Meeting the Information Needs of an Invisible Community:
An Annotated Bibliography
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Meeting the Information Needs of an Invisible Community: An Annotated Bibliography

Introduction and Scope
The following bibliography covers the issues of the still very acceptable discrimination of the Gay, Lesbian, Bi-Sexual, and Transgendered (GLBT) community in the public library. The articles within the bibliography discuss the myths that are continually perpetuated relating to homosexuality which prevent libraries from keeping their collections up to date and relevant. The information needs of the GLBT patrons are reviewed in several articles. Why a special collection is needed and the reasons behind the rampant discrimination are discussed. Several articles focus on the specific needs of lesbians, students, and youth. Other articles look at the reasons behind the censorship and the under-representation of GLBT materials in the library. One article covers the problem with indexing and subject headings. The articles were published from 1987 to the present and include articles from the United Kingdom, Scotland, and Canada. The purpose is to demonstrate that discrimination is worldwide, and even in a new millennium, the GLBT community must fight hatred, censorship, and ignorance and continue the battle for representation and their right to information and intellectual freedom.

Description
While the issues facing the GLBT community are gaining more acceptance; within the walls of the public library, censorship and discrimination are still perfectly acceptable. A group that has always been notoriously invisible continues to go unnoticed; misconceptions and myths continue to be perpetuated; youth and women are denied access to fiction with GLBT characters and information on homosexuality in general. Public libraries have a responsibility and a duty to meet the diverse information needs of all members of the community, including those patrons that identify as GLBT, through comprehensive collections and services.

Summary of Findings
Even though we are firmly entrenched in the 21st Century, homosexuality remains the last bastion of socially acceptable prejudices. The American Library Association (ALA) provides a code of ethics that is supposed to provide a framework to help guide in ethical decision making. “We provide the highest level of service to all library users
through appropriate and usefully organized resources; equitable service policies; equitable access; and accurate, unbiased, and courteous responses to all requests” (ALA, 2008). Even though these guidelines exist, discrimination continues to thrive in public libraries. “By adopting an ethos of neutrality, public librarians help perpetuate a heterosexist and patriarchal status quo that tends to exclude hidden minorities” (Joyce, 2000). A plethora of research has been conducted in an effort to determine the reasons behind the bias and prejudice by public libraries and librarians against the GLBT community.

Gough and Greenblatt (1992) examine the myths that are at the root of out-of-date and, in many cases, non-existent resources in the library. The first myth is the belief by librarians that gays and lesbians do not live in their neighborhoods and if they do then they do not use their library. Another myth, held by people in general, is that having gay and lesbian materials in some way endorses the homosexual lifestyle. It is also believed that special indexing is not necessary because gays and lesbians can use the catalog just like everyone else. A final disturbing myth is that young people do not search for gay or lesbian materials. Heterosexism, the belief that heterosexuality is superior and right, seems to be the main underlying reason for the poor service to the GLBT community. It is taught and instilled at early age that being a homosexual is wrong and those that are openly gay are rewarded with ostracism and violence as well as having their rights taken away (Gough & Greenblatt, 1992). “In order to develop quality services to LGB populations, librarians must address these myths” (Joyce, 2000).

The heterosexist mentality can be seen in the prejudicial classification schemes. At one point, under the heading homosexuality one would have found “Crime see Offenses; Sex see Sexual Disorders” (Joyce, 2000). Thanks to activists such as Ellen Greenblatt homosexuality is no longer linked to sex crimes. “Indexing is a major factor influencing access to periodical literature for gay men and lesbian” (Kilpatrick, 1996). Kilpatrick (1996) goes on to explain how indexing affects access to literature. His study examines availability of gay and lesbian journals and libraries as well as the indexing available for them. While the study did show that progress is being made through the determination of task forces, publishers, and patrons there is still a gap in those that receive services. Youth is a major group that is denied access to gay and lesbian
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The college student population is diverse and has unique needs. Research shows that the needs of this specific demographic must be met to ensure that “academic libraries are a welcoming place for all students” (Switzer, 2008). By creating initiatives the education of students in minority groups, such as those that are gay and lesbian, the overall educational experience is improved because they feel like a vital part of the overall college experience (Switzer, 2008). Switzer (2008) recommends having an “outreach specific librarian” on campus in order to ensure inclusion.

Another segment of the GLBT community that has been the subject of research are lesbians and their information needs. Several of the articles in this bibliography look at the needs of lesbians specifically. For lesbians, receiving equitable treatment in terms of services of resources can be very difficult. They are discriminated against on two different levels: gender and sexual orientation. Creelman and Harris (1989) note that according to the respondents to their survey the resources they have found focus on the experiences of gay men. Raaflaub (1991) found the same to be true in her survey. Creelman and Harris (1989) interviewed 50 women and found that they “sought affirmation for their experiences as well as lifestyle information”. Half of those women found libraries unhelpful because they could not find anything relevant, the resources focused on gay men and their experiences, the materials did not contain practical information, and materials were depressing or negative (Creelman and Harris, 1989).

Fiction plays an important role in the lives of lesbians. Norman (1999) found that “90.9 percent of the lesbian respondents to his research on Brighton and Hove Library Services read appreciated fiction, but only 63 percent the gay men.” Goldthorp’s (2007) survey explains the importance of fiction to lesbians. “It promotes the psychological wellbeing of women in particular.” Fiction fulfills many purposes. “The most constant is to teach, inform, show us to ourselves in ways we recognize and acknowledge to be true” Goldthorp (2007). The lack of accessibility to fiction denies women the “psychological
support and the sense of inclusion that reading lesbian fiction can provide” (Goldthorp, 2007).

Whitt (1993) mailed out 619 surveys. 141 women responded. In the survey library usage and satisfaction were addressed and it also “examined information needs as they exist within the situation contexts of women’s lives”. It can be very difficult to gain acceptance into the community due to issues of trust. For women just ‘coming out’ it can be a lonely time and without anyone to share similar experiences with the library can play a critical role. The survey showed that in general satisfaction with the library was low because of ignorance and homophobia.

Burke (2008) focuses on the importance and necessity of groups such as the ALA’s Gay, Lesbian, Bi-Sexual, Transgendered Round Table (GLBTRT). It provides a community for not only the GLBT population but also for supportive librarians. “The GLBTRT promotes and recognizes the rich cultural, artistic and literary heritage of gay and lesbian persons throughout history” (Burke, 2008). The GLBTRT was also, in part, responsible for the changes to subject headings that originally linked homosexuality with sex crimes. The purpose of the GLBTRT is not to recruit or promote a lifestyle, a major myth, but rather to honor and celebrate the struggles of homosexual men and women as well as to promote tolerance and diversity.

The articles in this bibliography examined the important role libraries play in the lives of everyone. They have a responsibility to meet the needs of all people in the community including those that identify as GLBT. “Every library and librarian has a duty not to practice discrimination” (Silverrod, 2007). Even though Burke’s (2008) study shows that society as a whole is becoming more tolerant and attitudes about homosexuality are changing, censorship is still a problem and we do not seem to be any closer to a solution. However, the results of these surveys can provide professionals with the guidance they need to uphold the intellectual freedom of everyone including the GLBT demographic. It is estimated that 10 percent of the population is homosexual and their needs are diverse, very real and just as important as anyone else’s needs.
Bibliography


**Abstract:** Gay images have slowly become integrated into mainstream cultural venues over the last forty years, including publishing. Studies show that gay-themed materials in libraries are targets of censorship attempts. Are these attempts reflections of the opinions of the majority of the population or of a vocal minority? The information in this study contributes over thirty years of trend data on the general public's views of the censorship of gay-themed materials in libraries. This information can be useful to library policy makers and those faced with materials challenges.

**Annotation:** The study that was conducted showed that people are becoming less conservative and do not favor censorship of gay-themed materials. The study will be a valuable tool for librarians when facing challenges by not only the general public but by school boards, school administrations, and the community.

**Search Strategy:** I used the Literature and Information Science database to look up a specific article. That article turned out not to be peer-reviewed but several other articles appeared in my search. I found one that was peer-reviewed by using the peer-reviewed tab.

**Database:** Library Literature and Information Science

**Method of Searching:** Browsing

**Search String:** Gay or lesbian and collection development and public libraries

**Scholarly/Refereed Status:** I selected the peer-reviewed tab.
Cooke, J.C. (Fall, 2005). Librarians and the need for GLBT library organizations: Ethical questions, professional challenges, and personal dilemmas in and “out” of the workplace. *Journal of Ethics*, 14(2), 32-49.

**Abstract:** This paper answers the question posed by one of James C. Cooke’s colleagues as to why there is a need for groups such as the Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual, Trans-gendered Round Table (GLBTRT).

**Annotation:** This paper summarizes the importance of the GLBT round table. The most important purpose being that it offers a sense of place and community to librarians that are not only out of the closet but for those that are supportive of their peers that are out.

**Search Strategy:** I used keywords and a title search to find an appropriate article

**Database:** Library Literature and Information Science

**Method of Searching:** Title/keywords

**Search String:** GLBT and librarian

**Scholarly/Refereed Status:** I selected the peer-reviewed tab.

**Abstract:** Presents results of a survey of the lesbian community to determine: the information needs of this group; their awareness of resources for gay information; and where lesbians seek help. Results illustrate the importance of libraries in providing information for lesbians.

**Annotation:** This article takes a different approach to studying the role the library places in the lives of gays and lesbians. Most literature about homosexuality focuses on men. This study focuses on the needs of women when they are in the coming out process. Data was gathered to assess the information used in an effort for lesbians to make sense of their world.

**Search Strategy:** I used Dialog to look up the author that was listed in an article to find a specific article. I went to Haggerty’s library to find it but I couldn’t get the full text. I used LISA to get the abstract and ILL to get the article.

**Database:** Dialog, Library Literature and Information Science, ILL

**Method of Searching:** Author

**Search String:** s au=Creelman, Janet

**Scholarly/Refereed Status:** I selected the peer-reviewed tab.

**Abstract:** The gay/lesbian free newspaper press has been crucial in the fight for equality of rights for homosexuals both in the U.K. and Canada. The laws affecting the publication and distribution of these newspapers have developed differently in the two countries however. Therefore librarians in each country have faced distinct challenges. This article examines the legislation in both countries, specifically Section 28 in the U.K. and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in Canada. It analyses the political and social climates responsible for the legislation in each country. The application of law and library policy to the Canadian gay/lesbian newspaper *Xtra! West* is explored through a 1996 censorship challenge in a British Columbia library. In the final section, collection management advice regarding gay/lesbian newspapers is offered, based on the results of a survey of 70 public libraries in British Columbia.

**Annotation:** This article discusses the political side of the issue of gay and lesbian resources in the library. A law was passed preventing any published material on homosexuality from being provided in a library along with anything promoting a ‘pretend family’. Even though librarians may have wanted to provide resources for their gay and lesbian patrons, their hands were tied from fear of repercussions.

**Search Strategy:** I used Dialog-Library Literature and Information Science. I used keywords. Once I found the article I searched for it in the full-text version on Haggerty.

**Database:** Dialog, Info Sci

**Method of Searching:** Keyword

**Search String:** s (Gay or lesbian) and (services) and (collection)(development)

**Scholarly/Refereed Status:** I clicked on the peer-reviewed box.

**Abstract:** This paper explores how Scottish public library services have responded to providing a service to a virtually invisible minority group, i.e. lesbians who enjoy reading lesbian fiction. The evidence that provides the foundation for the results discussed in this paper was drawn from the following sources: a study of the 32 public library services in Scotland, conducted through an e-mail/postal survey on lesbian fiction; an analysis of online public library websites and catalogues; workshops and focus groups with library workers and newly qualified librarians; women who identify as lesbian or bisexual and read lesbian fiction; and a questionnaire on lesbian fiction distributed through recognized lesbian forums and publications. The research found there to be an inequity of service provision for lesbians in terms of recreational reading and, in the light of this, recommends a reassessment of certain library practices. In particular, there is a need to raise awareness of LGBT people among library workers by encouraging contact with LGBT people and their support networks and providing diversity training linked with training in how to develop collections of lesbian and gay fiction and how to promote those collections to their main audience.

**Annotation:** The purpose of the research conducted and discussed in this article was to determine if the need of lesbians to read lesbian fiction were being met. The article discusses why it is important for lesbians to read lesbian fiction. Surveys were conducted with staff workers as well as lesbians to determine the level of service provide; why they are lacking, and how to improve them.

**Search Strategy:** I did a keyword search in Library Literature and Information Science.

**Database:** Library Literature and Information Science

**Method of Searching:** Keyword

**Search String:** Gay or lesbian and services and public libraries

**Scholarly/Refereed Status:** I clicked on the peer-reviewed box.

**Abstract:** Many libraries do not serve the information and recreational needs of their gay and lesbian users, despite growing awareness of their existence. Discusses some of the barriers to librarians' recognition of user needs, selection of materials, and provision of safe and easy access to materials in the library.

**Annotation:** Suggests that while the gay/lesbian community's visibility and needs have increased over the years, unrecognized barriers in many libraries prevent services from keeping pace. These writers discuss the key role libraries played in the discovery of their emerging sexual identities; Mainstream publishers; Positive books for gay/lesbian readers.

**Search Strategy:** I did a title search in Library Literature and Information Science.

**Database:** Library Literature and Information Science

**Method of Searching:** Title

**Search String:** I just used the title of the article.

**Scholarly/Refereed Status:** Not a peer reviewed article. However, every article I read quotes Gough and Greenblatt. I felt the information they presented was critical to my bibliography.

**Abstract:** A review of relevant library literature suggests that public library service to lesbian, gay, and bisexual people is poor. By adopting an ethos of neutrality, public librarians help perpetuate a heterosexist and patriarchal status quo that tends to exclude hidden minorities.

**Annotation:** In this article, Joyce discusses how neutrality only serves to maintain the status quo that in turn excludes the GLBT community. The article focuses largely on studies conducted in the 1970s-1990s in relation to services and collections, or lack thereof, directed at the gay population. The struggles lesbians have in getting their information needs met at the library is also touched upon. Myths are explained and suggestions on how to overcome them are provided along with suggestions on how to properly serve a hidden minority.

**Search Strategy:** I used the Library Literature and Information Science database because the articles relate to the library profession.

**Database:** Library Literature and Information Science

**Method of Searching:** Subject and Keyword

**Search String:** Lesbian literature/keyword and public libraries/subject

**Scholarly/Refereed Status:** I clicked on the peer-reviewed box.

**Abstract:** Presents a critical look at the availability of gay and lesbian periodical literature in United States libraries and standard indexing services. Libraries and indexing services not keeping pace with dramatic progress in gay and lesbian civil rights; Accessibility of literature; Gay and lesbian journals avoided by indexers and collection development librarians.

**Annotation:** This article examined two issues. The first is the availability of gay lesbian journals in libraries and the second is availability of indexing for those journals. Background was provided that discussed why libraries are resistant to making gay and lesbian literature available. For those libraries that are willing, it discusses the problems in doing so.

**Search Strategy:** I used the Library Literature and Information Science database because the articles relate to the library profession.

**Database:** Library Literature and Information Science

**Method of Searching:** Keyword

**Search String:** Lesbian Literature

**Scholarly/Refereed Status:** I clicked on the peer-reviewed box.
Abstract: Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to present a case study of a specialty collection implementation: lesbian fiction, in the Barnard College Library.

Design/methodology/approach – The study employs a multistep approach to implement the development of a lesbian fiction collection. First, a collection profile was created to assess the current state of collection, and then a checklist was developed to serve as a collection development tool. Findings – The collection profile provides important information for the collection development process. Consistent subject heading access control is essential for collection assessment and maintenance. Practical implications – The collection proposal and the suggestions drawn by the study were adopted by Barnard Library for collection development and maintenance. The methodology applied and the resources consulted in the study can serve as references for academic librarians with similar collection development goals. Originality/value – Very few studies have been done to discuss issues related to the collection development of GLBT themed fiction, particularly lesbian fiction in an academic library. This paper provides a concrete example of how Barnard Library carried out the selection of lesbian novels.

Annotation: This paper uses a case study to present a way to develop and institute a special collection, and more specifically, a lesbian fiction collection. The study found that in order to maintain a strong and consistent collection that appropriate subject headings are critical.

Search Strategy: I did a simple keyword search in Dialog, chose an appropriate article, and then went to Library Literature and Information Science on Haggerty to retrieve the full article.

Database: Dialog, Info Sci (438)

Method of Searching: Keyword

Search String: s (gay or lesbian) (collection()development)

Scholarly/Refereed Status: I clicked on the peer-reviewed box.

**Abstract:** Reports results of a questionnaire survey of users of the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Collection (LGB) located in, and shared between, Brighton Central Library and nearby Hove Central Library, UK; to determine who uses it, reasons for use, what resources are used and the benefits of having a separate and centralized collection.

Questionnaires were made available at the two libraries with sealed boxes provided in which to deposit responses to ensure anonymity and confidentiality and were available during November and December 1997. Forty four completed questionnaires were received and the results were analysed using SPSS. The importance of the Collection to the LGB community was confirmed, but the view that such collections also serve the wider community could not be supported from the profile of respondents. Concludes that separate collections aid information access and that concerns of ‘ghettoization’ seem unfounded. A centralized collection increases access and availability and bibliographies aid access and possibly lead to greater use. Most respondents use the LGB Collection for recreational use, particularly fiction, highlighting a gap in the research literature and showing that even advocates of LGB Collections have underestimated this need.

**Annotation:** The article discusses a survey that was conducted to find out the needs of the LGB community and how to better serve that segment of the population. The survey found that most of those that were involved in the survey use the library’s collection for recreational use. Other uses include educational, cultural, and because of economic reasons.

**Search Strategy:** I did a keyword search in Dialog and then used Haggerty’s to get the full article.

**Database:** Dialog, Info Sci (438)

**Method of Searching:** Keyword

**Search String:** s (lesbian?) and (information()needs) and (public()librar?)

**Scholarly/Refereed Status:** I clicked on the peer-reviewed box.

**Abstract:** This paper is intended to redress the imbalance within the literature on homosexuality by focusing on the problems of access to lesbian literature. Briefly addressed are attitudinal barriers posed by some librarians and the difficulties of locating materials and providing access once the materials are located. A more detailed study is done in assessing the quality of lesbian materials that may already be in a collection.

**Annotation:** This article discussed the main forces that work against lesbians and their ability to have their information needs met. The first is homophobia. Another reason is the difficulty in locating resources. The third reason is the lack of indexing. Few index terms refer to lesbians. The final reason is the lack of relevant materials in the library.

**Search Strategy:** I did a Dialog search by author to find an article that had been listed in another paper.

**Database:** Dialog, Info Sci (438)

**Method of Searching:** Author

**Search String:** s au=raaflaub, yvonne

**Scholarly/Refereed Status:** I clicked on the peer-reviewed box.

**Abstract:** This article focuses on the services that the San Francisco Public Library offers to its GLBT community. It also discusses the issues that the library has when it comes to serving this demographic. It discusses the reasons behind the problems and offers suggestions to other libraries as to how to meet the information needs of this segment of the population.

**Annotation:** The general public might believe that a public library in San Francisco would be more progressive in terms of their GLBT collection. Nancy Silverrod relives her decision to move from a conservative, suburban library where she had to sneak in GLBT titles to a library in San Francisco. What she discovered was that the same issues and myths exist everywhere. Librarians do not believe that homosexuals live near them or use the library and they also have no understanding of the demographic. Silverrod discusses how to overcome some of the obstacles faced in developing a collection and programming for the GLBT patron.

**Search Strategy:** I did a keyword search in Library Literature and Information Science Database: Library Literature and Information Science

**Method of Searching:** Keyword

**Search String:** Gay or lesbian and collection development and public libraries

**Scholarly/Refereed Status:** I clicked on the peer-reviewed box.

**Abstract:** This study describes a survey of 141 lesbians in a metropolitan area of North Carolina. In addition to assessing library usage and library satisfaction, this study also examined information needs as they exist within the situational contexts of these women’s lives. Results indicated that during the initial stages of identity acceptance, when individuals may not have access to the lesbian community, the library is used heavily as an information resource. During the later stages of identity acceptance, information needs become more specific and resources are consulted with more discrimination. Overall, satisfaction with the library’s services is low; respondents consistently reported that collections are meager and dated, and that librarians are unable to serve this population adequately due to their ignorance and homophobia. Several recommendations are made for improvement of the library’s services to this population.

**Annotation:** The question that was posed in this survey asked lesbians what they wanted in their library as opposed to what the library thought they needed. The response was always that information is lacking. Lesbians and teens are in most need of information. They want information on their community and on accepting who they are. The article also looks at how lesbians needs change over the years. It goes from coming terms with their sexuality to relationship needs, political needs, and the international community. They also need information on history, adoption, where to meet other lesbians as well as fiction and poetry. The article suggests that further research is needed to examine issues such as the attitudes of librarians.

**Search Strategy:** I used Dialog to do a title search that had been listed in many different bibliographies. I found the article I was looking for but not a full text version. I had to do an ILL.

**Database:** Dialog, Library Literature and Information Science

**Method of Searching:** Title

**Search String:** s (information(1w)needs) and lesbians/ti

**Scholarly/Refereed Status:** I clicked on the peer-reviewed box.