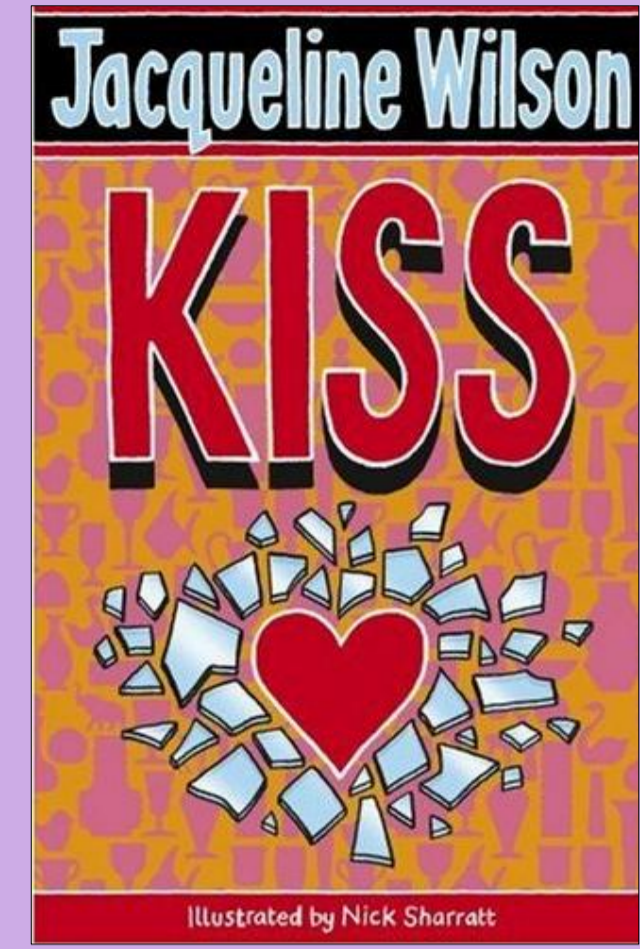


# LGBT fiction for children and young people in public libraries

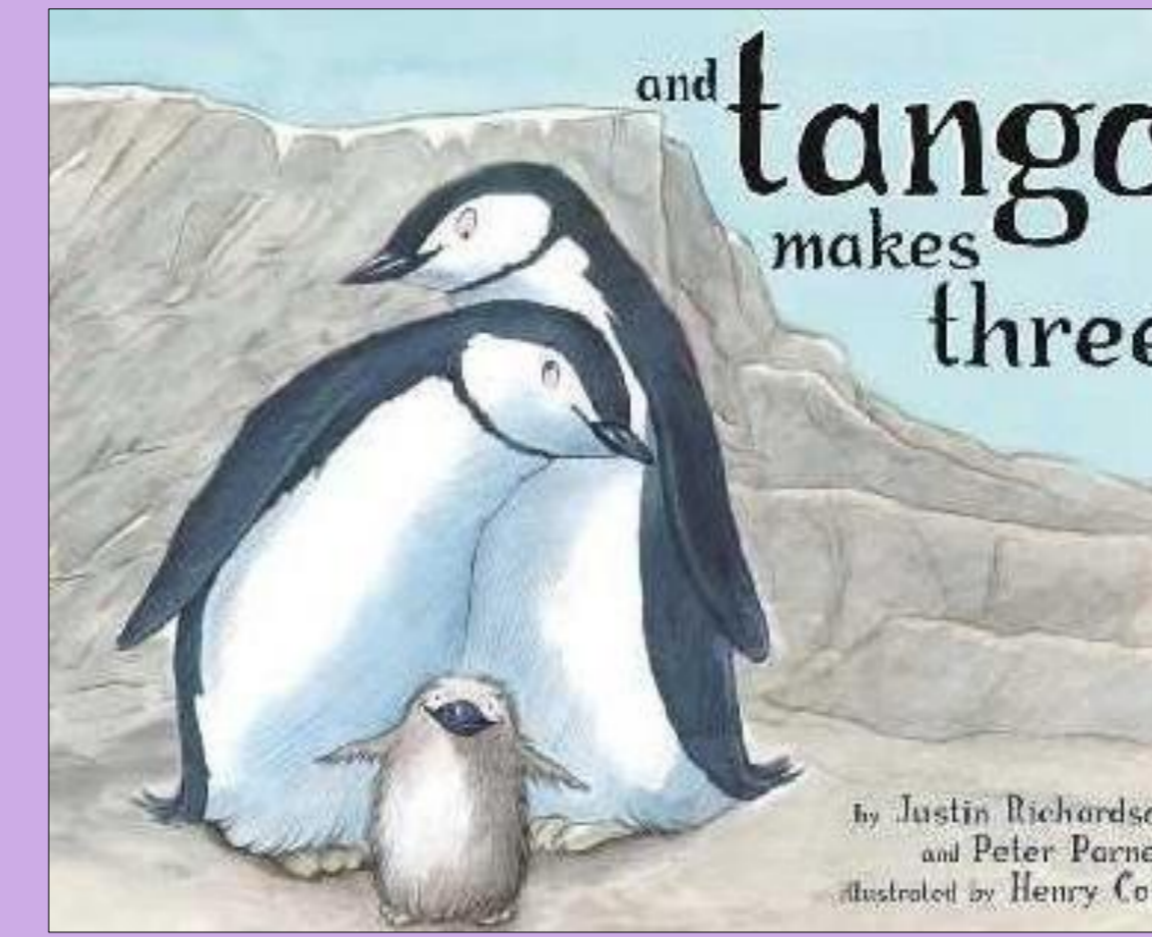
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## What is LGBT fiction and why is it important?

'LGBT' stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans. For the purposes of this study, 'LGBT fiction' was defined as fiction with recognisably LGBT characters in a reasonably significant role. It comprises picture books and early readers (e.g. about families with two dads), junior school books and young adult novels.

Research from fields such as social psychology, media studies and political philosophy, as well as significant anecdotal evidence, suggests that fiction featuring LGBT characters is of value to young people who are LGBT, in LGBT-headed families, or questioning their sexuality or gender identity. In addition, research in these fields indicates that fiction may have a role to play in reducing prejudice and promoting understanding among other young people.



## Aims of the study

The study seeks to investigate the level of provision of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans) fiction to children and young people in English public library authorities, factors affecting this provision, and staff attitudes to this material. As part of the research, targeted stock recommendations and suggestions for service improvement will be provided to participating library authorities; it is hoped that this will have a direct positive impact on provision.

There is currently little research on LGBT fiction for children and young people in UK public libraries. The research which does exist suggests provision is poor.

## Methodology

The study uses a mixed methods approach based on a pragmatic philosophy. A non-proportional stratified random sampling approach was used to select 12 library authorities of different types (London boroughs, county authorities, unitary authorities and metropolitan districts) and with differing levels of book budget. One additional authority with a reputation for good provision of LGBT materials was purposively selected to provide comparative data, giving 13 authorities in total. The findings from the questionnaires, checklist study and interviews will be combined to build an integrated model of provision of LGBT fiction to children and young people, and the factors affecting this, in English public libraries.

Questionnaire for stock team manager on stock procurement & management policies and procedures (QUAN + QUAL)  
n = 13, response rate = 100%

Questionnaire for stock team members on attitudes and opinions, plus stock procurement & management practices (QUAN + QUAL)  
n = 54, response rate = 52%

Checklist study of LGBT fiction for children and young people (QUAN)  
557 books  
Checked against 13 library catalogues and supplier's website

Interviews with stock team manager and members in selected authorities (QUAL)

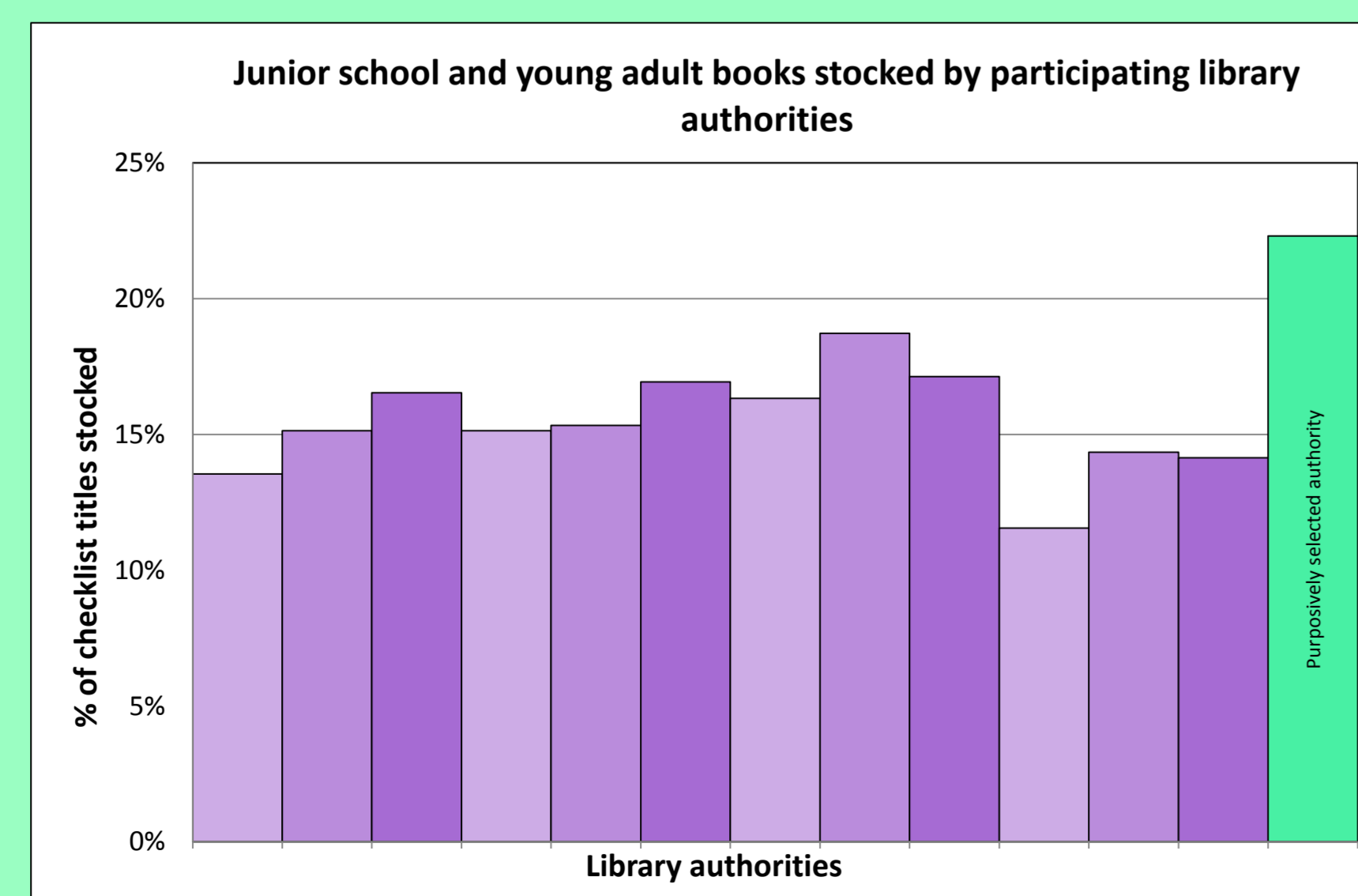
Interviewees will be asked to respond to the results of the checklist study and preliminary findings from the questionnaires will be investigated in greater depth, to identify reasons why provision levels are as they are in each authority

## Preliminary findings: stock holdings

Desk research identified 49 picture books, 6 early readers, 25 junior school books and 477 young adult novels with LGBT content currently in print in the UK.

The graphs show that the majority of participating authorities hold less than 20% of the available titles. The authority which was purposively selected due to its representation for good provision holds slightly more titles, but there is still room for improvement.

Ongoing research will identify recommended titles and measure holdings of these.



## Preliminary findings: staff attitudes and other factors affecting stock provision

As research is ongoing, this section also incorporates findings from a pilot study carried out as MA dissertation research. The methodology combined a UK-wide questionnaire with a checklist study and focus groups for staff in two library authorities.

### Processual factors

UK public libraries acquire the majority of their materials from library suppliers, which provide a pre-filtered selection of materials considered to be 'library range'. This selection does not generally include materials from small presses or US publishing houses, both of which are likely sources of LGBT fiction for children and young people. Only 4 / 28 respondents to the stock team members' survey (from three different library authorities) said that they purchased LGBT fiction for children and young people from specialist sources. Thus, this material may be under-represented in the stock purchased.

### Staff attitudes

Responses to Likert scale questions showed generally positive attitudes towards the provision of LGBT fiction to children and young people. This corroborated the survey and focus group findings from the MA research.

	The public library should provide a wide range of picture books with LGBT content	Picture books with LGBT content are valuable for children with LGBT parents	Picture books with LGBT content can help children with non-LGBT parents to understand others	The public library should provide a wide range of Young Adult novels with LGBT content	Young adult novels with LGBT content can help young people who are LGBT or questioning their sexuality to feel more comfortable about themselves	Young adult novels with LGBT content can help non-LGBT young people to understand others
% agree or strongly agree	70%	100%	100%	78%	100%	98%

However, qualitative analysis of the open-ended questionnaire responses highlighted a lack of awareness of the need to provide LGBT fiction to children and young people among stock team members. Many respondents also admitted that they were not aware of what material was available or where to get it from.

The MA research also revealed several loci of anxiety for library staff, which will be further explored in the interview stage of the doctoral research. These included:

- anxieties around 'excessive' promotion and the location of materials;
- the quality of LGBT fiction, especially picture books;
- issues relating to age-appropriateness and fear of complaints.

"We're very much tied by what our suppliers choose to supply for us"  
Librarian, MA research

"LGBT displays and promotions should not be treated as any more controversial than a gardening display"  
Librarian, MA research

"To be honest I've never really thought about it till now"  
Librarian, doctoral research

"It is the librarians' role to provide a range of fiction that is non-discriminatory"  
Librarian, MA research

"Material should be quietly available in limited quantities and should not be over-promoted"  
Library assistant, MA research

"We wouldn't just buy it because it happened to be an LGBT book if it didn't meet the criteria that we have for the artwork and the production"  
Librarian, MA research

"I hope that you appreciate the limits that are imposed on librarians with regard to purchasing material for children, and how much we must consider the wishes of parents, who can display volatile reactions to literature purchased for their children to read."  
Librarian, MA research