Clyde & Lobban, 2001; Strick, 2013).

A secondary aim of this research was to explore the level and format of LGBT+ provision in school libraries. Findings from this study demonstrate that budget is a key component in the level and format of LGBT+ provision, whether due to lack of money, with budget allocation based on librarian priorities, or due to money being sought and used specifically for LGBT+ resources. Very few respondents were able to focus on LGBT+ resources unless they had applied for extra funding or ringfenced funds. Those that claimed a good budget did not then evidence improved LGBT+ provision.

Beyond finances, many respondents highlighted the limited availability of age-appropriate resources as still a problem (Boon and Howard, 2004; Bridge, 2010; Clyde, 1999, 2003; Wright, 2007), with several respondents claiming that they could cater for some of their patrons but not all. Some expanded to say that some age groups receive more attention from publishers. However, findings from this study demonstrate that librarian censorship of materials may be preventing usage. It is not clear what constitutes inappropriate content within LGBT+ resources,

on what basis this is decided and whether it is censored more harshly than the equivalent heterosexual content. It is possible that all age groups are already catered for if a consensus on acceptable content was ascertained and enforced, and if not, this would at least clarify which areas needed more attention from publishers in order to close the gaps.

Additionally, the problem of even representation across the LGBT+ spectrum in library resources still remains an issue, with previous literature exposing the lack of lesbian, bisexual and transgender content (Clyde, 2001, 2003; Wright, 2007;). These gaps were less apparent in this study, but inclusion of any groups under the "+" label was erratic. This was due to many factors, including lack of knowledge, availability of stock, 'demand' for such stock and the speed with which the "+" expands to include new terminology. Even excluding the "+" as too niche or new, content that addresses the entire LGBT+ spectrum still remains comparatively small when compared to heterosexual content. This is demonstrated by one respondent considering 35 LGBT+ related books out of a 3000 in total – 1.16% of that collection – as a successful representation.

Format also limits the level of LGBT+ provision. This study demonstrates that there is a reliance on physical resources when it comes to LGBT+ provision (Wright, 2007) making librarians reliant on traditional publishing channels to provide adequate resources. Website and online content are not widely included in library collections, despite increasing availability, though this may be partly due to filtering systems limiting access (Bridge, 2010; Holt, 2006; Wright, 2007). The balance between non-fiction and fiction does suggest an increase in representation beyond the factual and an acceptance that representation is necessary even in fictional content (Banks, 2009).

A third aim of this research was to explore how proactive school librarians are in acquisition of, awareness and promotion of and access to LGBT+ resources. In terms of collections, findings from this study indicate that respondents employed a ranged of sources to expand stock, their knowledge and build displays. This variety of sources demonstrates a degree of proactivity on the librarians' part in seeking out information related to LGBT+ provision. Publishers' lists are used, but the respondents acknowledge that they do not always include mention of LGBT+ content. Expanding LGBT+ information and stock by sharing useful sources between librarians would improve even representation, as some individuals have extensive sources whilst others rely solely on mainstream limited sources.

One reason school librarians may not be working to expand their sources of information about LGBT+ materials is the apparent lack of demand, or perception that provision is already adequate. This attitude was reflected in this study through the perception that there were few or no LGBT+ pupils and that only LGBT+ pupils need LGBT+ resources. Due to this assumption, provision met assumed need, undermining the research suggesting that all readers benefit from LGBT+ resources not just those who fall outside of the cis-heteronormative (Blackburn & Clark, 2009; Clyde & Lobban, 2001).

One fix-all approach to reach 'adequate' service is displays, which are a clear way for librarians to provide access to and promotion of LGBT+ provision with minimal effort. This can take many

forms, though a major theme of these displays is their temporary nature, which means that visible LGBT+ content is a rarely a constant in pupils' experience of the library. This is especially true for librarians who rely on displays as access points to their collection, or in place of physical provision. One method was to incorporate LGBT+ content into mental health displays. Potentially positive, this collaboration helps to normalise LGBT+ content. However, being inextricably linked with mental health in a way dissimilar to hetero-content could negatively stigmatise LGBT+ provision. This link is not new, with sexual attraction and gender identity other than heterosexual and cis-gender being equated to mental illness (Burton, 2015; Franklin, 2018).

As with other aspects, proactivity of librarians was often reliant on budget. The respondents often had autonomy over their budget, so even small decisions about acquisition and promotion were theirs to make. Librarians' priorities were the determining factor; several librarians stated they would source information if demand was there, though one respondent did not do this when asked by pupils of different gender identities, stating that it was not a priority. Similarly, other librarians stated that they did not want to purchase stock that would only be used once or twice. This attitude will always disadvantage minorities, as the majority commands more influence. As one participant admitted, they cater for the majority because it supports the library's usage more substantially. The majority will not demand resources for issues that they don't feel concern them, leaving the minority to ask and be denied due to lack of influence.

Conclusion

This study set out to answer "How is LGBT+ provision being addressed in school libraries from the perspective of the school librarian?" Findings from this study highlight the level of disparity, lack of consensus and inconsistencies between actual and perceived LGBT+ provision in school libraries. Responses varied with some responses demonstrating good practice and high levels of awareness, while others demonstrated total ignorance. Lack of consensus between school librarians is seen through the provision itself including the variety of approaches used with varying success and different ideas of what 'good' LGBT+ provision looks like, which determines how much effort is exerted on this area. In a profession known for sharing good practice, good LGBT+ provision appears to be isolated. This study also demonstrates that neutrality, as a noble principle, is often used as an excuse for limited LGBT+ provision, with respondents justifying minimal work in this area to avoid favouritism.

Findings from this study indicate a number of recommendations to improve LGBT+ provision in school libraries. Library organisations should facilitate:

- Communication and consensus on key areas of LGBT+ provision, e.g. censorship, sources of materials, displays, handling complaints;
- Up-to-date training on all aspects of LGBT+ provision;
- Continued shared 'good practice' from school librarians recognised for good service, (e.g. Stonewall Champions);

- Framework and organisational support for LGBT+ provision, influential support for librarians facing negative SLT/Governors/school environments;
- As suggested by McNicol (2005b), the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Practitioners (CILIP) statement on intellectual freedom could be expanded to explicitly age-related issues, especially within the school sector; and
- A benchmark for LGBT+ provision should be recognised and defined at a national level, for solo school librarian.

More broadly, librarians' stance of neutrality should be reconsidered when it is used to side-line minority provision. The ways in which normalisation of LGBT+ identity is being achieved should be considered carefully, especially the association with mental health and whether it successfully enables access and promotion of LGBT+ resources. This is to ensure short-term fixes do not, in turn, cause damage or propagate homophobic/transphobic behaviour inadvertently. Along these lines, future research could explore the concept of 'Good Practice' and what it constitutes to inform potential benchmarks for school librarians, as well as the impact of individual external influences, e.g. censorship, on school libraries and suggested solutions. Research could also examine the presence and impact of recent publications containing/authored by LGBT+ people. As society continues to alter, it is important that school librarians examine their past and future role in LGBT+ provision as well as proactively changing "in all areas I cater to the majority" to 'I cater for everyone'.

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Appendix A. Glossary

ALA - American Library Association

Asexual - a person who does not experience sexual feelings or desires.

Bisexual - sexual orientation where there is attraction to both men and women.

CILIP - Chartered Institute of Library and Information Practitioners.

Cisgender - denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex.

Gay - a homosexual man.

Gender Identity - a person's perception of having a particular gender, which may or may not correspond with their birth sex.

Gender Non-conforming - denoting or relating to a person whose behaviour or appearance does not conform to prevailing cultural and social expectations about what is appropriate to their gender.

Genderqueer - denoting or relating to a person who does not subscribe to conventional gender distinctions but identifies with neither, both, or a combination of male and female genders.

Heteronormative - denoting or relating to a world view that promotes heterosexuality as the normal or preferred sexual orientation.

Heterosexism- discrimination or prejudice against homosexuals on the assumption that heterosexuality is the normal sexual orientation.

Homosexual - a person who is sexually attracted to people of their own sex.

Lesbian - a homosexual woman.

LGBT+ - will be used throughout except when used in reference to work where a different acronym was employed e.g. LGBTQ, GLBTQ.

LMS - Library Management System

Non-Binary - denoting or relating to a gender or sexual identity that is not defined in terms of traditional binary oppositions such as male and female or homosexual and heterosexual.

OPAC - online public access catalogue

Pupils - will be used instead to students to avoid confusion, this will encompass all age ranges served by the schools involved.

Sexuality - a person's sexual orientation or preference.

SLA - School Library Association

SLG - School Library Group SLS- School Library Services SLT - Senior Leadership team

SMT - Senior Management Team

TES - Teaching Educational Supplement

Trans - will occasionally be used in place of transgender

Transgender - denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender does not correspond with their birth sex.

YA - young adult

Appendix B. Survey Questions

I. Personal Information

1. Please indicate gender:
 - Female
 - Male
 - Prefer not to say
 - Other _____
2. Age:
 - 18-24
 - 25-39
 - 40-55
 - 56-65
 - 65+

II. School Information

1. Is your school...
 - Single Sex (female)
 - Single Sex (male)
 - Co-ed
2. Is your school...
 - Independent
 - State
 - Academy
 - College
 - Other _____
3. Is your school...
 - Fee paying
 - Not fee paying
4. Please select all of the key stages your school caters for:
5. How many pupils does your school have?
6. How many dedicated and paid library staff does your school have? (including yourself)
7. How many dedicated and paid library staff does your school have? (including yourself). If you put 0, how many unpaid/volunteer library staff does your library have?
8. How many 'library' spaces does your school have? (e.g. 2 if you have a prep and senior school library in separate places)
9. How many 'library' spaces does your school have? (e.g. 2 if you have a prep and senior school library in separate places) If you put 0, what form does your 'library' take?
10. In your school what level is the librarian equivalent to?
 - Senior Leadership (SLT)
 - Teacher
 - Senior Teacher
 - Support Staff
 - Administration Staff
 - Middle Management (MMT)
 - Head of Department
 - Other _____
11. Are you aware of what Section 28 was or did? Yes No

III. Currently

1. How confident do you feel in your knowledge of the LGBT+ spectrum?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all confident				Moderately					Completely confident
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Why is that?

2. How much emphasis is put on LGBT+ issues in your school environment?

1 No emphasis	2	3	4	5 Moderate emphasis	6	7	8	9	10 Complete emphasis
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Any comments?

3. How well equipped is your library to provide access to LGBT+ resources?

1 Not at all equipped	2	3	4	5 Moderately equipped	6	7	8	9	10 Completely equipped
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Why have you selected that number?

4. Do you think your library's LGBT+ provision needs any improvement?

1 No	2	3	4	5 Moderate	6	7	8	9	10 Complete
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Why have you selected that number?

IV. **Stock**

1. What LGBT+ resources does your library have in its collection? Please select all that apply

- Fiction
- Non-Fiction
- Manga/ Anime
- DVD/Film
- Self-Help resources
- Intranet content
- Collated websites
- Magazines
- Biographies
- Other _____

2. Does your library offer/have any other LGBT+ provision? Yes No
Please expand

3. Are your LGBT+ resources differentiated in the catalogue? (e.g. classified as LGBT+) Yes No

4. Are your LGBT+ resources shelved/housed separately? Yes No Sometimes

5. Could library users identify LGBT+ resources without interaction with the library staff? Yes No Sometimes

6. Could library users identify LGBT+ resources without interaction with the library staff? If yes, how can they do that?

V. **LGBT+ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, +**

1. Is the 'Lesbian' category (of LGBT+) represented in your library collection? Yes No

2. What resource types? Please select all that apply

- No selected
- Fiction
- Non-Fiction
- Self-Help
- Intranet Content
- Collated Websites
- DVD/Film
- Biographies
- Manga/ Anime
- Other _____

3. Is the 'Gay' category (of LGBT+) represented in your library collection? Yes No

4. What resource types? Please select all that apply
 - No selected
 - Fiction
 - Non-Fiction
 - Self-Help
 - Intranet Content
 - Collated Websites
 - DVD/Film
 - Biographies
 - Manga/Anime
 - Other _____
5. Is the 'Bisexual' category (of LGBT+) represented in your library collection? Yes No
6. What resource types? Please select all that apply
 - No selected
 - Fiction
 - Non-Fiction
 - Self-Help
 - Intranet Content
 - Collated Websites
 - DVD/Film
 - Biographies
 - Manga/Anime
 - Other _____
7. Is the 'Transgender' category (of LGBT+) represented in your library collection? Yes No
8. What resource types? Please select all that apply
 - No selected
 - Fiction
 - Non-Fiction
 - Self-Help
 - Intranet Content
 - Collated Websites
 - DVD/Film
 - Biographies
 - Manga/Anime
 - Other _____
9. Is there representation (e.g., resources/promotional goods) for any other groups within the LGBT+ umbrella terminology (e.g. non-binary, transexual, asexual, pansexual)?
Yes No
10. What other groups do you consider represented in your library collection?
11. What resource types? Please select all that apply
 - No selected
 - Fiction
 - Non-Fiction
 - Self-Help
 - Intranet Content
 - Collated Websites
 - DVD/Film
 - Biographies
 - Manga/Anime
12. Do you feel your library has an even representation of the LGBT+ spectrum? Yes No
13. Do you feel your library has an even representation of the LGBT+ spectrum? If yes, how do you source it?
14. Do you feel your library has an even representation of the LGBT+ spectrum?"If no, what is stopping you from providing an even representation of the LGBT+ spectrum in its entirety?

VI. Successes

1. Have you implemented or changed anything to increase the number of LGBT+ resources in your library collection?
2. Have you implemented or changed anything to increase awareness of LGBT+ resources/provision in your library?
3. Have you implemented or changed anything to increase patron access to LGBT+ resources/provision in your library?

4. Any other comments in relation to success in LGBT+ provision?

VII. Suggestions

1. Can you identify any other areas which you feel affect the LGBT+ provision in your library?
2. After completing this survey is there anything you would consider doing / changing in your library?
3. How well equipped is your library in terms of LGBT+ provision?

1 Not at all equipped	2	3	4	5 Moderately equipped	6	7	8	9	10 Completely equipped
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. Do you think your library's LGBT+ provision needs any improvement?

1 No	2	3	4	5 Moderate	6	7	8	9	10 Complete
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. Would you mind being contacted for a follow-up survey based on the themes raised in this questionnaire? Yes - Please contact me
No- Please do not contact me
If you put yes, please enter the email address you would like to be contacted on: