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“It’s woefully inadequate”: Collections of LGBTQ* fiction for teens in English public library services

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Abstract

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

Introduction

Recent North American literature in the domain of LIS (library and information science) has increasingly recognized the need to provide LGBTQ*-inclusive materials and services to children and teens in libraries¹ (see the following sub-section for a discussion of the acronym 'LGBTQ*'). However, the topic has not received an equivalent amount of attention in the United Kingdom (UK), in either scholarly or professional literature, or in practice². The relatively small amount of extant research – much of which is dissertation research carried out at Master's level – has focused either on school libraries³ or on materials and services for adults⁴. There is thus a gap in the literature regarding LGBTQ* materials and services for children and teens in public libraries.

A note on terminology

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

There is an ongoing debate within trans(*) communities as to whether an asterisk should be used after the word trans(*)⁵. Those in favour of its use argue that it broadens the term to include people who might otherwise feel the term does not apply to them, such as some non-binary people (i.e. people who do not identify with a binary male or female gender)⁶. However, others argue that it is important to retain the word 'trans' (without the asterisk) as a disruptive and non-exclusionary term in its own right⁷. Both of the present authors identify as cisgender women, i.e. women whose gender identity matches our sexes assigned at birth, and who thus are not part of a trans(*) community⁸. Consequently, we feel the asterisk is not ours to criticize, and we have thus opted to use it in this paper in order to be as inclusive as possible. In future work, we will be guided in our use of terminology by the consensus emerging from within trans(*) communities⁹.

For the purposes of the study reported here, 'LGBTQ* fiction' was defined as fiction containing at least one character who was identified as LGBTQ*, or who was in a recognisably LGBTQ*

relationship (e.g. a family with two mums). Books with only brief mention of LGBTQ* background characters were not included within the scope of the research. We also did not take the sexuality or gender identity of the author into account when defining 'LGBTQ* fiction', focusing instead on the content of the book.

Statistics and context

It is difficult to gather reliable data on the number of LGBTQ* people in the UK, as people may be unwilling to declare their sexuality or gender identity through official channels; moreover, the concepts of sexuality and gender identity are complex and fluid, rendering measurement difficult. In a survey of UK adults carried out in 2015 by polling organization YouGov, 6% of the sample self-identified as gay or lesbian, with 2% identifying as bisexual and 1% identifying as 'other'. These figures rose to 10%, 2% and 2% respectively for the 18-24 age group¹⁰. Furthermore, preliminary findings from the Equality and Human Rights Commission suggest that around 1.0% of the UK population have undergone some part of a gender reassignment process, while 0.4% identify as something other than 'male' or 'female'¹¹. The 2014 Youth Chances survey – which surveyed over 7,000 young people aged 16-25 in England and is the largest and most representative UK research of its kind at the time of writing in 2016 – found that just over half of LGBQ respondents (53%) knew they were LGBQ by the age of 13, while a slightly higher proportion of trans* respondents (58%) knew they were trans* by the same age¹². The statistics thus suggest that there is a substantial population of LGBTQ* young people in the UK, and that many are aware of their LGBTQ* identity by the start of the teenage years. Librarians therefore need to be aware of the needs of this user population, and to provide them with relevant materials.

UK opinion poll data, gathered in 2012, suggest that attitudes towards LGB people are becoming more positive; however, negative attitudes persist among a substantial minority of the population, and three in five respondents felt that society in general was prejudiced against LGB people¹³. In a 2009 review of the literature on attitudes to trans* people, the authors concluded that "large sections of the British population hold negative and discriminatory views towards trans people, though there is evidence of positive change"¹⁴. Moreover, research into young LGBTQ* people's experiences, carried out in 2012, shows that these young people continue to experience stigma, bullying and discrimination¹⁵. Some studies suggest that over 70% of young LGBTQ* people have experienced homophobic, biphobic or transphobic bullying, with young trans* people experiencing particularly high rates of bullying¹⁶. There is thus a strong moral argument for providing materials that will help young LGBTQ* people to develop positive LGBTQ* identities, and/or combat prejudice among others.

Research rationale

In both the UK and the US, there is increasing awareness among authors, publishers, librarians and the general public of the need for teen books to feature diverse characters – including LGBTQ* characters¹⁷. Authors who write LGBTQ* fiction for teens report receiving hundreds of letters, emails and Twitter messages from LGBTQ* teens who have been helped by their books, as well as from straight, cisgender teens who say that the books opened their eyes¹⁸. There is also a small but increasing body of empirical research with young LGBTQ* people which demonstrates the unmet need for LGBTQ*-inclusive books and resources, including fiction¹⁹.

However, there is a lack of existing research on collections of LGBTQ* materials for children and teens in UK public libraries; the study reported here aimed to go some way towards addressing this.

UK public library services

UK public library services, or 'public library authorities', are administrative entities that comprise multiple library branches or outlets (broadly equivalent to the US term 'public library systems'). At the time when the research was carried out, there were 148 public library authorities in England²⁰. Throughout the remainder of this paper we have used the term 'public library services' as this is more widely understood beyond the UK context.

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

Literature review

LGBTQ* teens' library usage and satisfaction

The small amount of UK research on young people's information needs and library usage has identified various types of LGBTQ*-related information sought out by young people, including fiction. Bridge found that around 60% of respondents wanted gay community information and factual coming out information, with just over half looking for fiction with gay characters and around two-thirds looking for sexual health information²¹. In contrast, the top five types of information sought out by Walker's respondents were LGBT-related political information, sexual health information, LGBT history, fiction and general advice²². A previous piece of non-scholarly research carried out with teens in the US identified similar topics, although in a different order of priority, with (auto)biographies of LGBTQ* people ranking highest, followed by coming-out stories, activism 'how-to' information, fiction, community resources and so on, with sexual health information ranking lowest²³. The different rankings of information types in the three studies are unsurprising, as each surveyed a different population (in Northern Ireland, the wider UK, and the US) and none of the samples were large enough to be statistically generalizable.

In both Bridge's and Walker's studies, only a minority of respondents looked for the information they needed in the library, with just one respondent to Bridge's survey (n=42) using the library as an information source²⁴. Twenty-two percent of respondents to Walker's survey (n=104) said they had looked for LGBT-related information in their school library, and over half of these had not

found anything. Reasons for not using the library to look for this information included fear, and the assumption that the library would not have anything relevant²⁵. However, the library emerged as an important 'safe space' for LGBTQ* pupils in both pieces of research. Participants in Walker's research also made suggestions for how to improve the library service. In order of popularity, these were: increase the availability of LGBT resources; improve the promotion of resources; ensure that access to LGBT materials is not restricted; and work to improve awareness of LGBT issues at a school-wide level.

A number of studies in the UK and North America have surveyed LGBTQ* adults about their information needs and library usage. Findings differ significantly in terms of the frequency with which respondents used libraries in their efforts to locate information, with earlier studies showing higher levels of library use²⁶. More recent studies (from the mid-2000s onwards) show lower library use by LGBTQ* participants, who cited negative perceptions of libraries, fear of homophobia or transphobia, and the assumption that the library would not have anything useful as reasons for not using the service²⁷. Even where libraries were used, satisfaction levels were low, with respondents criticising both the collections and the attitudes of the staff²⁸. Norman's UK-based research on the Brighton & Hove LGB collection bucked the trend of the extant literature, with most respondents rating the collection as "good" or "satisfactory"²⁹.

Library holdings

A number of studies have been carried out which assessed holdings of LGBTQ* materials in public libraries, although few were UK-based. The majority of studies have used various forms of checklist approach³⁰. Within this literature is a body of work focusing on holdings of LGBTQ* teen materials in public libraries³¹. One study was located which used a checklist approach to investigate school library holdings of LGBTQ* fiction and non-fiction³², while a UK study by Wright asked school librarians to assess their own LGBTQ* holdings³³.

Those studies which made a value judgement concluded that holdings of LGBT-related fiction for children and teens in public/school libraries were limited³⁴. Spence, and Rothbauer and McKechnie, working in the North American context, both noted substantial variation in holdings between library services, resulting in an inconsistent level of service³⁵. The latter study also found that older titles were just as likely to be held as more recent ones, despite the fact that older titles are more likely to contain negative stereotypes. Boon and Howard compared holdings of LGBT titles with a control group of non-LGBT titles, finding that LGBT titles were less likely to be held³⁶. Moreover, there were fewer copies of LGBT titles (40.57 copies on average) than of control titles (68.14 copies on average). More recently, Williams and Deyoe found that 326 public libraries in the US (out of 2507 listed on Worldcat.org) did not hold any of the titles from the ALA's Rainbow List of LGBTQ* books for children and teens³⁷. In the school library context, Hughes-Hassell et al. found that around two-thirds of the 125 school libraries in the sample held fewer than five titles from a recommended list of LGBTQ* fiction; total holdings of LGBTQ* titles made up just 0.4% of collections, on average³⁸.

Little research has been carried out on this topic in the UK. A study on LGBTQ* materials and services in UK secondary school libraries (which serve pupils aged 11-18) asked respondents to

estimate the number of LGBT books in their collections³⁹. On average, LGBT books made up 0.24% of library holdings. However, as this relies on self-reported figures, it may say as much about librarians' knowledge of their collections as about LGBTQ* holdings.

Chapman's own dissertation research, which was carried out in 2007, looked at holdings of LGBT-related fiction for children and teens in public libraries in the UK⁴⁰. Checklist research carried out in two case study library services found room for improvement in comparison with a library service that had a good reputation for LGBTQ* collections and services. It was also notable that few titles were available in alternative formats, and no titles with trans* content were held. Moreover, a questionnaire distributed nationally tentatively suggested that holdings might be limited in other libraries across the UK, and the dissertation recommended further research to investigate this.

Budget and collection development

One potential factor that could affect holdings of LGBTQ* materials for children and teens is budget. There is little previous literature on this area. However, Williams and Deyoe found a mild relationship between collection size and number of LGBTQ titles ($R^2 = 0.22$) and between collection expenditure and number of LGBTQ titles ($R^2 = 0.3$)⁴¹. However, the impact of this in practice was not substantial, with the number of LGBTQ titles increasing by 1.6 for every \$100,000 spent on the collection, and by 0.3 for every additional 10,000 volumes in the collection. Rothbauer and McKechnie looked not at budget, but at the potentially related variable of library size, and found no significant relationship between size and number of titles held⁴².

Qualitative research supports the hypothesis that budgetary considerations may affect holdings of LGBTQ* materials. Some of the library directors surveyed by Pruitt expressed a reluctance to support gay men's reading groups for budgetary reasons or, relatedly, due to an expectation that circulation figures would be poor⁴³. Similarly, a more general study of attitudes relating to collection management found that materials were expected to provide value for money, leading to a focus on mainstream materials that were likely to be checked out frequently⁴⁴.

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

Methodology

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

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

Additional research questions, not discussed in this paper, related to the procurement and management of LGBTQ* fiction for children and teens; librarians' attitudes towards this material; and other factors potentially affecting holdings⁴⁵. Some of the findings relating to librarians' attitudes have been presented in a previous paper⁴⁶ and the remaining findings will be discussed in forthcoming papers.

The study as a whole employed a mixed-methods approach, the design of which was informed by Johnson et al.'s definition of such research as:

“...the type of research in which a researcher... combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration.”⁴⁷

The mixing of methods took place at both the data collection and analysis stages. The research design combined a checklist study to assess fiction holdings (discussed further below), questionnaires for staff members involved in collection development, and interviews with staff members involved in collection development at selected library services. Descriptive statistics were generated from quantitative data collected through the checklist study and through closed-ended questions on the questionnaires. The findings from the checklist study and questionnaires were used to inform the design of the interview schedule, and the qualitative data from the interviews and open-ended questionnaire responses were subsequently explored using thematic analysis⁴⁸. This paper presents the findings of the checklist study, although the subsequent interview study method and findings are mentioned where appropriate.

The mixed-methods approach of the thesis as a whole was based on a pragmatic philosophy. Pragmatism “[e]ndorses eclecticism and pluralism (e.g., different, even conflicting, theories and perspectives can be useful; observation, experience, and experiments are all useful ways to gain an understanding of people and the world)”⁴⁹. Ontologically and epistemologically speaking, pragmatists believe in the existence of both a single physical world, and multiple realities which are experienced differently by individuals; similarly, knowledge is both constructed and based on the ‘real world’⁵⁰.

This ontological and epistemological stance informed the choice of methods used in the research. Books are countable objects, which either are or are not held by the library; it was therefore appropriate to assess holdings using a quantitative method. However, the ways in which individuals view and interact with these books are highly subjective; therefore, in order to gain a thorough understanding of librarians' attitudes and decisions regarding this material, it was necessary to have a qualitative element to the research. Pragmatism thus provided an eminently appropriate philosophical background for this mixed methods study⁵¹.

Pragmatism emphasises action, usefulness, and theory which supports effective practice or transformation. Moreover, pragmatists argue that research is inevitably value-laden, and that a

pragmatic approach upholds values such as equality and social justice⁵². The research reported here was intended to be transformative, and to make a positive contribution to developing libraries' collections of LGBTQ* fiction for children and teens. The authors believe that when conducting and reporting research it is preferable to be open about one's personal and political stance rather than to pretend to scientific objectivity, as one's values will inevitably affect the way that knowledge is constructed in the research process. Moreover, positions which are supposedly 'neutral' often translate in practice to support for established systems⁵³. However, despite the transformative intention of the research, we sought to minimise the potential impact of bias on the data analysis by critically reflecting on our possible biases, and through peer debriefing with one another and with a colleague from a somewhat different disciplinary background⁵⁴.

Sampling

Thirteen library services across England were selected for this research. The goal was not to make statistical generalizations from the sample – which would have necessitated a much larger number of library services – but to include a range of services with different characteristics, to increase the likely transferability of the findings⁵⁵. Descriptive summaries of each library service were included in Appendix O of the thesis, to help readers ascertain the extent to which findings could be transferable to other, similar library services⁵⁶.

The sample selection process was based on two variables, the first being number of book acquisitions (as a proxy measure for annual book budget), as reported in the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's Public Library Statistics for that year⁵⁷. The second variable was the type of local authority. As noted in the Introduction, UK library services are generally run by local authorities, which fall into four categories: county authorities, unitary authorities, metropolitan boroughs and London boroughs. Although the characteristics of local authorities vary within as well as between these categories, we felt that the use of this variable for sample selection would give us a varied sample in terms of size, geographical location, and rural/urban authorities. The composition of the final sample confirmed this hypothesis.

Thus, for each of the four types of local authority, we randomly selected library services with high, medium and low numbers of book acquisitions, resulting in a non-proportional stratified random sample⁵⁸. In addition to these twelve library services, one service that had a good reputation for LGBTQ* collections and services was selected based on existing knowledge. To maintain anonymity, the library services were coded as shown in Table 1:

Category	Code
B ottom quintile for book budget, C ounty authority	BC
M iddle quintile for book budget, C ounty authority	MC
T op quintile for book budget, C ounty authority	TC
B ottom quintile for book budget, L ondon borough	BL
M iddle quintile for book budget, L ondon borough	ML
T op quintile for book budget, L ondon borough	TL
B ottom quintile for book budget, M etropolitan borough	BM
M iddle quintile for book budget, M etropolitan borough	MM

Top quintile for book budget, Metropolitan borough	TM
Bottom quintile for book budget, Unitary authority	BU
Middle quintile for book budget, Unitary authority	MU
Top quintile for book budget, Unitary authority	TU
Purposively selected authority (happens to be bottom-quintile unitary authority)	BUP

Table 1: Codes used for participating library services.

To facilitate the reading of the charts presented in the ‘Findings’ section, the stratified sampling is also reflected in the colour-coding. Bottom-quintile library services are shaded light grey, middle-quintile services are shaded medium grey, and top-quintile services are the darkest grey.

Checklist

A checklist of LGBTQ* fiction for children and teens was used to assess holdings of LGBTQ* fiction for children and teens at the participating library services. There was no comprehensive extant list of LGBTQ* fiction for these age groups available in the UK, and we therefore developed our own checklist of titles, which were then looked up in each library’s catalog to ascertain whether they were held. There is a consensus in the literature that checklist studies are an appropriate method of assessing holdings of LGBTQ* materials⁵⁹, and the present research arguably improves on previous studies in that the checklist is more comprehensive and was validity tested with key professionals from LGBTQ* librarianship, research and activism (discussed further below).

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

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

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

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

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

Catalogue checking

The catalogue checking stage of the research was carried out between December 2010 and July 2011. Each title on the full checklist (of 556 titles) was checked against the Online Public Access Catalogues (OPACs) of the 13 participating library services, and the following information was recorded in a spreadsheet:

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

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

Interviews

Interviews were carried out with staff members involved in collection development at four of the participating library services, plus pilot interviewees; a total of 18 individuals were interviewed. As part of this stage of the research, interviewees were presented with summary data on holdings of LGBTQ* fiction in the 13 participating library services, and asked to respond to it. This enabled us to collect empirical data to supplement our own value judgement on the adequacy (or otherwise) of collections. Here, as elsewhere in the research, we endeavoured to minimise the potential impact of interviewer bias. The initial question was extremely open and simply asked the interviewee for their thoughts on the data. This was followed by a prompt specifically asking whether the interviewee felt holdings were adequate, in the event that they had not already discussed this. No opinion was expressed by the interviewer until after the participant had fully explained their own thoughts, and then only if the interviewee asked for our opinion.

Limitations of the research

As stated in the Methodology, the research reported here formed part of a larger doctoral study involving further empirical research, and as a result it was not feasible within the scope of the thesis to study the libraries in more than 13 local authorities. As a result, the sample for the present study is not sufficiently large for the findings to be generalized to the wider population of English public library services. However, it has been possible to identify some potential trends which may be transferable to other library services.

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

Findings

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

[Figure 1 here].

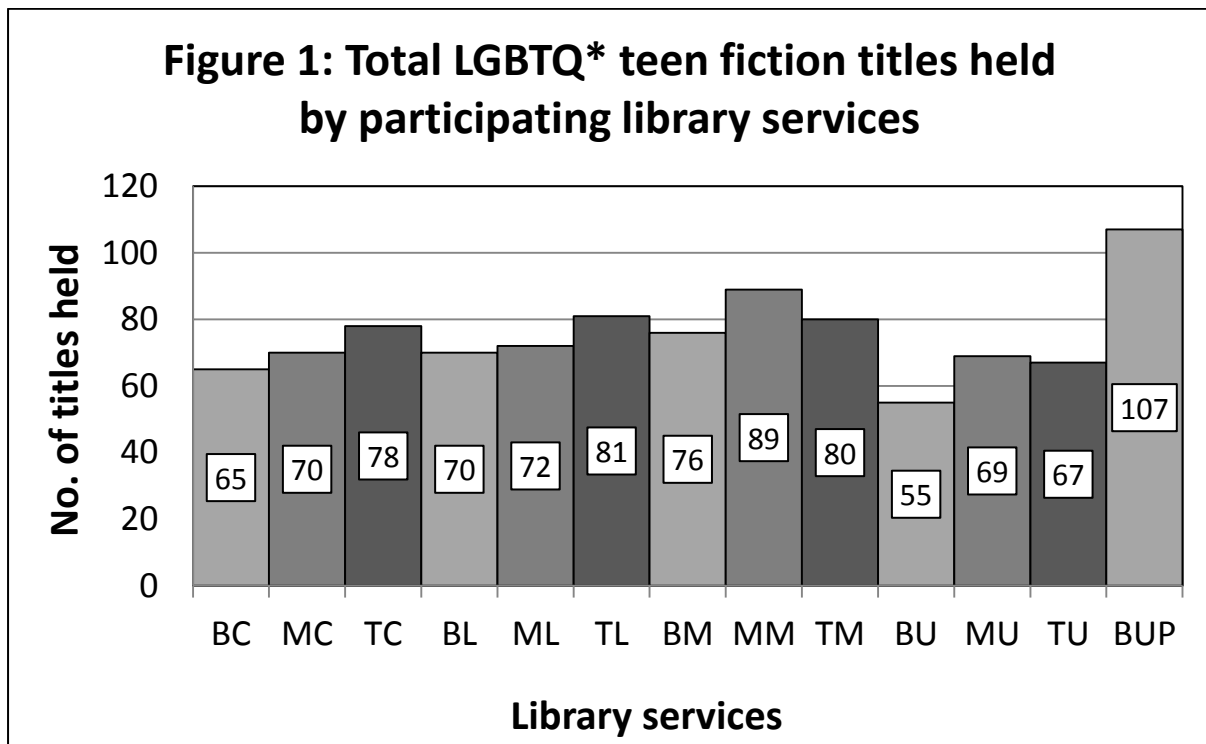
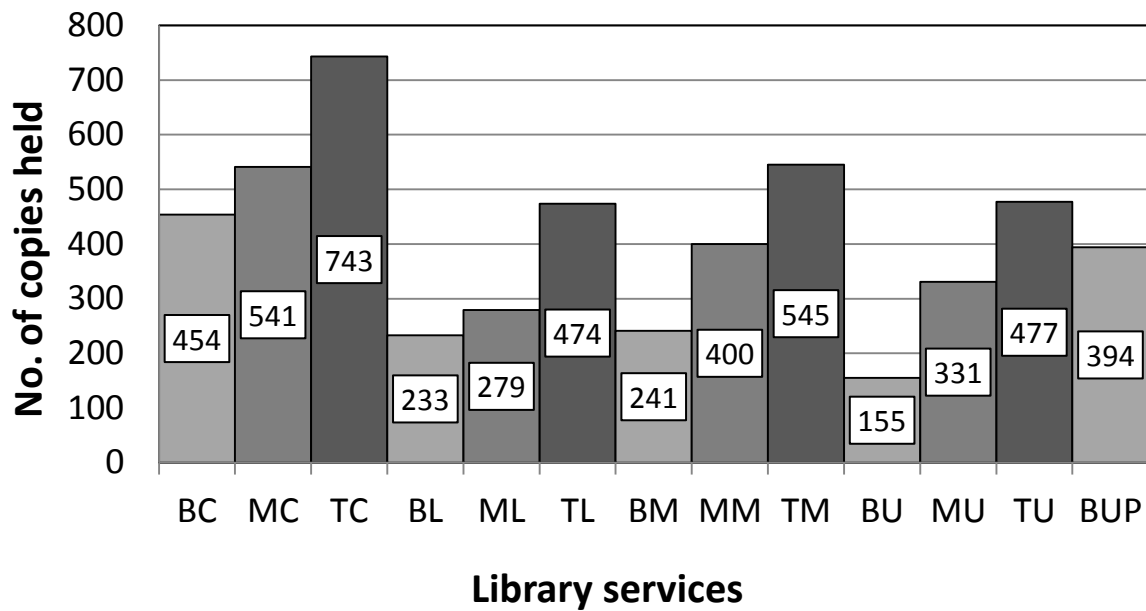


Figure 2 shows the number of copies of LGBTQ* teen fiction titles held by the participating library services. On this measure, BUP performs less well despite its reputation for good LGBTQ* collections and services, reflecting its smaller budget. The chart also suggests a potential relationship between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

[Figure 2 here]

Figure 2: Total copies of LGBTQ* teen fiction titles held by participating library services



Holdings of titles in accessible formats

Data were also gathered on holdings of titles in different formats, in order to assess the availability of LGBTQ* fiction for children with visual impairments or other reading difficulties. As discussed in the ‘Methodology’ section, the first step was to ascertain how many titles were available in these formats. Table 2 shows the availability of the teen fiction titles on the checklist in different formats. Although not all e-books are fully accessible, the font size can be increased to improve legibility, and increasing numbers of e-book readers provide text-to-speech options⁶⁰. Furthermore, remote availability of e-books or e-audiobooks facilitates access for people with mobility difficulties⁶¹.

As shown in Table 2, a large number of checklist titles were available in e-book format (268 titles, or 56.3% of the total teen fiction titles on the checklist). However, far fewer were available in other accessible formats. This is consistent with broader research by the Royal National Institute of Blind People on availability of titles in accessible formats⁶².

[Table 2 here]

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

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

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

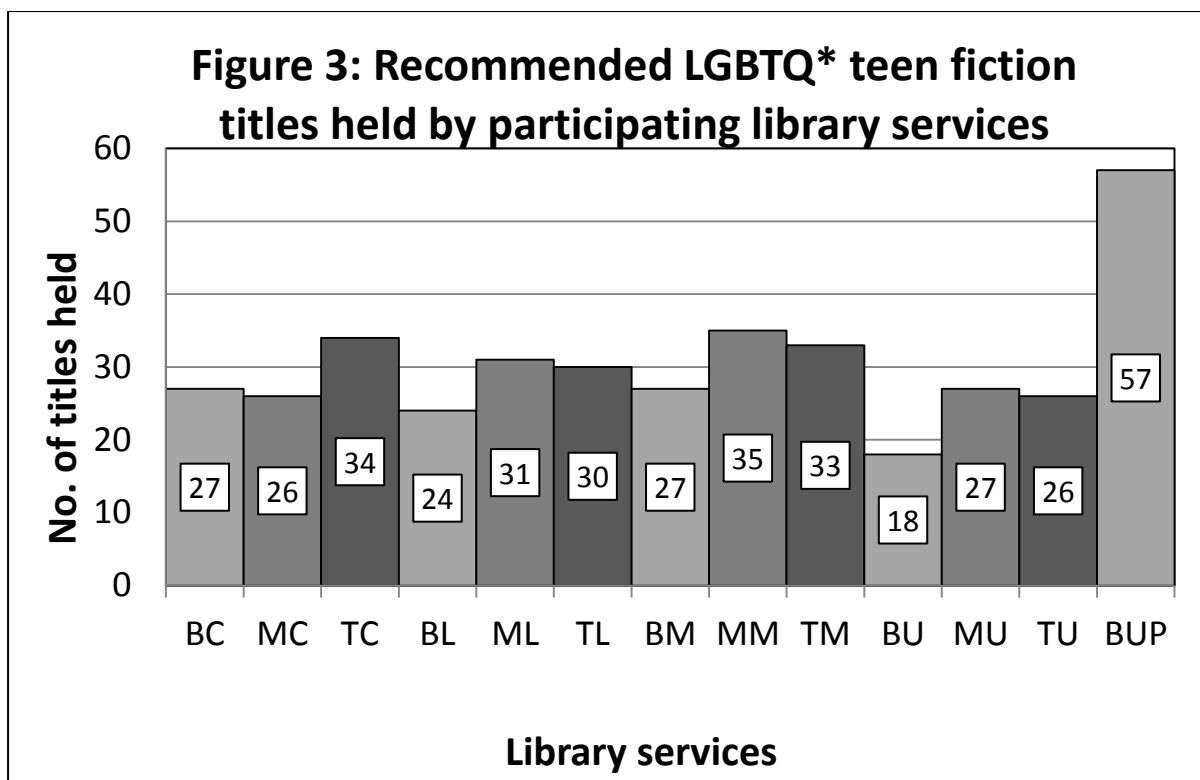
Six of the participating library services did not provide any titles in either of the e-audiobook formats, and none of the library services held more than seven titles in this format. This may reflect a general lack of take-up of this format by library services; however, an investigation of this lay beyond the scope of the research. Similarly, none of the participating library services held any of the titles in e-book format, despite the large number of titles published in this format. It may be that none of the library services offered an e-lending service at all when this phase of the research was carried out in 2010-11. Alternatively, the lack of e-book titles may reflect the restrictions on e-lending by public libraries. Research carried out by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) in 2014 found that 90% of the 50 most borrowed print books had been published in e-book format, but only 7% were available to public libraries for e-lending⁶³.

The checklist study also showed that the participating library services did not generally hold multiple copies of titles in large print or e-audiobook formats. The exception to this was TC, which held 24 copies of large print titles (an average of four copies for each of its six titles). However, the library services performed better as regards the number of copies of titles on CD, with several holding multiple copies.

Holdings of recommended titles

As noted in the Methodology, a shorter list of recommended titles was compiled, comprising 203 titles in total, including 168 teen fiction titles. Figure 3 shows the total holdings of recommended teen fiction titles at the 13 participating library services. Once again, BUP – which has a reputation for good LGBTQ* collections and services – stands out, with 57 titles. However, this is still only 33.9% of the 168 recommended teen fiction titles available. The remaining library services held between 18 and 35 titles, or between 10.7% and 20.8% of the titles available.

[Figure 3 here]



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

[Table 3 here]

Library service	Proportion of non-recommended titles held, as % of total teen fiction titles not on recommended checklist	Proportion of recommended titles held, as % of total recommended teen fiction titles
BC	12.3	16.1
MC	14.3	15.5
TC	14.3	20.2
BL	14.9	14.3
MM	13.3	18.5
TL	16.6	17.9
BM	15.9	16.1
MM	17.5	20.8
TM	15.3	19.6
BU	12.0	10.7
MU	13.6	16.1
TU	13.3	15.5
BUP	16.2	33.9

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

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

[Figure 4 here]

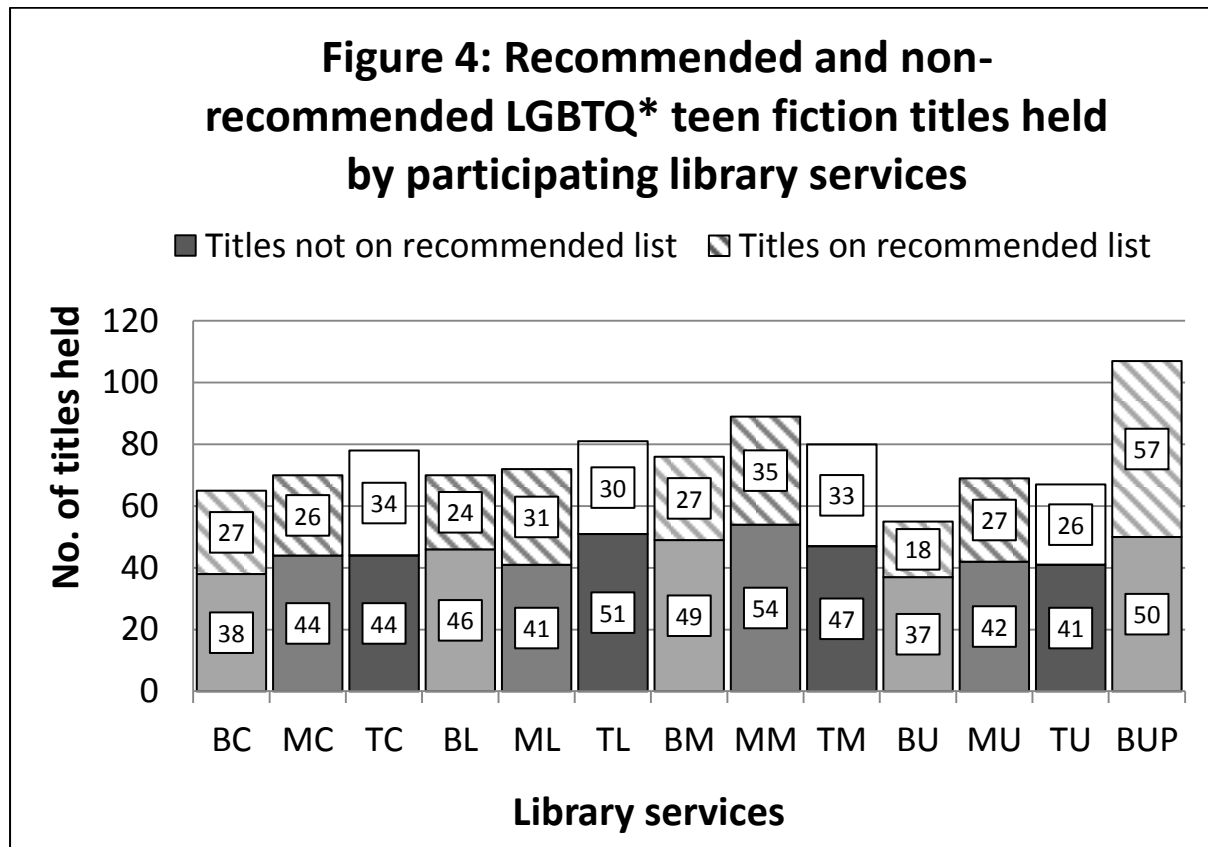
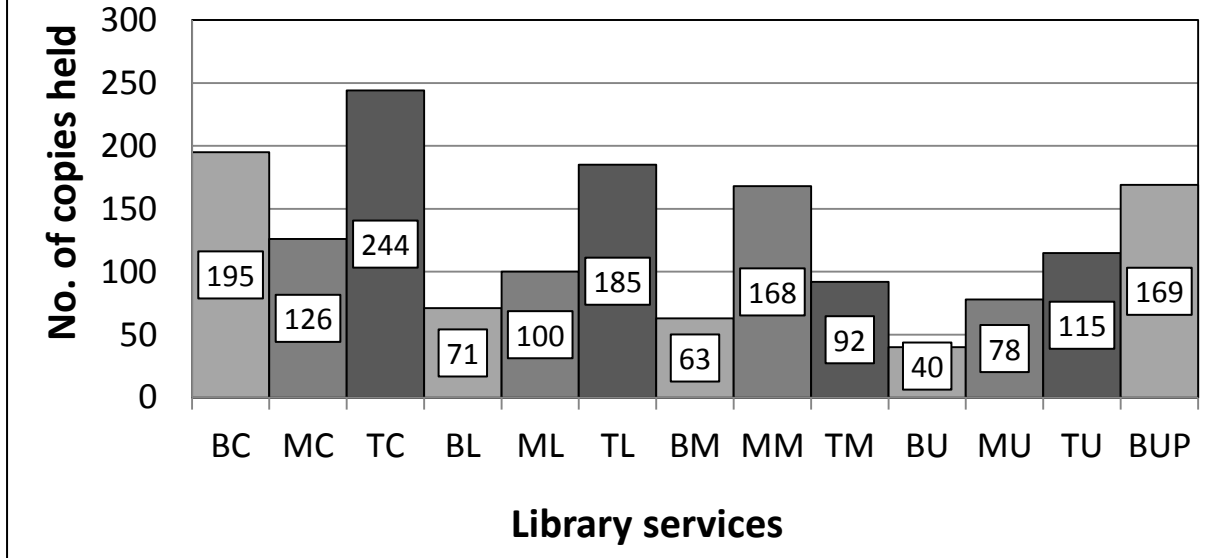


Figure 5 shows the number of copies of recommended titles held by participating library services. The pattern is rather different from that shown in Figure 2 (total copies of checklist titles), suggesting that the number of copies of *recommended* titles is not simply a function of budget (discussed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

[Figure 5 here]

Figure 5: Copies of recommended LGBTQ* teen fiction titles held by participating library services

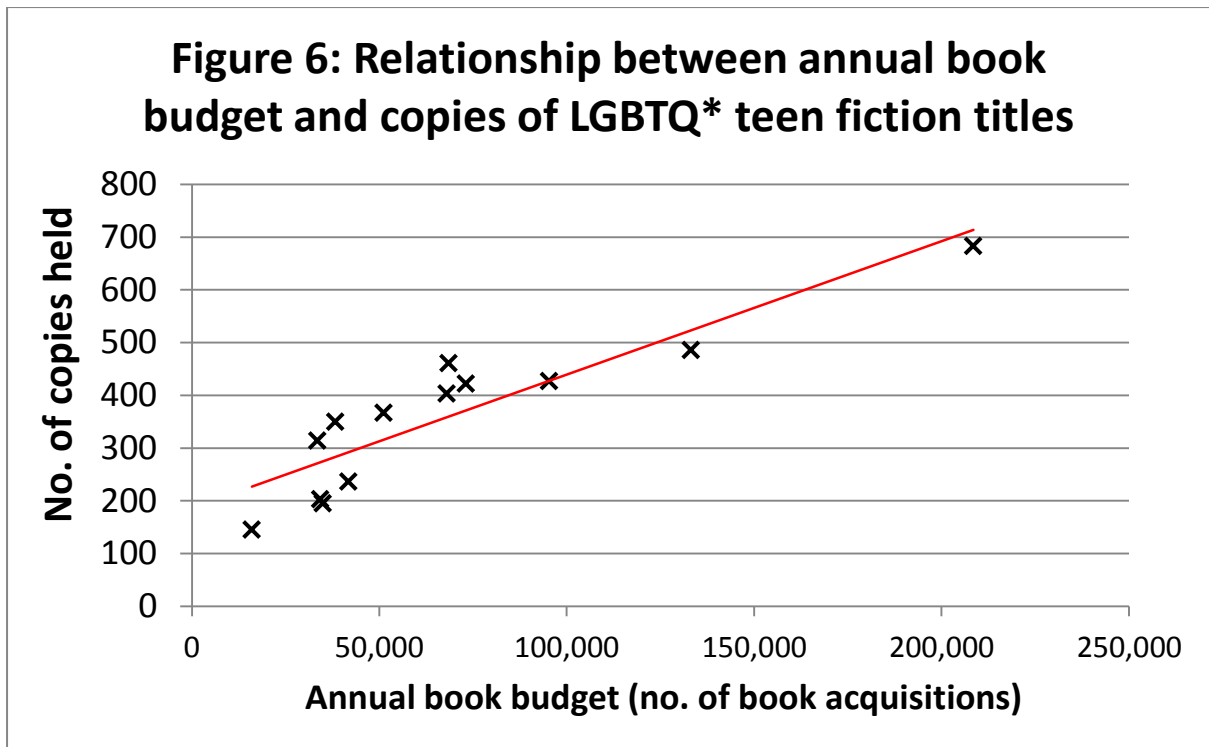


Relationship between annual book budget and library holdings

As discussed in the Methodology section, annual book budget (specifically the number of book acquisitions) was used as one of the variables for selecting the sample of participating library services, as it could have a direct impact on the service’s ability to purchase LGBTQ* fiction for children and teens. Although the sample was not large enough for the findings to be statistically generalizable, we nonetheless felt that it would be useful to map the number of titles held against the number of book acquisitions, with a view to tentatively identifying any potential correlations. The number of book acquisitions for the 2007-08 financial period was visually mapped against a) the total holdings of LGBTQ* teen fiction titles and b) the holdings of recommended LGBTQ* teen fiction titles, by using Microsoft Excel to create a scatterplot and insert a line of best fit. No correlation was apparent in either case; in other words, there was no evidence that budget had an impact on the holdings of LGBTQ* teen fiction titles. Indeed, it should be noted that BUP, which had the highest figures for both total holdings and holdings of recommended titles, actually had a relatively small budget.

In contrast, when the number of book acquisitions was mapped against the number of *copies* held, the data suggested a strong correlation (Figure 6). As noted above, the sample was not large enough for the findings to be statistically generalizable, and statistical tests were thus not carried out. However, the existence of an apparent correlation is supported by logic: library services with larger book budgets are able to buy more copies of the titles selected.

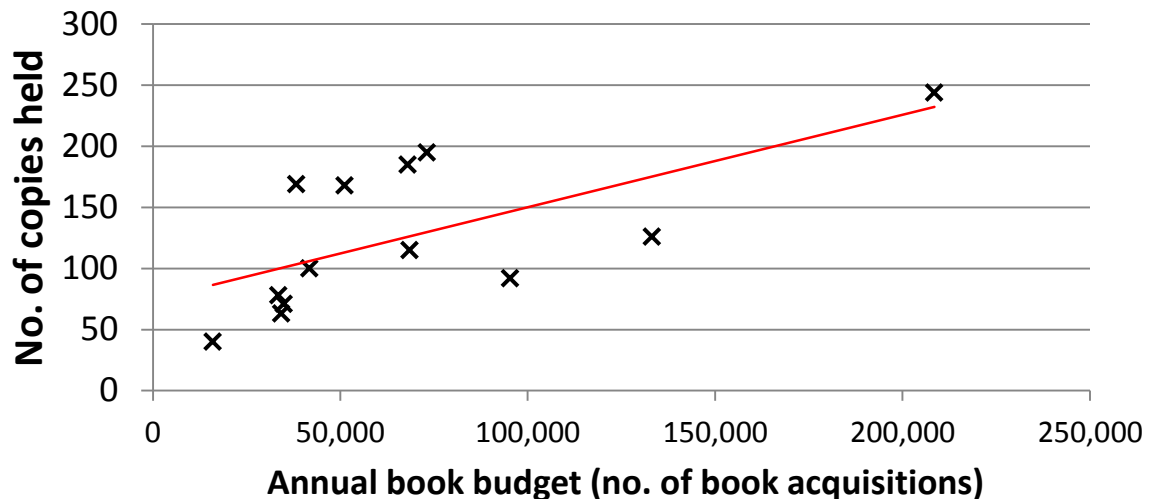
[Figure 6 here]



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

[Figure 7 here]

Figure 7: Relationship between annual book budget and copies of recommended LGBTQ* teen fiction titles



Discussion

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

One limitation of checklist studies is that frequently, no indication is given of what could constitute a 'good' or 'adequate' collection of LGBTQ* fiction⁶⁴. Martin and Murdock suggest that even the smallest branch library should hold at least 10 LGBTQ* teen titles; however, while this has implications for the number of copies held, it does not say anything about the range of titles required across the library service as a whole⁶⁵. We therefore opted to collect opinion data from research participants, as described in the Methodology, to supplement our own value judgement as to the adequacy (or otherwise) of collections.

The large majority of interviewees felt that provision was not adequate, with many expressing disappointment or even shock⁶⁶. One interviewee responded with the observation, "It's woefully inadequate" (Pilot 2), while another commented, "I'd say it makes quite disappointing reading" (Interviewee TL4). The only library service where interviewees expressed some satisfaction with their collection was, perhaps unsurprisingly, BUP. However, even the interviewees from this authority felt there was room for improvement.

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

There has been very little previous research on holdings of LGBTQ* fiction aimed at children and teens in public library services in the UK. Chapman’s previous MA research found room for improvement in the two case study library services, particularly as regards materials in accessible formats, and tentatively suggested that “provision may be limited in other authorities [across the UK]”⁶⁷. The present research appears to confirm this. In addition, studies from the US and Canada have also concluded that public library holdings of LGBTQ* fiction for children and teens are limited⁶⁸, while UK research on school libraries has found a similar lack of attention to LGBTQ* materials⁶⁹. The findings of the present study are thus in line with the extant research, while also presenting new data on the situation in English public library services.

The small amount of extant quantitative research suggests that budget has, at most, a limited impact on holdings of LGBTQ* materials for teens⁷⁰. However, qualitative research suggests that budgetary concerns may affect holdings indirectly, through the focus on titles that will generate high circulation figures and provide ‘value for money’⁷¹. Over the period between 2007-08 and 2012-13, eight of the 13 participating library services experienced cuts to their book budgets, and three saw substantial cuts of around 50%⁷². This may exacerbate the tendency to focus on circulation figures to the detriment of diverse collections.

Conclusion

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

Librarians in many services are facing cuts to book budgets, together with concomitant pressures to generate high circulation figures⁷³. However, the present study showed no correlation between book budget and number of LGBTQ* teen fiction titles held. Indeed, BUP, which had a relatively small budget, performed better in terms of both the total number of titles held, and the number of titles from the recommended list. It can thus be inferred that it is possible, even on a small budget, to provide a collection that is at least somewhat better than is currently the case in most of the participating library services, in terms of the range and quality of titles. In other words, a small budget does not preclude the development of an LGBTQ* teen fiction collection, and should not be used as an excuse for inadequate holdings. Librarians may need to consider alternative ways of measuring and communicating value and impact, beyond circulation figures alone⁷⁴.

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

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