

LGBTQIA+ Inclusive School Library Research: A Systematic Literature Review

[Jenna Spiering](#), Assistant Professor, School of Information Science, College of Information and Communications, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina

Lucy Santos Green, Director and Professor, School of Library and Information Science, Graduate College, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa

Jesselyn Dreeszen Bowman, Ph.D. student, School of Information Science, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina

Abstract

The current LGBTQIA+-hostile political climate highlights a growing need among school librarians for evidence-based support addressing inclusive professional practices. To establish a baseline of studies providing this evidence and to identify areas where further research is needed, this study used systematic literature review methodology to examine international empirical research in the field of school and youth librarianship published between the years of 2009 and 2021. The study's objectives were to identify and categorize published empirical research on LGBTQIA+ topics in school and youth librarianship and to identify and categorize gaps in that research, proposing focuses for future research studies. Findings determined that little research has been done to examine LGBTQIA+ inclusive school library services for youth. Also revealed was a monolithic approach to the discussion of LGBTQIA+ identities and expressions. More research in this area and the employment of diverse methodologies to uncover a detailed and expansive picture of what LGBTQIA+ inclusive service means are desperately needed.

Introduction

In its most recent school climate survey, GLSEN (formerly known as Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network) found schools in the United States are “hostile environments” for an overwhelming majority of LGBTQIA+ youth who routinely face discrimination, harassment, and physical violence in schools (GLSEN, 2022). LGBTQIA+ is an umbrella term referring to people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, with the “Q” standing in for queer and/or questioning. Additional letters and the plus sign represent other identities not conforming to dominant societal norms of sexual orientation and gender identity and expression (GLSEN, 2014). The report suggests that hostile school climates negatively impacted not only students’ physical and mental health but also students’ academic achievement. The effects of discrimination and feelings of being unsafe resulted in 32.2% of LGBTQIA+ youth surveyed missing at least one day of school a month, LGBTQIA+ youth maintaining significantly lower grade-point averages than the national average; and a significant number of LGBTQIA+ students considering dropping out of school due to victimization based on their sexual identity and gender expression. However, the GLSEN 2021 survey also highlighted correlations between LGBTQIA+ students who did feel safe and supported in their schools, and the greater presence of supportive resources such as inclusive curriculum, GSAs (gay-straight alliances), and welcoming educators. These safe, supported students also had higher academic performance and higher likelihood of pursuing post-secondary education compared to students who faced a hostile environment in school.

Notably, fewer than half of the LGBTQIA+ students surveyed (42.8%) reported they could find LGBTQIA+ resources in their school library. Despite this disappointing statistic, inclusivity remains an often-touted goal of school librarianship. The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) School Library Guidelines clearly state: “School libraries around the world, in their many forms, share a common purpose: the enhancement of teaching and learning for all.” This statement is based on a core IFLA value: “the belief that people, communities, and organizations need universal and equitable access to information, ideas, and works of imagination for their social, educational, cultural, democratic, and economic well-being” (Schultz-Jones & Oberg, 2015, p. 12). Considering the other categories of impactful supports mentioned in the 2021 GLSEN survey (inclusive curriculum, supportive educators, student organizations), the school library is uniquely poised to offer the kind of welcoming environment that makes a positive difference in the emotional well-being and academic achievement of LGBTQIA+ youth.

Green et al. (2022) highlighted the many ways school and other youth librarians can design and implement inclusive policies, practices, and programs that go beyond attention to collection development, asking librarians to consider their practice at a holistic level because “simply including LGBTQIA+ books in children’s collections does little to create inclusive spaces ... libraries have an important role to play, not only in collecting materials, but in providing access through intentional placement, displays, and curricular inclusion” (p. 2). Other professional publications in school librarianship (e.g., Knowledge Quest, School Library Connection, and School Library Journal) have begun to incorporate suggestions for LGBTQIA+ inclusive school library holistic practice in areas such as inclusive makerspaces (Moorefield-Lang & Kitzie,

2018), the creation of safe spaces (Gay-Milliken & DiScala, 2020), as well as digital tools and access to electronic information resources for queer youth (Altobelli, 2017).

The expansion of school librarianship's inclusivity efforts beyond collection development is further supported by a growing body of empirical research in adjacent education disciplines, including studies on youth responses to LGBTQIA+ literature (e.g., Blackburn & Clark, 2011; Blackburn & Schey, 2018; Cruz, 2013; Ryan & Hermann-Wilmarth 2018). As an example, Blackburn and Smith (2010) emphasized the need for direct engagement with LGBTQIA+ texts because the mere presence of these materials in a classroom does little to challenge normative conceptualizations of gender and sexuality or disrupt heteronormative constructs. This idea is important for school library research to examine as the current body of work tends to prioritize examinations of collections rather than the applied use of those collections (e.g., Dawkins, 2017; Garry, 2015).

Other efforts in research on teacher education explore why educators may be reluctant to confront and include LGBTQIA+ topics in their classrooms. Malo-Juvera (2015) documented teachers having attributed their reluctance to being unsure of how to engage students in conversations about gender and sexuality. When examining preservice teacher discourses on reluctance to teach LGBTQIA+ young adult literature, Thein (2013) found the use of arguments on responsibility (i.e., this should be done by somebody other than me or in some other class), unpreparedness (i.e., I have never received guidance on teaching these topics), and fear of pushback from conservative parents and administrators (also documented by Dawkins, 2017 and Whelan, 2009). The fear of pushback is, perhaps, the timeliest. We write this research paper at a time when library professionals are experiencing what the American Library Association (ALA) describes as “a dramatic uptick in book challenges and the outright removal of books” from libraries (2022). These efforts are a full-scale attack on the rights of queer youth and their families within public education and community spaces, as the most heavily targeted materials are those featuring LGBTQIA+ characters, stories, or topics (PEN America, 2022).

The current LGBTQIA+ hostile political climate highlights a growing need among school librarians for evidence-based support addressing inclusive professional practices. Dickinson (2005) detailed the steps in searching for evidence-based support: “develop an answerable question, search for known evidence in the literature, apply possible solutions, evaluate the results, and share findings with others in the profession” (p. 16). Our answerable question regarding LGBTQIA+ inclusive school librarianship was: How are academic researchers identifying, defining, and examining best school library practices for LGBTQIA+ youth? To date, an exhaustive examination of LGBTQIA+ topics in school library research has not been conducted. In addition, our preliminary review of currently available publications in both practitioner and academic publications highlights a tendency to privilege North American library settings, with most work published in English.

METHODOLOGY

Research Purpose and Questions

The main goal of this study was to examine international empirical research in the field of school and youth librarianship published between 2009 and 2021, implementing the systematic literature review method applied by Abreu and Kenny (2018) and by Johnston and Green (2018). The study's objectives were: a) identify and categorize published empirical research on LGBTQIA+ topics in school and youth librarianship, and b) identify and categorize gaps in that research to propose focuses for future research studies. Therefore, the following questions were developed:

Research Question 1: What LGBTQIA+ topics have been examined in school and youth library research?

Research Question 2: What methodological approaches and data collection methods have been used to examine LGBTQIA+ topics in school and youth library research?

Research Question 3: In what settings have research on LGBTQIA+ topics within school and youth librarianship been conducted?

Systemic Literature Review

A systematic literature review differs from a standard literature review in its use of research questions to establish the categorization of literature findings (Gough et al., 2012), the creation of a comprehensive and predetermined review protocol (Grant & Booth, 2009), and its use of a common-core procedural method (planning, conducting, reporting) to maintain methodological rigor (Johnston & Green, 2018). As with standard literature reviews, the systematic approach synthesizes a report of the existing literature on a specific topic and uncovers gaps to be addressed in future research studies. However, its unique methodological characteristics expand on the traditional literature review by helping research teams codify and synthesize findings consistently and thoroughly, bringing more nuanced potential future research questions to the surface (Kitchenham et al., 2010).

Search Strategy

The planning phase of the systematic literature review method includes both the identification of information sources and the establishment of a search strategy (contextualized and limited by the research questions). The search strategy codified what we were searching for, where we were searching, the breadth and length of the search, what findings we would review, and how we would minimize the impact of researchers (Kugley et al., 2017). According to the research questions for this study, the search strategy aimed to uncover all empirical school library research focused on LGBTQIA+ identities published in each of the IFLA official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, German, Russian, and Spanish). Search terms developed for this study's strategy contained variations of the term LGBTQ (i.e., GLBT, LGBT, LGBTQ,

LGBTQ+, and LGBTQIA), as well as terms more broadly related to gender and sexuality (i.e., gay, lesbian, queer, bisexual, gender, coming out, sexuality, transgender). For languages not spoken by the researchers, school and youth library experts from each needed language were contracted to translate English terms and further develop search term lists appropriate for the target language's cultural and linguistic context (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Examples of Search Strategies Implemented for IFLA Languages Not Spoken by the Research Team

Language	Database or Target Journals	Keywords Used	Findings
French	Target journals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MEDIADOC • INTERCDI 	GLBT, LGBT, LGBTQ and LGBTQ+, LGBTQIA, lesbienne, homosexuel, homosexuelle, homo, bisexuel, bisexuelle, transgenre, sexe, révéler son homosexualité, sexualité	One article found on topic of library service and LGBTQIA+ community but article did not consist of empirical research (no research questions or methods section) and therefore did not meet inclusion criteria.
Chinese	Databases	<p><u>Group 1</u></p> <p>1. SU%=(未成年人+少年儿童+少儿+青少年+儿童+中小学+小学+中学+初中+高中) AND SU%=图书馆 (8,488 records) [research about library and children and youth during 2009-2021] AND</p> <p>2. FT=(LGBTQIA+LGBTQ+LGBT+性少数+同性恋+双性恋+泛性恋+跨性别+变性者+性别重置+酷儿+间性者+无性恋+性取向+性别认同+性教育)</p> <p><u>Group 2</u></p> <p>1. SU%=(LGBTQIA+LGBTQ+LGBT+性少数+同性恋+双性恋+泛性恋+跨性别+变性者+性别重置+酷儿+间性者+无性恋+性取向+性别认同)</p>	One article found on topic of library service and LGBTQIA+ community but, ultimately, did not meet inclusion criteria because the focus of the article was evaluating the content of sexual-education textbooks.

Language	Database or Target Journals	Keywords Used	Findings
		<p>AND 2. SU%=(未成年人+少年儿童+少儿+青少年+儿童+中小学+小学+中学+初中+高中) (1&2 189 records) AND 3. SU%=图书馆</p> <p><u>Group 3</u> 1. SU%=(教育+信息素养+教学支持+学校表现+成绩) AND 2. SU%=(LGBTQIA+LGBTQ+LGBT+性少数+同性恋+双性恋+泛性恋+跨性别+变性者+性别重置+酷儿+间性者+无性恋+性取向+性别认同) AND 3. SU%=(未成年人+少年儿童+少儿+青少年+儿童+中小学+小学+中学+初中+高中)</p>	
Russian	<p>Target Journals: Школьная библиотека: сегодня и завтра, Школьная библиотека ГЛБТ, ЛГБТ, ЛГБТК, Современная библиотека, Bibliosphere/Библиосфера, and Bibliotekovedenie/Библиотекведение</p>	<p>ЛКБТК+, ЛКБТКИА, Гей, Лесбиянка, Квир, Бисексуал (бисексуальная, бисексуальный), Гендер Каминг-аут (каминаут), Сексуальность (сексуальная ориентация), Трансгендер</p>	No articles found.
Spanish	<p>Target Journals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Revista de Investigación Iberoamericana en Ciencia de la</i> 	<p>aiado(a), asexual, bisexual, cisgénero, Drag, Gay, lesbiana, Queer, transgénero, LGBT, LGBT+</p>	No articles found.

Language	Database or Target Journals	Keywords Used	Findings
	<p><i>Información y Documentación</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Biblios: Revista de Bibliotecología y Ciencias de la Información</i> <p>Database: La Referencia, an open repository of Spanish-language research publications</p>	<p>(terms selected using this source: https://www.lgbtqihealtheducation.org/publication/glosario-de-terminos-lgbt-para-equipos-de-atencion-a-la-salud/)</p>	

To minimize research bias when searching English-language publications (Sheble, 2016), we selected English-language refereed journals to be searched that “comprehensively address[ed] the areas of interest, thus increasing the chance that all relevant studies [were] located” (Johnston & Green, 2018, p. 4), seeking out publications that featured school and youth library research. Public library research on LGBTQIA+ young people in library spaces was included because public and school libraries serve the same youth population, and often apply similar programming and instructional strategies. The final English-language journal list was:

- *Information Processing and Management*
- *Information Research*
- *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*
- *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology*
- *Knowledge Quest*
- *Library and Information Science Research*
- *Library Trends*
- *Reference Librarian*
- *School Libraries Worldwide*
- *School Library Research*
- *TechTrends*
- *Journal of Intellectual Freedom and Privacy*
- *The Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults*
- *The ALAN Review*
- *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*
- *Journal of Literacy Research*
- *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature*
- *IFLA Journal*
- *LIBRES*
- *Russian Education and Society*
- *European Education*

- *International Perspectives on Education and Society*
- *SCAN: The Journal for Educators* (New South Wales government publication)
- *ACCESS* (published by Australian School Library Association)
- *Synergy* (published by School Library Association of Victoria)

Again, for languages for which searches were conducted by contracted language experts (Arabic, Chinese, French, and Russian) and for languages spoken by the research team (English and Spanish) database searching was applied using search terms and Boolean operators as exemplified in Table 1.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

To establish the depth and breadth of this systematic literature review, the inclusion criteria listed below were used. To be included, a paper or article had to meet all five criteria.

- 1) peer-reviewed, empirical research articles with a methods section,
- 2) articles reporting original research findings,
- 3) research conducted at a children's or youth library program, school library programs serving Pre-K through 12th-grade students, or library and information science (LIS) post-graduate preparation programs for school library, children's, and youth library candidates,
- 4) a primary topical and research focus on LGBTQIA+ communities and identities, and
- 5) published between 2009 and 2021.

Studies were excluded if mention or coverage of LGBTQIA+ identities and experiences made up only a small part of the research study (e.g., collection analysis on literature with a broad, diverse perspective). Editorials, prefaces, critiques, reviews of previous research, and think pieces were also excluded.

Conducting the Search

During the conducting phase of the systematic literature review, we and two graduate assistants combined and applied the selection criteria with the search strategy, scanning all articles in the list of journals provided above for alignment with the inclusion criteria (Impellizzeri & Bizzini, 2012). We also reviewed the reference lists in each article identified for possible inclusion to locate any other applicable studies that might have been initially overlooked. The articles and papers in the final selected list were then downloaded and analyzed in depth according to the study's research questions. Each of us independently assessed every article to maintain reliability in inclusion and description of articles. Differences in categorization were negotiated until full agreement was achieved. After an in-depth search of empirical research published in all seven

IFLA languages, only 13 articles met the inclusion criteria for this study (see Appendix for information about each).

Findings

What LGBTQIA+ topics have been examined in school and youth library research?

The topics that have been examined in research relevant to school librarianship fall into two broad categories:

- 1) examinations of collections and how representative these are of LGBTQIA+ identities, and
- 2) examinations of the beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of librarians, youth, and other stakeholders about LGBTQIA+ inclusive library service and access (see Figure 1).

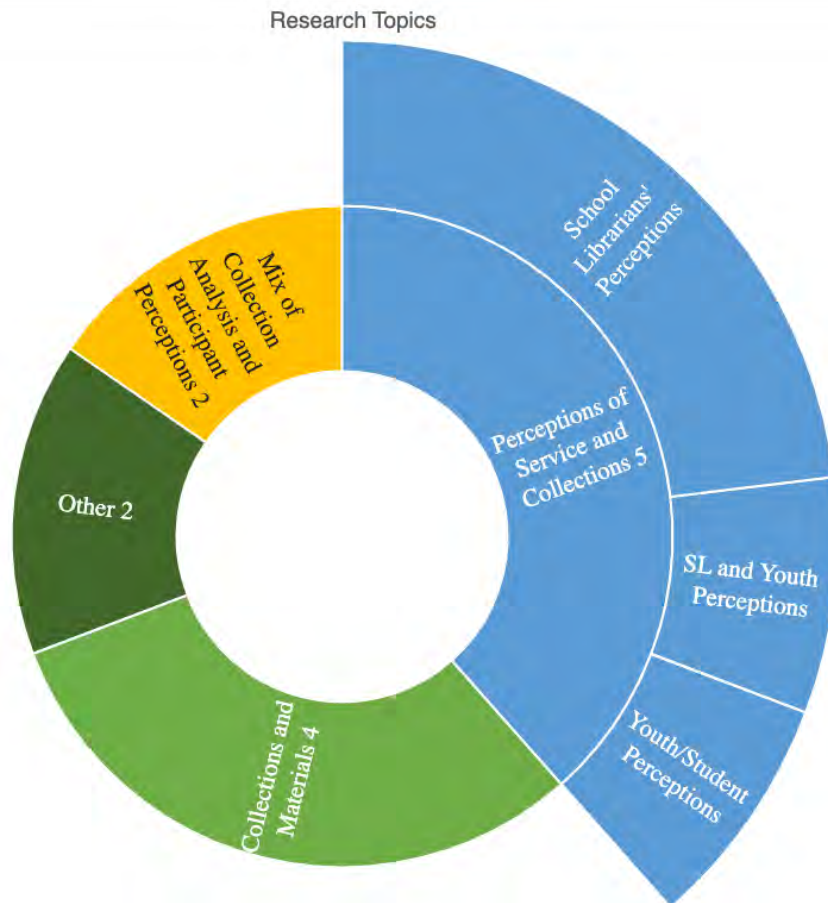
Studies about collections focused on the presence of LGBTQIA+ materials in youth collections (some looking at high school collections and others looking at public library collections), paying particular attention to award winners and geographic differences.

The second category of studies considered how the participants felt about collections and services to LGBTQIA+ patrons: Were these adequate? What was missing? What was the experience of being a student/youth in these libraries?

Two studies combined the topics of collections and perceptions by incorporating multiple layers in the study design (described in the next section) to look at collections as well as stakeholder's perceptions of those collections.

Two other studies did not fall neatly into either category nor did they combine collection analysis and examination of perceptions. One of these articles in the "other" category in Figure 1 examined language used in book reviews of LGBTQIA+ material (Spiering, 2017). The second study in the "other" category examined motives behind book challenges. The researcher's efforts were intended to help librarians become better prepared to encounter such efforts and the individuals behind them (Magnuson, 2011). While both studies focused on books, they did not consider "collections" in the same way as other articles, instead examining unique situations or trends rather than analysis of whole collections.

Figure 1
Research Topics Addressed



Regardless of an article’s main topic, all 13 studies paid attention to collections and materials in some way—either in the study authors’ thinking about library collections for youth or in examinations of specific titles considered for those collections. Although two studies did not specifically mention collections, the existence of collections was implied (Attwell, 2020; Walker & Bates, 2016). Both school library studies in the United Kingdom sought to examine “provisions” to LGBTQ students in the decades after Section 28 was abolished. Section 28 was a law on the books in the UK until 2003 that kept school officials from “promoting homosexuality,” broadly interpreted by many to mean that LGBTQIA+ materials and services could not be provided in schools. Provisions for students’ education, which certainly include adequate collections, also involve issues of access to those collections through cataloging and library organization, access to other information resources and how this access is impacted by internet filtering, promotion and readers advisory, outreach, and library (librarian) support.

What methodological approaches and data collection methods have been used to examine LGBTQIA+ topics in school and youth library research?

A variety of methods have been used to research LGBTQIA+ topics in school and youth librarianship, and in categorizing these studies, we referred to the qualifications of study authors and research teams (Figure 2). Seven studies employed qualitative approaches (54%), three used quantitative methods, and three used a mixed methodology approach.

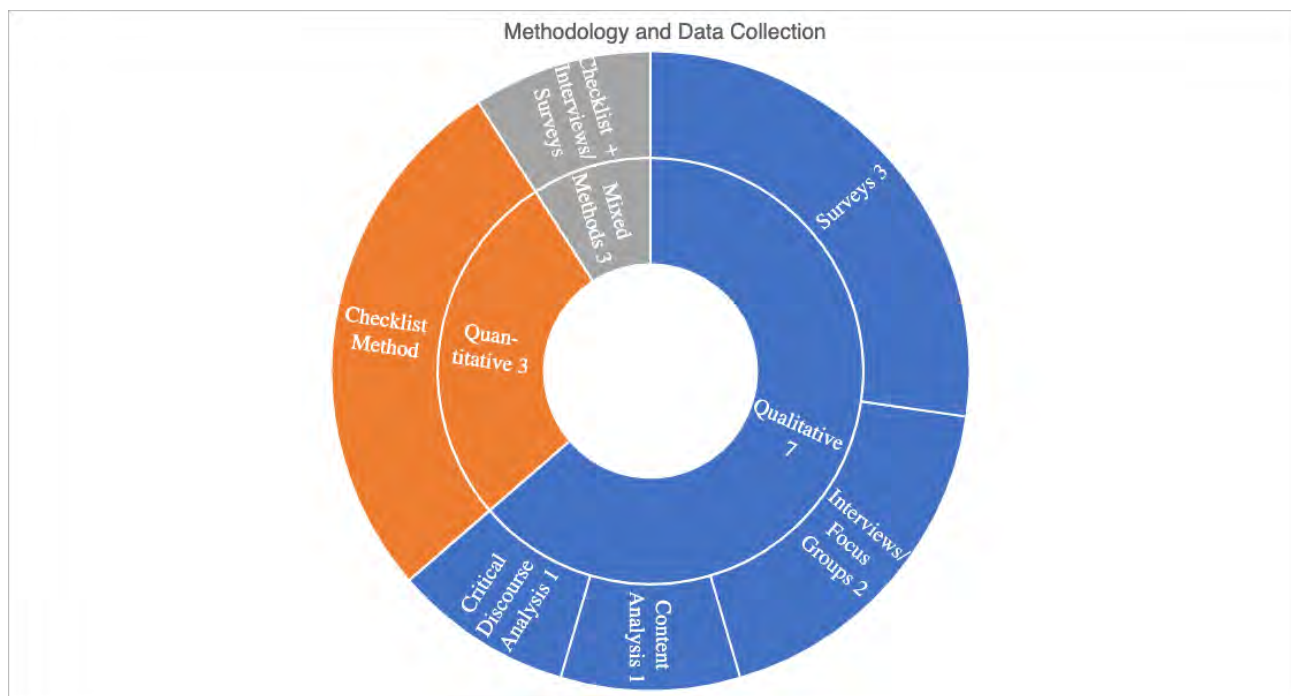
Qualitative methodology studies included data collected through surveys, questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, content analysis, and Critical Discourse Analysis. Most of the qualitative studies attempted to capture how participants felt about collections and services to LGBTQIA+ patrons. These five studies (38.5% of all the articles and papers examined) used interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires to capture how school librarians, students, youth, and other stakeholders felt about that their library's efforts (or lack thereof). Three of these studies specifically examined school librarians' perceptions (Attwell, 2020; Oltmann, 2016; Rickman, 2015). Another focused on youth perceptions, although the researcher interviewed college-aged students who reflected on their experiences in K–12 schools (Escobar, 2020). One study looked at both school librarians working in the UK as well as people who self-identified as LGBTQIA+ and were served by UK school libraries at some point in their schooling (Walker & Bates, 2016). One study employed a mixed-methods approach to analyze collections and examine the attitudes and beliefs (in relation to these materials) of librarians, library staff, and LGBTQIA+ children. Notably, none of these studies sought the opinions and perspectives of students who were being served by school librarians during the time studies were conducted, hinting at difficulties in conducting research with youth populations.

All three of the quantitative studies (23% of all the articles and papers examined) used a checklist method to analyze and statistically describe the presence of LGBTQIA+ materials in youth collections. This method compared different libraries' holdings against a predetermined list of materials such as ALA's Rainbow Book List (Creel & McMullen, 2018), award-winning titles, and other lists recognized in professional review sources likely to be named in libraries' collection-development policies. Hughes-Hassell et al. (2013) analyzed 125 high school collections for inclusion of a core collection of 21 LGBTQIA+ titles, finding that every library surveyed under-collected in this area. Brendler et al. (2017) conducted a similar collection analysis in 24 libraries (four libraries represented each of six key geographic areas) using a checklist method for a core list of titles from the ALA Stonewall Award and Rainbow Book List. All 24 libraries in the Brendler et al. study under-collected LGBTQIA+ materials. This study also considered how geographic differences correlated with collections (e.g., libraries in certain geographic areas, particularly in the southern United States, were even less likely to hold LGBTQIA+ titles in their collection). The third collection-analysis study (Creel & McMullen, 2018), focused on public library systems in 10 large cities in the US, comparing their holdings from the 2014 ALA Rainbow Book List to their holdings of top-ten titles on YALSA's Best Fiction for Young Adults, Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers, and Teens Top Ten lists. Once again, those researchers found that libraries and librarians under-collected LGBTQ titles. This finding was particularly evident when efforts to collect acclaimed, highly regarded LGBTQIA+ materials were compared to efforts to collect other award-winning titles.

Finally, each of the three mixed-methods studies (23% of all the articles and papers examined) used quantitative data collected with the previously described checklist method applied to library collections, in addition to interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires to contextualize collection statistics, and school librarian and youth perceptions of LGBTQIA+ materials in the collection (Chapman, 2013; Chapman & Birdi, 2016; Garry, 2015). For example, Chapman and Birdi (2016) applied the checklist method to 13 library collections and then used that descriptive statistical data to inform interviews with librarians at each of the 13 libraries. The librarians were asked to examine the findings of the checklist method analysis and to reflect on the significance and adequateness of their collection's LGBTQIA+ holdings.

Figure 2

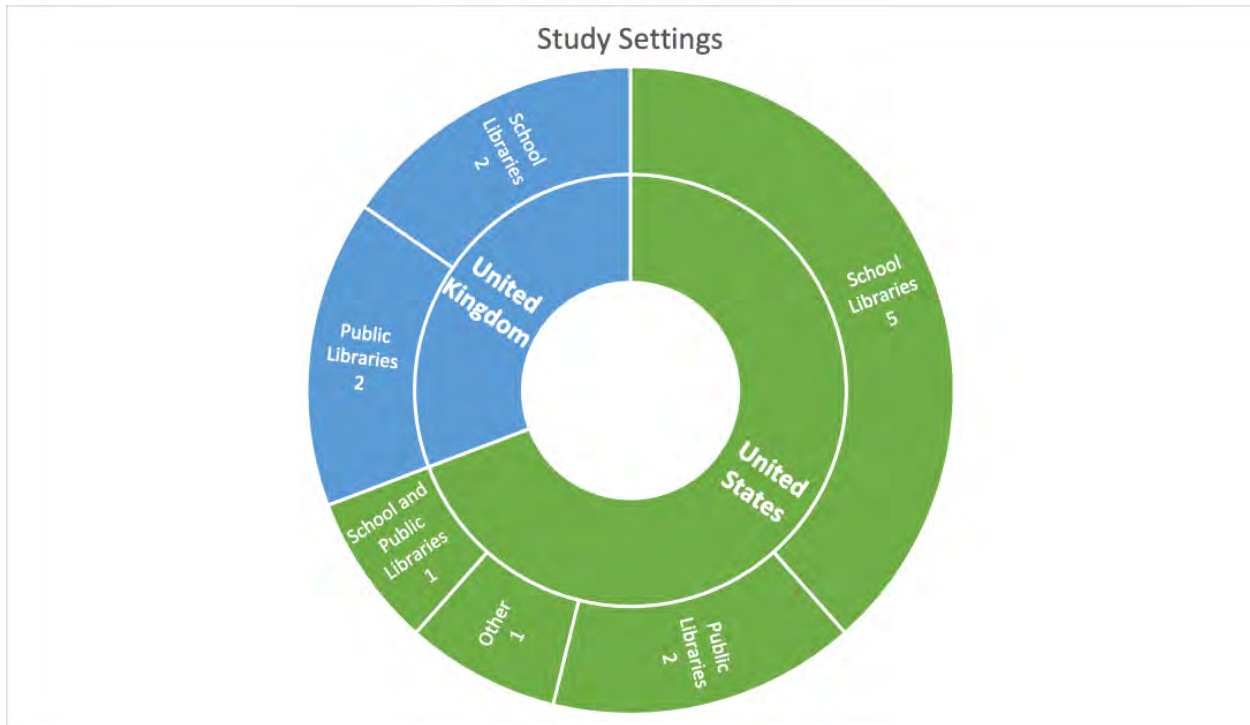
Methodology and Data Collection by authors of papers studied



In what settings have research on LGBTQIA+ topics within school and youth librarianship been conducted?

The majority of the studies were conducted in the United States (9), with the remainder taking place in the United Kingdom (4) (see Figure 3). Despite our efforts to find research published in all the IFLA languages, all research studies that meet the inclusion criteria for this systematic literature review were conducted in English-speaking countries. Most of the research we found took place in school libraries or explored school library services (7 studies), while another large portion of the work (5 studies) took place in public libraries or in a mix of public and school library settings. One study, published in *The Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults*, presented its findings as support for the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ materials in school library collections as a source of sexual health information.

Figure 3
Study Settings



DISCUSSION

In this section, we identify and examine three substantial research gaps that emerged through the systematic review of scholarship on LGBTQIA+ topics in school and public libraries, offering directions for future research questions, contexts, and structures:

- lack of youth involvement,
- lack of representation, and
- emphasis on collection development and materials.

Lack of Youth Involvement

Among the small group of studies that comprise this systematic literature review, a fairly balanced amount of attention has been paid to both statistical analyses of what can be found in library collections and qualitative analyses of the perceptions librarians and patrons have regarding the ways libraries should be serving LGBTQIA+ patrons and their families. However, very few youth voices were heard by researchers in this work—a missed opportunity for scholars to include and center youth in their research. Although several studies involved human participants, most of the data collected came from library professionals. Only three studies (Chapman, 2013; Walker & Bates, 2016; Escobar, 2020) collected data directly from young people, and even in these three instances, the studies were not designed with the goal of highlighting youth voices and perspectives. Both Chapman (2013) and Walker and Bates (2016)

interviewed young people after interviewing library professionals. Walker and Bates (2016) and Escobar (2020) articulated challenges with conducting research with participants under the age of 18, so the voices recorded were those of college students over the age of 18.

While young college students are capable of recollecting and reflecting on their high school experiences—and this is an important perspective—the rapidly increasing anti-trans and anti-gay movements the United States faces remind us of the importance of speaking with current K–12 students. In fact, none of the research we found collected data on the experiences of youth younger than 15 years of age, nor LGBTQIA+ inclusive library services for middle and elementary school-aged children. There is increasing attention in the professional literature (Green et al., 2022) to this younger group of students who benefit, just like their older peers, from LGBTQIA+ inclusive practices and collections. A study of younger children would also be of great importance in light of newer legislation such as the Florida House Bill 1557 (also known as the “Don’t Say Gay” bill) that targets grades K–3 (Izaguirre & Licon, 2022). Numerous examples of empirical research within education and LIS disciplines have successfully involved K–12 students. While we acknowledge the challenge and ethical considerations present in this work, research on LGBTQIA+ library collections, services, and programs must center and highlight youth (ages 2–18) perspectives.

Lack of Representation

Individuals under the LGBTQIA+ umbrella represent a variety of identities and experiences. However, none of the studies in this systematic literature review attended to those individual identities. None of the study designs solicited demographic or identity information from participants, instead categorizing all participants under a broad LGBTQIA+ label. Such grouping does not address the differences and nuances of student experiences within these communities. LGBTQIA+ youth of color experience challenges that their white queer peers do not, and trans and nonbinary students face oppressive structures in schools and classrooms that are different than those faced by gay and lesbian youth. Of the limited research (as discussed in the previous paragraph) that consulted young people, transgender youth were severely underrepresented, with only one study explicitly reporting the presence of a transgender participant (Walker & Bates, 2016).

The lumping of all LGBTQIA+ identities and experiences under one broad label was also present in the collection analyses studies. These studies presented strong evidence librarians were undercollecting LGBTQIA+ books (e.g., Brendler et al., 2017; Creel & McMullen, 2018; Hughes-Hassell et al., 2013), but none examined and reported on the LGBTQIA+ identities and experiences present in the LGBTQIA+ books librarians are collecting, promoting, and recommending. If the majority of LGBTQIA+ books present in a library’s collection feature two fathers or two mothers who are white, cisgender gay or lesbian couples, then exploring this trend would help school and youth library researchers consider the ways these collection-development approaches may perpetuate white, cisgender, homonormative thinking (Green et al., 2022).

Emphasis on Collection Development and Materials

As discussed in the findings section of this article, a heavy focus on LGBTQIA+ collections and materials was identified, with 11 of the 13 studies explicitly studying collections and the remaining two including a significant discussion of collections as part of larger inquiries on services to LGBTQIA+ populations. LGBTQIA+ collections are an important aspect of youth librarianship and are one way that librarians signal their support for LGBTQIA+ user populations within their library communities. However, purchasing materials and making these available on a shelf are only small parts of collection development. There is much more LIS research can learn from the application of an intentional LGBTQIA+ focus to examinations of cataloging practices in school and public libraries, purchasing procedures, promotional practices like book talking, circulation policies, and even displays. Moreover, the current LIS research approach to examination of LGBTQIA+ collections ignores other key areas with potential for inclusive practices such as instruction and collaboration, reference and reader's advisory services, programming (such as author visits and book clubs), policies (such as those related to patron privacy), and community outreach. In today's hostile climate (GLSEN, 2022), and considering the dramatic number of book challenges happening across the United States, librarians need to broaden the scope of their LGBTQIA+ inclusive professional practice to these important services so that when books are challenged, students are still supported in multiple ways. Research on such practices is sorely needed so that evidence-based approaches can be applied.

CONCLUSION

School librarians, as well as classroom teachers and other education professionals, need evidence-based research to inform the creation and development of strong and impactful LGBTQIA+ inclusive programs. Unfortunately, a key finding of this systematic literature review is that little research has examined LGBTQIA+ inclusive school library services for youth. More research in this area, along with the employment of diverse methodologies to uncover a detailed and expansive picture of what LGBTQIA+ inclusive service means, is desperately needed.

Limitations

We acknowledge that two limitations may have affected the results of our review. First, despite efforts to be thorough and international in its application, this present study's data collection was limited to peer-reviewed, empirical studies published between 2009 and 2021. A more expansive search might examine conference proceedings, book chapters in edited collections, and thesis and dissertation collections. Second, our need to outsource searches in languages not spoken by the research team may also have limited the scope of this present study as we were not able to formally examine findings in those languages, and instead had to rely on the analysis conducted by the international LIS professionals.

Implications

School and public librarians are facing challenges to materials and programs in their libraries at an unprecedented level (ALA, 2022). It is not enough that LIS professionals have research to support collections through data about what is and is not available to students representing the diverse identities under the LGBTQIA+ umbrella. It is also imperative that LIS professionals have research to support effective, inclusive practices and services. The contentious climate of post-pandemic 2022 and 2023 will have a long-lasting impact on our LGBTQIA+ and cisheteronormative youth patrons. We strongly encourage LIS researchers to study and document examples of libraries and librarians who are engaged in inclusive practice as exemplars in the field, providing tangible findings about how students, classroom teachers, and communities benefit when these services are available through the library.

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Appendix: Articles and Papers Meeting Inclusion Criteria for this Study

Article	Methodology and Data Collection	Setting(s)	Research Questions	Abstract (Author's Abstract from Published Article)
Attwell, V. (2020). "In all areas, I cater to the majority": An investigation of LGBT+ provision in school libraries from the librarian's perspective. <i>School Libraries Worldwide</i> , 26(1), 61–81.	Qualitative—Questionnaire	United Kingdom School Libraries	How do school librarians perceive that they are addressing LGBT+ provision in school libraries?	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 that limited promotion of homosexuality by 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. A thematic analysis of qualitative and quantitative data was collected using a survey. It found many factors impacting LGBT+ provision, including external sources and the librarians themselves. Sporadic improvement has been made in LGBT+ provision, but there is no consensus on what good practice looks like.
Brendler, B., Beckman, L., Adkins, D., Sandy, H. M., Wiggins-Prelas, N., & Adams, V. (2017). Provide the highest level of service: Public library collections of LGBTQ* materials for adolescents in the United States.	Quantitative—Checklist Method and Descriptive statistics	United States Public Library	RQ1: What do public library LGBTQ* collections for young adults look like in the United States today? RQ2: Are there differences in LGBTQ* collections for teens related to library size and/or location?	With the growing youth LGBTQ* population comes the need for representation of those communities in library collections. To determine how well LGBTQ* populations were represented in library collections for young people, the authors reviewed the catalog holdings of 24 libraries

Article	Methodology and Data Collection	Setting(s)	Research Questions	Abstract (Author's Abstract from Published Article)
<p><i>The Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults</i>, 8(1), 1–32. https://www.yalsa.org/jrly/2017/07/provide-the-highest-level-of-service-public-library-collections-of-lgbtq-materials-for-adolescents-in-the-united-states/</p>				<p>across the country and serving various population sizes using a checklist of 80 LGBTQ* titles. The results were nuanced. Libraries serving populations greater than 300,000 held the most titles on the list; however, libraries serving populations fewer than 20,000 had the largest ratio of copies per population. Libraries in the south-central region had the fewest copies of these books overall. Libraries in the northeast held the greatest number of titles on the checklist. The northwest region held the most eBooks, audiobook CDs, and downloadable audiobooks, but the Northeast region held the most print copies of the books on the list.</p>
<p>Chapman, E. L. (2013). No more controversial than a gardening display? Provision of LGBT-related fiction to children and young people in U.K. public libraries. <i>Library Trends</i>, 61(3), 542–568. https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2013.0010</p>	<p>Mixed Methods—Checklist method, questionnaire, focus groups/interviews</p>	<p>United Kingdom Public Libraries</p>	<p>No research questions provided. Research objectives as stated in the paper:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To gain an overview of provision of LGBT-related fiction to under-eighteens in library authorities across United Kingdom, and staff attitudes to this provision • To assess holdings of LGBT-related fiction for under-eighteens in two library authorities 	<p>This article reports the findings of a study on the provision of LGBT-related fiction to children and young people in U.K. public libraries and on library staff attitudes to this material. The term "LGBT" stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans, with "trans" being an umbrella term used to encompass transgender and transsexual people, cross-dressers, and other gender-variant people. The research used a mixed-methods approach, comprising a checklist study, in which a list of books was checked against the catalogs of</p>

Article	Methodology and Data Collection	Setting(s)	Research Questions	Abstract (Author's Abstract from Published Article)
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To evaluate library staff opinions in these authorities regarding LGBT-related fiction aimed at under-eighteens ● To evaluate the opinions of young LGBT people and LGBT parents regarding LGBT-related fiction aimed at under-eighteens ● To make recommendations regarding the provision of LGBT-related fiction to under-eighteens in U.K. public libraries 	<p>two participating library authorities; staff focus groups in these authorities; and a questionnaire distributed nationwide via professional listservs. Opinions were also gathered from young LGBT people and LGBT parents through focus groups and interviews. The research showed clear room for improvement in provision in the two authorities studied, particularly as regard to picture books, books with trans content, books in different formats, and books from less mainstream authors and publishers. Library staff members showed generally positive attitudes toward this material, but there were some areas of concern, notably relating to the quality of materials, provision of materials to younger children, and the possibility of parental complaint. The study provides a much-needed preliminary insight into the subject and highlights areas for improvement.</p>
<p>Chapman, E. L., & Birdi, B. (2016). "It's woefully inadequate": collections of LGBTQ* fiction for teens in English public library services. <i>The Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults</i>, 7. http://www.yalsa.ala</p>	<p>Mixed Methods —Checklist method, questionnaires, interviews</p>	<p>United Kingdom-Public Library</p>	<p>To what extent is LGBTQ* fiction aimed at children and teens provided in English public library service?</p>	<p>Academic and professional literature in the field of library and information science has increasingly recognized the need to provide LGBTQ*-inclusive materials for children and teens. However, little research has been carried out in the United Kingdom on collections of these materials in</p>

Article	Methodology and Data Collection	Setting(s)	Research Questions	Abstract (Author's Abstract from Published Article)
.org/jrlya/2016/03/its-woefully-inadequate-collections-of-lgbtq-fiction-for-teens-in-english-public-library-services/				<p>public libraries. This study used a checklist approach to assess the holdings of LGBTQ* teen fiction in thirteen English public library services. The findings showed room for improvement in library collections, with particularly low holdings of titles in accessible formats. Moreover, titles from a recommended list made up less than half of LGBTQ* teen fiction holdings in all but one of the participating services. No relationship was found between annual book budget and number of LGBTQ* teen fiction titles held, although there was an apparent correlation between book budget and number of copies held.</p>
<p>Creel, S., & McMullen, R. (2018). The 2014 Rainbow List: A descriptive study of the list and ten public libraries' ownership. <i>Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults</i>, 9(1), 1–15. https://www.yalsa.org/jrlya/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Rainbow-List_Creel_McMullen.pdf</p>	<p>Quantitative—Checklist method and descriptive statistics</p>	<p>United States Public Libraries</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What does the makeup of the 2014 RBL look like? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. How frequently are the following categories represented on the 2014 RBL: Gay, Bisexual, Lesbian, Transgender, and Multiple? b. What is the breakdown of the list by age designation? c. How much of the list is designated as fiction, 	<p>Are libraries purchasing adequate materials for their youth LGBTQ collections? This study compares the ownership of the 2014 Rainbow Book List (RBL) titles to a list created from the top-ten titles of Best Fiction for Young Adults (BFYA), the Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers (QP), and the Teens' Top Ten (TTT) in the public libraries from the top-ten largest cities in the United States. It also reports on the balance of the 2014 RBL list in regards to target audience, diversity in types of fiction, nonfiction, and theme. In general, libraries owned</p>

Article	Methodology and Data Collection	Setting(s)	Research Questions	Abstract (Author's Abstract from Published Article)
			<p>nonfiction, or graphic novel?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. How are the 2014 RBL titles treated in the selected public libraries? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. To what classification (Adult, Juvenile, YA, or YA/Adult) are the 2014 RBL titles assigned in the public library's catalog? b. Are some categories of the 2014 RBL less represented in the collections of the ten libraries? 3. Which titles on the 2014 RBL have the most and least copies available? 4. How does ownership and classification of the 2014 RBL titles compare to ownership of selected titles from three top-ten lists? 	<p>fewer copies of RBL titles than those on the comparison list.</p>
<p>Escobar, Kristie L. (2020). "It's okay to be confused": LGBTQAI+ teen novels as sexuality and sexual health information resources. <i>The Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults</i>, 11(1). http://www.yalsa.ala</p>	<p>Qualitative—Interview</p>	<p>United States Public University (study conducted with teenaged undergraduate college students)</p>	<p>RQ1: How closely do the 2018 Rainbow Book List teen fiction novels relate to the real life of a group of LGBTQAI+ teens?</p> <p>RQ2: What do a group of teens like about the 2018 Rainbow Book List teen fiction selections? What do they dislike or disagree with?</p>	<p>Although sexual-education programs are staples in the middle and high school curricula, many of these courses are abstinence-based, which do not serve the needs of the teen demographic, let alone those who are LGBTQAI+. Curricula for sex education often ignore or discriminate</p>

Article	Methodology and Data Collection	Setting(s)	Research Questions	Abstract (Author's Abstract from Published Article)
<p>.org/jrly/2020/02/its-okay-to-be-confused-lgbtqai-teen-novels-as-sexuality-and-sexual-health-information-resources/</p>			<p>RQ3: How does this group of teens think that these novels could fulfill the information needs of LGBTQAI+ teens relative to sexuality?</p> <p>RQ4: How does this group of teens think these novels could fulfill the information needs of LGBTQAI+ teens relative to sexual health?</p>	<p>against LGBTQAI+ teens. LGBTQAI+-focused literature can help fill the gaps in sexuality/sexual-health information not addressed in public school curricula. Qualitative research such as content analysis divulges sexuality and sexual-health issues examined in LGBTQAI+-marketed teen literature. Individual interviews of LGBTQAI+ teens add insight into whether the positive and negative aspects of the teen literature, discovered through content analysis, affect them in their enjoyment of or willingness to read the book, whether the issues in the book are authentic and pertinent to their everyday life, and if the books fulfill an information need they have about sexuality or sexual health.</p>
<p>Garry, C. P. (2015). Selection or censorship? School librarians and LGBTQ resources. <i>School Libraries Worldwide</i>, 21(1), 73–90.</p>	<p>Mixed Methods— Checklist method, analysis of publicly available demographic data, interviews</p>	<p>United States School Libraries</p>	<p>Phase One RQ: What is the evidence that suggests school librarians may be practicing self-censorship when it comes to including library materials with gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender content?</p> <p>Phase Two RQ: What is the evidence that suggests certain attributes of the librarian, school, or community may correlate with higher or lower instances of self-censorship?</p> <p>Phase Three RQ: What actual professional and personal experiences</p>	<p>All students, including those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ), benefit from quality library books that reflect their experiences. This mixed-method research project examines whether public high school library professionals self-censor their library collections when it comes to materials with LGBTQ themes. Quantitative data were collected from 120 Ohio public high school libraries and 12 school librarians were interviewed. The results</p>

Article	Methodology and Data Collection	Setting(s)	Research Questions	Abstract (Author's Abstract from Published Article)
			<p>affect how school librarians approach collection development and materials selection? What internal or external factors influence their decisions during the selection process?</p>	<p>suggest that school libraries tended to have significantly fewer LGBTQ-themed books than titles with other kinds of controversial content, and that certain school-based factors, such as high enrolment, racial diversity, liberal-leaning community locations, and presence of certified school librarians, were present in schools with more inclusive LGBTQ collections. Qualitative findings supported the quantitative analyses in that participants stressed the importance of a supportive community and administration when developing a quality, inclusive library collection.</p>
<p>Hughes-Hassell, S., Overberg, E., & Harris, S. (2013). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ)-themed literature for teens: Are school libraries providing adequate collections? <i>School Library Research</i>, 16, 1–18. https://www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org/aasl/files/content/aaslpubsandjournals/slr/vol16/SLR_LGBTQThemedLiteratureforTeens_V16.pdf</p>	<p>Quantitative—Checklist Method</p>	<p>United States School Libraries</p>	<p>Research questions were not provided. The stated purpose of this study was to determine if young adults have access through school libraries to LGBTQ-themed literature.</p>	<p>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.</p>

Article	Methodology and Data Collection	Setting(s)	Research Questions	Abstract (Author's Abstract from Published Article)
<p>Magnuson, M. L. (2011). Perceptions of self and the “other”: An analysis of challenges to <i>And Tango Makes Three</i>. <i>School Library Research</i>, 14. https://www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org.aasl/files/content/aaslpubsandjournals/slr/vol14/SLR_Perceptions_ofSelf_V14.pdf</p>	<p>Qualitative— Content analysis</p>	<p>United States School and Public Libraries</p>	<p>What reasoning was given by those who challenged the controversial children’s book <i>And Tango Makes Three</i> and by those who opposed the challenges?</p>	<p>Understanding what motivates people to challenge books and how community members react to these challenges can help librarians find better ways to work with challengers to come to equitable solutions. This study focused on the motives behind challenges to the acclaimed children’s book <i>And Tango Makes Three</i> and the reasoning given by those who opposed these challenges. Qualitative content analysis was done on newspaper and library journal articles that discussed challenges to the book. Analysis revealed five major themes: third-person effect, parental rights, scarcity, First Amendment rights, and diversity.</p>
<p>Oltmann, S. M. (2016). “They kind of rely on the library”: School librarians serving LGBT students. <i>The Journal of Research on Libraries and Young Adults</i>, 7. http://www.yalsa.ala.org/jrlva/2016/03/they-kind-of-rely-on-the-library-school-librarians-serving-lgbt-students/</p>	<p>Qualitative— Interviews and content analysis</p>	<p>United States School Libraries</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are school librarians’ views on collecting LGBT resources? 2. For those who do collect LGBT resources, what are their reasons for doing so? 3. What roles can school librarians play to counter bullying of LGBT students? 	<p>This research examines school librarians’ perspectives on collecting LGBT materials. Based on qualitative interviews with thirty-one school librarians, this project found generally strong support for collecting LGBT materials. School librarians discussed serving their communities, having resources for all students, and meeting the needs of diverse students. In addition, they shared several ways that school libraries can counter bullying: creating a bully-free zone in the library, collecting LGBT and anti-</p>

Article	Methodology and Data Collection	Setting(s)	Research Questions	Abstract (Author's Abstract from Published Article)
				bullying materials, collaborating with guidance counselors and teachers, suggesting particular books for certain students, being a supporter of students, and positioning the school library as a safe space.
<p>Rickman, W. (2015). Collection development behaviors in school librarians: LGBTQQ books and resources. <i>Knowledge Quest</i>, 43(5). https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1063884</p>	Qualitative—Questionnaire	United States School Libraries	Research questions were not provided.	<p>For all students in public and private schools, the need to search for themselves in books and other resources is real and ever-growing. Selection is of prime importance in collection development—second only to de-selection, and 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). The study discussed here 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. 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</p>

Article	Methodology and Data Collection	Setting(s)	Research Questions	Abstract (Author's Abstract from Published Article)
				would provide further evidence of positive or negative collection-development tenets of the state's school librarians.
Spiering, J. (2017). Reviewing to exclude: Critical discourse analysis of LGBTQ book reviews for school librarians. <i>The ALAN Review</i> , 44(2), 43–53.	Qualitative—Critical Discourse Analysis	United States School Libraries	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does the language of book reviews of LGBTQ texts intended for school librarians position and frame LGBTQ themes and characters? 2. How does the language of book reviews of LGBTQ texts intended for school librarians frame and position school librarians and the youth readers they serve? 	School librarians use book reviews from professional publications like <i>School Library Journal</i> and <i>Library Media Connection</i> to make decisions about books to include, and exclude from their library collections. In this paper, the tools of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) were used to analyze book reviews for some popular and critically acclaimed LGBTQ literature intended for young adults, in order to better understand ways in which the language of book reviews could be influencing the decisions school librarians make about purchasing these materials. The analysis revealed that the discourses at work within these book reviews could potentially be limiting the audience for these materials through their cautionary tone and influencing school librarian's decisions about the books and their position within collections. While many of these discourses could be limiting school library collections, there are also examples that suggest that the discourses of book reviews can be used to disrupt normative understandings about

Article	Methodology and Data Collection	Setting(s)	Research Questions	Abstract (Author's Abstract from Published Article)
				what students should be reading and what should be considered appropriate content in LGBTQ literature.
<p>Walker, J., & Bates, J. (2016). Developments in LGBTQ provision in secondary school library services since the abolition of Section 28. <i>Journal of Librarianship and Information Science</i>, 48(3), 269–283. https://doi.org/10.1177/0961000614566340</p>	Qualitative—Questionnaires	United Kingdom School Libraries	Research questions were not provided. The article explores progress made in LGBTQ provision in UK secondary school libraries since Section 28 was repealed in 2003.	<p>These authors found that little research has been conducted on LGBTQ provision in UK school libraries. This paper aimed to fill a research gap in this field. Data was gathered from two qualitative surveys conducted in 2013. The first survey was aimed at LGBTQ people who had been pupils of a UK secondary school at some point during the period 2003–2013. The second was aimed at librarians currently working in UK secondary schools. The surveys were disseminated using targeted mailing lists and social media. A four-staged thematic analysis of the data was undertaken. The research found that school library use among LGBTQ teens is low due to LGBTQ invisibility and fear experienced by young LGBTQ people. LGBTQ school library provision would be highly valued by most LGBTQ pupils. Librarians are generally positive about LGBTQ provision, although they respond differently to diversity. Some adopt a neutral approach to inclusion; others offer more targeted and active support. Librarians' knowledge and</p>

Article	Methodology and Data Collection	Setting(s)	Research Questions	Abstract (Author's Abstract from Published Article)
				<p>confidence regarding LGBTQ provision also varies. The paper provides increased insight into LGBTQ school library provision in the UK and provides recommendations to improve practice.</p>

Cite This Article

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