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FEATURE

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COLLECTION
DEVELOPMENT
BEHAVIORS IN SCHOOL
LIBRARIANS
LGBTQQ
BOOKS
AND RESOURCES
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2.5

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MILLION
TEENS
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sixteen

Introduction

The average age for gays and lesbians to come out in the United States is now sixteen (Martin and Murdock 2007; Huegel 2003; Savin-Williams 2005). Family constructs often are composed of same-sex parents or with LGBTQ family members as active family participants. These social changes are apparent in every level of society and in each state of the union. For all students in our public and private schools, the need to search for themselves in books and other resources is real and ever-growing.

As school librarians it is our responsibility to both develop and maintain our collections to be responsive to the curricular goals of our districts and the recreational and informational reading demands of student populations. This message is one that is repeated in school librarian post-graduate programs across the United States. Through surveys of students, surveys of teachers and other faculty, conversations, circulation statistics, collection mapping and analysis, curriculum mapping, awareness of book awards, professional-organization recommendations, professional reviews, professional development, and organizational conferences, we find out what is missing, what is needed, what is overlooked, and what is no longer needed. We must be mindful of the fact that pedagogical choices made are political statements (Wink 2001).

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**I TURNED TO
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HONESTLY?
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Review of Literature

Selection is of prime importance in collection development—second only to de-selection. A choice must be made. What will present the most value to the collection and the needs of the curriculum and students? With about two and a half million LGBTQQ teens in the U.S., the weight of selection choices that reflect the needs and interests of *all* students is real (Rauch 2011).

Within the school library, students often undertake searches to understand themselves and their surroundings. Students seek others with whom to identify—others, fictional or real, similar to themselves—or search for factual information necessary for this understanding. For LGBTQQ students high depression and suicide rates correlate with unfulfilled information needs (Rauch 2011). Informational needs or LGBTQQ students are represented in searches for community services, coming-out stories, and information about health issues and safe sex.

In an essay from *School Library Journal*, Brent stated:

When I set out to find more LGBT titles, I turned to my school's library. Honestly? It was pathetic. There was not one single LGBT novel. But oh, of course the librarian went out of her way to buy books about gangs, drugs, and teen pregnancy. When I asked her about that, she replied, 'This is a school library. If you're looking to read inappropriate titles, go to a bookstore.'... There are tons of gay teens struggling to find a group to fit into. LGBT YA lit helps us realize that no, we aren't alone and no, we aren't worthless. It helps us discover that we are part of the LGBT group, which includes tons of brilliant people, doing brilliant things. (2010)

Survey Questions

The study was motivated by the lack of school librarian graduate student response to the discussion of LGBTQQ student populations and responses by state conference attendees to diverse population collection development and programming sessions. Conversations about dealing with diverse student population traditionally dealt with gender (i.e., female/male) or African-American or Hispanic/Latino student populations.

The study requested responses to several different question areas:

Demographic Information: Gender, self-identification, age, and ethnicity.

Demographic Information: Licensure, grade levels served, number of years as a school librarian, currently under an additional licensure plan (ALP), and if currently enrolled in a graduate school librarian program and where.

Do you invite student input or conduct student surveys regarding the collection?

Do you invite teacher input or conduct teacher surveys regarding the collection?

Do you invite school counselor input or conduct school counselor surveys regarding the collection?

Do you have any nonfiction books or other resources dealing with LGBTQQ (Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning) topics or issues including, but not limited to health, political issues, religion, social issues, parenting, and/or bullying?

If yes, have you had any reconsideration/challenge requests regarding these items?

Do you have any fiction books or other resources dealing with LGBTQQ characters, themes, story plots, authors, and/or award winners?

If yes, have you had any reconsideration/challenge requests regarding these items?

Do you have any books or other resources dealing with LGBTQQ topics or issues including, but not





limited to diversity, integration, health, political issues, religion, social issues, parenting, and/or bullying in the professional collection?

If yes, have you had any reconsideration/challenge requests regarding these items?

Do you purchase books that have been winners and/or honor books from the ALA Stonewall Award for Children and Young Adults?

Do you purchase books that have been included in the ALA Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Round Table annual Rainbow List for children and young adults?

Do you attend professional development sessions/workshops covering LGBTQQ issues/topics?

If yes, where?

Do you have any LGBTQQ self-identified students at your campus?

If no, do you feel as though there are LGBTQQ students who have not yet self-identified?

Do students request LGBTQQ books and/or resources for purchase in your school library?

Does your school or campus have a PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) or another student group for LGBTQQ students and their allies?

Do you feel that LGBTQQ students at your campus feel safe?

Do you feel that LGBTQQ students at your campus feel safe in the school library?

Have you witnessed bullying of LGBTQQ students in your school?

If yes, was it instigated by: students, colleagues, administration, support staff, parent/guardian, other?

Please provide details of the incidents.

Have you witnessed bullying of LGBTQQ students in the school library?

If yes, was it instigated by: students, colleagues,

administration, support staff, parent/guardian, other?

Please provide details of the incidents.

Have you felt reluctant in purchasing LGBTQQ books and/or resources for the school library?

Have you been harassed about LGBTQQ books and/or resources for the collection?

If yes, was it instigated by: students, colleagues, administration, support staff, parent/guardian, other?

Please provide details of the incidents.

Participants

Participants surveyed were among the 715 members of the Arkansas Association of Instructional Media (AAIM), a state organization for school librarians and school technologists. The survey instrument was shared via AAIM's listserv. Participation was voluntary with consent acknowledged by responding to the survey. Participants were aware of the topic of the survey as the topic was provided in the survey notification.

Institutional review board (IRB) paperwork was completed with the researcher's university. IRB approval for the study was received.

Procedures

Participants completed the survey during the two-month window the survey was accessible. Twice during the survey window members of the AAIM listserv were reminded of the opportunity to complete the survey. Responses were analyzed at the close of the survey window. Of the thirty-

seven participants, thirty-five completed the survey in its entirety.

Findings

The survey results provided the following information. The majority of participants were Caucasian heterosexual women under the age of fifty-nine. Additionally, a significant majority were already licensed school librarians; three were currently under an ALP and attending graduate school. Respondents were fairly evenly divided between elementary and secondary schools. Most participants have been school librarians ten years or less.

While the majority of participants do solicit student and teacher input regarding the collection, only 75 percent invite the school counselor's input.

Participants indicated that most do have fiction books dealing with LGBTQQ characters, themes, and story plots, or by LGBTQQ authors, or that were winners of relevant ALA awards, and have had few challenges. Most do not have nonfiction books or other resources related to LGBTQQ-specific issues. Of those that do, only one indicated that a reconsideration/challenge request was put in motion. A large majority also do not have books or other resources dealing with LGBTQQ topics or issues in the professional collection.

Ten participants indicated purchase of ALA Stonewall Book Award winners and honor books for children and young adults for their collection. Five responded that they had purchased items from the ALA GLBT Round Table annual Rainbow List for children and young adults. The majority have never purchased items from among

the ALA Stonewall Award recipients nor from the ALA Rainbow List.

The majority of respondents, 91 percent, have never attended professional development (PD) sessions/workshops covering LGBTQQ issues/topics. The three who had attended such PD sessions did so at professional organization conferences. None of the professional development was provided by a school district.

Most responded "no" to the question of LGBTQQ self-identified students at their campus. When asked if respondents felt that there were LGBTQQ students who had not yet self-identified, the majority responded "yes." Two participants indicated that their campus or school did have a PFLAG group or other group for LGBTQQ students and allies.

When asked about LGBTQQ students' safety at school and in the school library, significant

majorities responded "yes." They also responded that they had not witnessed any bullying of LGBTQQ students at school. The respondents who had witnessed bullying stated that mostly other students instigated it. One stated that an administrator had instigated the bullying. Only one respondent had witnessed bullying of LGBTQQ students in the school library, bullying that was instigated by a fellow student.

The majority of participants indicated reluctance in purchasing for the collection books and resources for LGBTQQ students. Most had not been harassed when they did purchase such items for the collection. However, one or more students, an administrator, and a parent had harassed some of the respondents who had purchased LGBTQQ-focused items. Several respondents noted that living in the Bible Belt made them very reluctant to purchase items relating to issues of particular interest to LGBTQQ students.

Further analysis of responses indicated significance around the strength of exposure to professional development. A correlational significance was present between participation in professional development about LGBTQQ student populations and the purchase of both nonfiction and fiction books and resources for the school collection. Another strong correlational significance can be deduced: there has not been enough professional development on LGBTQQ resources and how to respond to LGBTQQ student informational needs. School librarians demonstrated reluctance in purchasing LGBTQQ books and resources regardless of whether or not school librarians participated in professional development.





the study self-identified as gay, and another self-identified as bisexual.) A participant e-mailed the researcher stating that homosexuality had nothing to do with collection development.

Recommendations for Further Study

A nation-wide study regarding LGBTQQ resources in school libraries would be a logical next step. An additional look at the curriculum of each of the state's school librarian post-graduate programs would provide further evidence of positive or negative collection-development tenets of the state's school librarians.

Awards and Other Resources

A few sources available for locating fiction and non-fiction resources for children and young adults are listed below:

ALA Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Round Table (GLBTRT): www.ala.org/glbtrt

ALA Rainbow Books – GLBTQ Books for Children & Teens: www.glbtrt.ala.org/rainbowbooks/



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She was awarded the

2014 Pat McDonald Outstanding Individual Achievement Award from the Arkansas Association of Instructional Media. A member of AASL, she is also the immediate past-chair of the Arkansas Association of School Librarians.

ALA 2015 Rainbow List: www.glbtrt.ala.org/rainbowbooks/archives/II61/

ALA Stonewall Book Award: www.ala.org/glbtrt/award/

ALA Stonewall Book Awards List: www.ala.org/glbtrt/award/honored/

Association for Library Service to Children Newberry Award: www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/newberymedal/newberymedal

Mike Morgan & Larry Romans Children's and Young Adult Literature Award: www.ala.org/glbtrt/award/honored/

I'm Here. I'm Queer. Now What The Hell Do I Read: www.leewind.org

Lambda Literary: www.lambdaliterary.org

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Conclusions

This study demonstrated both a lack of resources available for the LGBTQQ student population in the state and an acknowledgment of the need for resources. Whether through professional development offered by schools or state organizations, the recognition of the informational needs of this particular student population is very scarce.

While school librarians in Arkansas are required by legislation to hold Master's degrees in school librarianship and obtain sixty hours of professional development each year, it is evident that the skills and significance of diversity integration and importance of responding to students' needs via the collection in school libraries are not continually reinforced outside of educational training.

Limitations

Limitations to the study were several. Arkansas is a rural, conservative, southern state well entrenched in the Bible Belt. The majority of respondents were heterosexual and female. Over 700 listserv members were invited to participate in the survey, but only thirty-seven responded. (One participant of