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.

Methodology

The study uses a mixed methods approach based on a pragmatist 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.

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.

**LGBT displays and promotions should not be treated as any more controversial than a gardening display**

**We're very much tied by what our suppliers choose to supply for us**

**To be honest I've never really thought about it till now**

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 by 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 materials from these sources.

**I hope that you appreciate the limits that are imposed on librarians by the law**

**Material should be quietly available in limited quantities and should not be over-promoted**

**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**

**I don't think it's controversial at all**

**We're very much tied by what our suppliers choose to supply for us**

Library authorities are also limited by physical space, with the majority of staff members saying that the representation in the library collection was not enough. This is also due to the fact that many libraries have selection policies that control the types of materials that can be purchased.

**The librarian’s role to provide a range of fiction that is non-discriminatory**

**It is the librarians’ role to provide a range of fiction that is non-discriminatory**

**LGBT displays and promotions should not be treated as any more controversial than a gardening display**

**To be honest I’ve never really thought about it till now**

**Librarian, MA research**

**We're very much tied by what our suppliers choose to supply for us**

**To be honest I’ve never really thought about it till now**

**Librarian, doctoral research**

Overall, 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.

**Material should be quietly available in limited quantities and should not be over-promoted**

**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**

**I don’t think it’s controversial at all**

**We’re very much tied by what our suppliers choose to supply for us**

**To be honest I’ve never really thought about it till now**

**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**

**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**

**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**

**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.**