No place on the shelves?

Are Northern Ireland’s school libraries addressing the information needs of their lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered students?

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A dissertation submitted to Aberystwyth University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Magister in Scientia Economica (MSc) under Alternative Regulations

Department of Information Studies

Aberystwyth University

2010
Abstract

This research set out to investigate school libraries in Northern Ireland and the information needs of their lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) students. Wanting to ensure that these students receive an equal service to their peers, the researcher’s aim was to consider how well school libraries addressed these needs.

To achieve this aim the research established the information needs of LGBT teenagers and how they fulfilled them. The importance of information to LGBT students and why it should be provided for them was then considered. Finally, the experiences of LGBT students and school librarians were examined in order to ascertain which barriers prevent the provision of this information in schools.

The literature review confirmed the researcher’s suspicion that parity did not exist in this provision despite a clear need for information in order to help fight homophobic abuse in schools.

Using mixed method, web-based questionnaires, the researcher gathered qualitative and quantitative data from two self-selecting populations: LGBT people aged between 16-25 and school librarians. This data was triangulated with information received from email questions to representatives of the School Library Service to provide an illustration of the situation in Northern Ireland’s schools.

This research found that whilst seeking ways of understanding their sexuality, LGBT students are being denied their rights to information through the absence of appropriate material on library shelves. They are often subjected to homophobic abuse, resulting in the degradation of their performance at school and of their mental health. The influence of religion also ensures that homosexuality is stigmatised in many schools.

School librarians are largely unaware of the presence of these students or of their information needs. They receive no directives or training and are unsure of their role in helping these students.

The research concludes with a number of simple recommendations which could improve the situation in individual libraries, until changes are made to recognise this issue at a governmental level.
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This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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List of abbreviations

- CILIP   Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals
- CoSO   Coalition on Sexual Orientation
- DENI   Department of Education for Northern Ireland
- DUP   Democratic Unionist Party
- ELB   Education and Library Board
- GLAAD Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation
- GLYNI Gay and Lesbian Youth Northern Ireland
- LBGTQ Lesbians, bisexuals, gay, transgendered, and questioning persons
- LGBT  Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered persons
- MLA   Member of Legislative Authority
- NI    Northern Ireland
- RSE   Relationship and sexuality education
- SLS   School Library Service
- UK    United Kingdom
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the LGBT people who took the time to respond to my questionnaire. I appreciate that you have been surveyed out and am eternally grateful that you took the time to do mine.

Thanks to GLYNI, CoSO, Rainbow, LASI and to all the other LGBT organisations who sent out my survey.

Thanks to the school librarians who also completed the questionnaire and to the representatives of the School Library Service.

I am incredibly grateful to Catherine Couvert, Gaynor Creighton, Paula Keenan and Marie Quiery for their advice, support and encouragement – you have kept me on track when I could so easily go off the rails.

Thanks also to my supervisor, Gayner Eyre, and to Sue Lithgow for their advice and support.

Finally, a huge thank you to my family: to my partner, Catherine, for everything and the soup; and to our sons, Sam and Pablo who let me study when I should have been hanging out with them and for helping me with my ‘qwestion hares!’
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background to the research

During the HIV crisis of the 1980’s a drive for schools to begin educating their students about homosexuality began to gain momentum, clashing with right-wing condemnation of the gay community. The Conservative government responded to this by including a clause to the Local Government Act 1988 which became known as Section 28. Demanding a “Prohibition on promoting homosexuality by teaching or by publishing material” (Great Britain 27), this censorship clause created confusion and fear in education and library establishments, resulting in the removal of gay literature from shelves and curriculums. Although repealed in 2003, it had helped to create an environment where lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) people were increasingly marginalised and pressured to conform.

Although law in England, Scotland and Wales, Section 28 had no jurisdiction in Northern Ireland (NI), leaving schools and libraries theoretically free to stock and promote gay literature. Historically, however, NI has rarely encouraged this freedom. In 1977, Ian Paisley launched his “Save Ulster from sodomy” campaign in opposition to the decriminalisation of homosexuality in NI. Although the law reform was passed in 1982, fifteen years after England and Wales, Paisley’s political party, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) continues to publicly oppose homosexuality in NI.

Recent changes in law have raised the profile of the LGBT community and increased awareness of the importance of diversity to NI society. In 2005 the first
Civil Partnership in the United Kingdom was held in Belfast. Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 together with the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2003 and the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) have also improved protection and equality for LGBT people.

This move towards a greater acceptance of the gay community has not, however, lessened the problems of homophobia and heterosexism in NI society. A recent report by John O’Doherty shows that many LGBT people live in constant fear of homophobic hate crime in the street, their work places and their homes (20). The situation in schools in no better, where the word ‘gay’ is casually used as an insult and homophobic bullying is often an acceptable form of abuse on the playground. Marginalised from their peers, LGBT teenagers in NI do not need a Section 28 to make them feel the stigma of their sexuality. For libraries in NI this presents a great challenge.

Since S. R. Ranganathan wrote his second law of library science in 1931, libraries have been trying to ensure “every reader his book” (9), regardless of colour, creed and sexuality etc. Even in the current climate of information technology and the internet, libraries are rising to the challenge of continuing to be relevant to all their users. The Library and Information Services Council (NI) reports that “libraries address the interests and needs of this diverse population, promoting social inclusion and equality” (2), whilst the People’s Network claims that libraries “are one of the highest valued and trusted public services on your streets” (par. 5). To maintain this equality of service and trust however, libraries, including school libraries, must show parity to their users, to ensure that there is a book which
satisfies the demands of each reader. For young LGBT users it is particularly important, if equality is to be achieved, that they have a place on the shelves alongside their heterosexual peers.

1.2 Purpose of the research

Driven by a desire to see equality in all aspects of society, this research will look at post-primary school libraries in NI and assess the extent to which they are providing a service to their LGBT users. The researcher suspects that there is a gap in the provision of information for young LGBTs in these libraries, resulting in an inequality of service which could contravene their right to information and have a negative effect on their well-being.

Using evidence gathered from young LGBT people and school librarians, the researcher plans to build a picture which illustrates the current situation in post-primary school libraries. The research questions were devised to fulfil this aim by considering the information needs of LGBT students and how far school libraries have gone to provide them. They also considered the experiences of these young people in their schools in order to understand why providing information can help them.

1.3 Scope of the research

Although public libraries also have a responsibility to LGBT people, this research is based on the premise that school libraries have a particular role to play in ensuring that relevant information reaches their LGBT students. Working in a system which is intrinsically biased and heterosexist, school librarians have a duty to live up
to their premise of impartiality and equality. They are providers of information, the repositories of knowledge and understanding, and should, therefore, ensure that all their students have their book and a place on the shelves.

1.4 Research aim and objectives

1.4.1 Research aim

The aim of this research is to investigate the provision of information by school libraries to young LGBTs in NI. By the end of the study, the research will have identified the information needs of LGBT students and the importance of it to them. It will also have explored how well school libraries currently fulfill this need and identified any reasons for gaps in the provision of information. This research will conclude by providing recommendations which could help to close this gap.

1.4.2 Research objectives

- To discover the information needs of LGBT teenagers in post-primary education and the ways in which they satisfy them
- To understand why access to information is particularly important to young LGBTs
- To investigate the problems, if any, which face LGBT students when seeking to fulfil their information needs
- To consider how effectively school libraries are addressing the information needs of their LGBT students in NI
- To raise any recommendations which could ensure that the information needs of LGBT students are met within school libraries in NI
1.5 Research structure

Using a qualitative methodological approach, this research employed mixed-method techniques to achieve these aims and objectives. Following a comprehensive literature review which exposed themes and questions to be further developed, the researcher devised web-based surveys containing both open and closed questions. Using non-probability sampling methods, these were completed by self-selecting populations of LGBT people aged between 16 and 25 and by post-primary school librarians based in NI. A further set of questions were devised for representatives of the School Library Service to complete.

This research design resulted in the collection of mixed qualitative and quantitative data which provided a rich source of information from which to analyse the research questions. This data was coded and correlated to expose trends and themes for further discussion. Triangulation from the three sources of information also gave validity and rigour to the results.

A detailed discussion then considers the collected data and the implications of it to the research questions. Finally, the researcher concludes with an overview of the situation in NI and offers recommendations which have arisen from the research.

Department of Information Services Modern Language Association of America citation guidelines are employed throughout this research.
Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This research aims to consider the information needs of LGBT teenagers and the reasons why these should be addressed in a school library setting, and also to look at how school libraries in NI rise up to the challenge. The literature review reflects these aims and looks at research and publications which address them.

The scarcity of literature considering the provision of information to LGBT students in school libraries creates a challenging environment in which to research this topic. In 2003 Laurel Clyde, speaking at a world library and information conference, claimed that “there is almost no research available about the relevant holdings of school libraries, or the relevant services offered by school libraries” to LGBT teenagers (7). This situation is exacerbated when the research is narrowed down to the United Kingdom where the work of Caroline Wright seems to stand alone in the field. To address this imbalance it was necessary to extend the review to include public libraries and research from the United States and Canada.

To create a background for this research it is also useful to consider literature written from the perspectives of LGBT teenagers, to give depth and understanding to their lives. This literature has been accessed from government and LGBT community sponsored reports in NI and psychological and educational studies into the topic. Combining the findings from these two areas of literature will create a background
of understanding from which to begin the empirical research. The first of these questions considers the information needs of young LGBTs.

2.2 What are the information needs of LGBT teenagers?

2.2.1 LGBT teenagers perspective

From the perspective of LGBT teenagers there is little research into actual information needs. In the YouthNet report, “Shout”, Carolan and Redmond describe the need for a safe environment in which to explore developing sexuality and to come out to peers. They also report that an important need is access to relevant sexual health information as, in their survey, only 11% received any information or support from school on the issue of sexual orientation (35). Loudes supports this claim, reporting that “In Northern Ireland, young LGB people are rarely provided with sex education at school that reflects their sexual orientation” (11). It is against this background of institutionalised heterosexism that Quiery considers both lesbian teenagers and children with LGBT parents whose needs are, according to her research, not currently addressed by NI schools (19).

These documents, however, are less concerned with the actual needs of these young people than how marginalising them by failing to provide relevant information affects their lives.

2.2.2 Library perspective

Looking at literature from a library perspective, there are a number of reports which have considered the information needs of LGBT people, including the American based work of Creelman and Harris, Whitt, Linville, and Hamer. Creelman and Harris’s research into the information needs of lesbian women in 1990 identified
three categories of information need for their subject group: coming to terms with their lesbian identity; coming out to others and learning about the gay community (39). Gay fiction featured highly as a means to satisfy these needs, as did factual information about gay rights and self-help books. The participants of this research, written before the advent of the internet, were reliant on printed sources to access information, so the library featured highly as a place to visit for such resources. These findings were mirrored by Whitt in 1993, whose survey found that “The library figures very prominently in the initial effort to locate information” (278). However, she also found that these efforts were frequently unrewarded and unpleasant experiences, which resulted in many of the women surveyed refusing to return to libraries in later life.

Research by Hamer, into the information seeking behaviour of gay men in New Jersey, supports Creelman and Harris’s categories of need and includes information about sexual health and meeting other gay people. Written in 2003, however, this research shows a move away from printed sources of information and libraries as the internet and television became the preferred route to knowledge. Hamer notes that “interacting with others online was the choice method for information seeking” (81). Libraries must update their methods of information provision if they are to keep up with the demands of today’s gay youth.

2.2.3 Summary

Research from a library perspective has been carried out but not many have focused on young LGBTs or their experience in school libraries. Most researchers gather data from the over 25’s age group, where memory recall, given the time
passed since school, can be unreliable. This is compounded by the fact that much of the research was carried out in the 1990’s, before the advent of the internet and therefore of limited relevance for today’s teenagers.

Whilst much of the research does not consider the specific needs of LGBT teenagers within a school context, it does provide a background from which to consider this aspect. Both perspectives in literature raise similar areas of information need, like coming out information and sexual health guidance, which provide tools to help gay people come to terms with their sexual identity. A recurrent theme is the difficulty gay people experience in finding information which will give them these tools, whether it is from the library or the internet.

2.3 Why is access to information particularly important to young LGBTs?

2.3.1 Homophobic bullying

A report published by the Rainbow Project in 2009 found that 39% of those surveyed had experienced homophobic hate crime in NI in the last year (O’Doherty 5). Hunt, in the School Report, discovered that over two thirds of LGBT teenagers had been bullied at school, with homophobic bullying representing the second highest reason for bullying after weight issues (3). Carolan and Redmond report that 69% of young people who had been bullied ended up dropping out of school whilst 57% had attempted suicide (35). This is a common thread through research in NI surrounding LGBTs at school. They contain sobering lists of the consequences of homophobic bullying including self-harm, mental health problems and drug/alcohol abuse.
A survey conducted by Hansson, Depret and Fitzpatrick concluded that the education system in NI was not proactive in dealing with this issue (47). This can only have a negative effect on young LGBTs as Barron and Collins claim in their paper for the Irish Association of Suicidology:

“young LGBT people will not feel valued by the school, nor encouraged to report bullying directed against them, if the Public Policy of the school does not acknowledge their existence or the reality of homophobic bullying.” (4)

Jarman and Tennant also makes the interesting observation that the increased visibility of LGBT people in the media has made it more difficult for LGBTs in schools who can be more readily identified by those who want to harm them (10). This can often occur before these teenagers are aware of their own sexuality, or to others who are perceived to be gay whether they are or not. Homophobic bullying is therefore a serious and often life-threatening issue which needs to be addressed by schools.

This point is also noted in library-focused literature with Whelan and Martin and Murdock in the USA and Wright in the UK commenting that school library holdings can create a positive visibility of LGBT issues, helping confront homophobia in schools. Schrader and Wells, researching in America, illustrate this point:

“Like classroom teachers and school administrators, school and public librarians have urgent and crucial roles to play in confronting homophobia and heterosexism in schools and communities. Unfortunately, as with the general response of their educational colleagues and community and national leaders, the call for more substantive advocacy by school and public librarians to eliminate homophobia and heterosexism had fallen largely on deaf ears” (15).

School libraries could play an important role in tackling the problem of homophobic bullying in schools.
2.3.2 Equality

The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) has, within its mission statement, a pledge to “support the principle of equality of access to information” (par. 2). In her American college-based research, McDowell argues that an inadequate library collection perpetuates heterosexism for LGBT students and denies their right to information. She calls for librarians to “ensure that all students have equal access to the information that they need in order to make sense of their lives and to build a society based on equality and mutual respect” (83). However, whilst considering adolescent health in their Convention on the Rights of the Child, the United Nations highlighted their concerns that this access is not available in the UK and NI:

“The Committee is concerned that homosexual and transsexual young people do not have access to the appropriate information, support and necessary protection to enable them to live their sexual orientation” (11).

As Hendry, writing from the perspective of UK public libraries, points out, a collection which ignores its LGBT users, not only denies them their rights to information but also fails to reflect society and cannot be equal (39).

2.3.3 Summary

It is clear why LGBT teenagers should have access to information. Homophobic bullying is a disruptive and possibly life-threatening element of NI schools. It needs to be addressed by schools and also by school librarians. LGBT information provision can offer vital support to LGBT teenagers and can help those
who have LGBT parents or friends and to broaden the minds of heterosexual students (Clyde and Lobban 27). According to research this support is not readily available, leaving Hendry to ask “how many more teenagers will have to attempt suicide, or die, before the civil right of freedom of information is endorsed?” (40).

2.4 What, if any, are the barriers LGBT teenagers face when seeking to fulfil their information needs in post-primary schools?

2.4.1 Institutionalised heterosexism

The overwhelming factor which appears in research into the needs of LGBT teenagers is how different their experience is compared to their heterosexual peers. Epstein and Johnson claim that “there is a presumption of heterosexuality which is encoded in language, in institutional practices and the encounters of everyday life” (198). Forrest also reports the “repressive and oppressive” nature of “heteronormativity” (114). Burton compares the sexual awakening of heterosexual and homosexual youths, where the former, although filled with angst and teenager trauma, will be supported by the overwhelming positive images surrounding them, whilst the latter will “very rarely have any positive images of their sexuality” (21). Growing up in this environment which is inherently heterosexual (Loudes; Quiery), LGBT teenagers must come to terms with their sexuality and find ways to express this to others around them. This often has to be undertaken alone and unsupported.

In library focused literature, institutionalised heterosexism is recognised as an integral problem for LGBT teenagers seeking information in schools. In 1992, American researchers Gough and Greenblatt write that the overwhelming presence of the heterosexist perspective in everyday life creates an environment where gay people remain closeted to avoid further ostracism in the public eye. They comment
that heterosexism provides the “most important clue” as to why libraries continue to fail to provide for their LGBT users (60).

LGBT teenagers growing up in this environment become marginalised from their peers and invisible to their institutions, leaving them information poor in an information rich environment.

2.4.2 Information poverty

In 2001, the Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI) released a circular providing guidance to schools on the provision of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE). This document advocates that “Teachers should not avoid discussion of sensitive issues such as contraception, abortion, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, homosexuality and pornography” (Northern Ireland. Department of Education 4). That homosexuality is equated with sexually transmitted diseases and pornography in this statement is a worrying indication of how education authorities view homosexuality. Two years after this circular, nearly 90% of Carolan and Redmond’s sample felt they had not received any information about sexual orientation in school (35). A further two years later, Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) George Dawson was questioned by the Belfast Newsletter about RSE and is quoted saying “It would surely be far better to offer help to young people away from this lifestyle choice rather than to provide assistance into it” (Anonymous par. 11). This sentiment is then echoed by MLA Iris Robinson in 2008 when she offered the services of her psychologist to “cure” LGBT people. It is against such a background of misconception and lack of understanding that young LGBT teenagers must struggle to find information relevant to them.
2.4.3 Religious influence

This absence of information in schools is noted many times in both areas of research, but an added element, particularly sensitive in NI, is the religious influence on schools. Recent laws such as Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2006 protect against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. These laws, however, become vague when it comes to education and the religious ethos of the school. Carolan and Redmond, Feenan et al. and Loudes all pick up on this issue in NI and the negative impact it has on LGBT teenagers. Feenan et al. discuss the powerful influence of churches over education in NI where only around 20 schools are independent from any religious involvement. Loudes reports that the influence of a strong religious ethos in many schools inhibits the open discussion of sexual orientation in the classroom (20).

LGBT teenagers who attend the majority of schools in NI can, therefore, be legally denied their basic rights to information because of the religious beliefs of their schools. Yet this does not seem to reflect the attitude of the young people who attend these schools. Loughrey researched RSE in Catholic post primary schools in NI where she found that whilst 49% of parents and 40% of teachers felt that homosexual acts were wrong, only 35% of pupils felt the same. It is clear that teenagers, regardless of their sexual orientation or faith, are more ready to accept diversity than the adults who are responsible for their education. This should be
considered when determining how to include sexual orientation in RSE classes, perhaps especially in faith schools.

2.4.4 School staff

Although research looking at the issue from an LGBT teen perspective considers how school teaching staff deal with the issue of sexual orientation, it is relevant to the issue of school librarians as the stock held in school libraries reflects the issues being taught at school. Hunt and Jensen, Carolan and Redmond, Hansson, Depret and Fitzpatrick, and Loudes all comment on the reluctance of teachers to address the subject of homosexuality. This is illustrated in Loughrey’s research where 41% of teachers felt discomfort in teaching about homosexuality whilst only 15% had trouble discussing heterosexual relationships (35). Hunt, in the Stonewall “School Report” also reported that 30% of his sample had experienced homophobic bullying from school staff (3). This point is repeated throughout the literature as researchers discover that often the only information available to young people in schools about sexual orientation is done in a subjective and negative manner, usually as a way to discourage rather than inform (Carolan and Redmond 64).

2.4.5 Librarians

According to research from a library perspective, public and school librarians fare little better than teaching staff when it comes to providing information on sexual identity. American writers Downey, Curry and Creelman and Harris are just a few of the many researchers who comment on the internalised homophobia and prejudices of library staff. A fear of controversy from parents, library boards or
fellow school staff can then create an environment of self-censorship, where school librarians will not buy stock just in case it causes them problems. This is obviously very unhelpful for young LGBT teenagers searching for information.

Library staff can also be unaware of the presence of their LGBT users and so cannot provide information for clients they do not realise they have (Wright 48; Downey 25). Gough and Greenblatt dispel many of the myths librarians use as reasons for not providing information. These myths range from believing that “those kinds” do not use the library to the belief that holding books on AIDS will cover any possible LGBT need (60). Written 17 years ago, these could be extreme sentiments which, with increasing visibility of gay rights, should have disappeared long ago. However, Whelan and Martin and Murdock, writing over the last two years, report that these opinions are still present in today’s libraries. In her research of 2007, Wright finds that library staff have a very poor knowledge and understanding of LGBT issues and are waiting for students to ask for information whilst acknowledging that this could be very difficult for them (49). This increases the invisibility of LGBT teenagers and can allow librarians to feel excused from responsibility for providing relevant information.

2.4.6 Internet filtering

Making the school library welcoming to LGBT users is an important element in ensuring that they can access the information they need. If students feel unable to ask for help from staff then they will be forced to go and look for it elsewhere. As previously reported, the prime resource for finding information about sexual orientation is the internet. The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation
(GLAAD) report “Access Denied”, looks at this issue and considers the use of filtering software in schools to protect students. The purpose of this software is to prevent access to sites which are pornographic, violent or deemed in any way unhealthy for a student at school. GLAAD looks at filters used in the United States. These include one which forbids access to anything containing the word “homosexual” and another is URL based and uses filters determined by human reviewers. The latter filter is subjective and based on the individual reviewer’s beliefs; an unacceptable form of censorship according to GLADD (17). The extremity of these filters means that LGBT teenagers are often blocked from viewing safe and important sites offering help and advice.

From a library perspective, Alexander and Miselis, Whelan, Wright and Holt are just a few researchers who comment on the destructive nature of internet filters. Based in America, Holt’s research looks exclusively at the negative impact of internet filtering on LGBT teenagers. His findings reveal that teenagers prefer to use the internet as it provides “privacy and confidentiality”, allowing them to research their feelings without having to “out” themselves (par.3). He also claims that the majority of internet users reveal their sexual orientation to others online before telling anyone else. The internet is, therefore, a vital link to information for these young people, yet filtering prevents this access. Schools which buy in filtering software, are relying on others to make decisions about what should be accessible through their computers. Holt recommends using filtering software which can be configured by individual schools and allows the unblocking of safe sites (par. 23). In 2003, Greenblatt refers to the unfiltered internet as a lifeline to young LGBT teenagers. She
goes on to warn that the “use of filters in public and school libraries effectively shuts off this lifeline, creating obstacles between LBGTQ users and the information and services they seek” (23). It is clear from the research that there must be some form of safe internet access within schools libraries if they are to attempt to provide information to these users.

2.4.7 Library stock issues

Although Wright’s research concludes that many of the school libraries surveyed do have some provision for their LGBT users, she maintains that “the majority had inadequate provision in terms of both quantity and variety” (1). Most had a few gay fiction books, but book lists publicising them were rarely available. Neither were lists of safe websites or any links to community organisations outside of the school. Finding existing material was difficult and Wright blames poor use of subject headings in library catalogues for this. Joyce agrees in his review of literature on the topic, pointing out that poorly classified material will not be found by its intended user (273).

Another cataloguing issue which creates problems when trying to find information is conservative cataloguing, where a cataloguer, trying to assume neutrality, can negatively affect the record by leaving out terms which are key to finding the material itself. Boon and Howard illustrated this point when their Canadian based study showed “that less than half the LGBT titles received subject headings that identified the LGBT content in the catalogue record, which constitutes another obstacle to accessing these titles” (138).
Clyde and Lobban, looking at teenage access to gay fiction in America, comment that although the publication of these novels has greatly expanded since the 1960’s, school libraries have not seen an equivalent rise in their stock (25). These books tend to be published by smaller firms which do not have their stock freely publicised around schools. School librarians would actively have to seek out information rather than depending on publisher lists sent out from their school library service. This seems unlikely to happen given the reported reluctance to stock this material at all.

2.4.8 Summary

Across both fields of research there are recurring themes in the reasons why LGBT teenagers struggle to find information, from institutionalised heterosexism to homophobia among staff members. A general lack of awareness and understanding is another issue which compounds the invisibility of these students. Whilst the literature focused on LGBT teenagers recognises discrimination in schools, the library is rarely considered as a place of information provision. This is a worrying reflection of the importance given to school libraries and the service they provide.

Library focused literature deals with many of the same issues, with undertrained staff and censorship issues all conspiring to prevent access to information. It seems that the invisibility of LGBT teenagers is their greatest difficulty as a problem that cannot be seen will rarely be fixed.

2.5 Conclusion
The findings of this literature review do not reveal any big surprises. Life is difficult for LGBT teenagers coming to terms with their sexual orientation and this is especially so in NI schools where institutionalised heterosexism and homophobic bullying help keep closet doors firmly shut. Receiving constructive and relevant information is crucial to the well-being of these youths and school libraries can play an active role in providing it for them. There are, however, big hurdles to achieving this, from governmental laws to untrained and homophobic library staff.

The literature has proved that some librarians are very aware of the inequality of service provided to this user group and have been writing about the issue for more than thirty years. That the same issues are still being raised despite radical changes to equality laws in society confirms that LGBT teenagers remain an invisible minority. Wright’s research shows some hope, in that many of the school libraries surveyed did hold LGBT material. This survey, however, took place in Sheffield, close to a library school which has visited this topic on several occasions. It is possible that this increase in material, therefore, is because librarians in this area have been made aware of the issue.

In Northern Ireland the specific issue of LGBT information provision in school libraries has never been considered. This research seeks to address this imbalance and to discover if the situation is as bleak as the literature would suggest.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Overview

This research is qualitative in approach and uses mixed method research techniques to gather data from which to answer the research aims and objectives.

Web-based surveys, employing both closed, quantitative and open, qualitative questions are a key data collection instrument used in this research. The surveys were completed by LGBT people aged between 16 and 25 years old and by post-primary school librarians. Triangulation of this data was achieved with information sourced via an email questionnaire completed by representatives from the School Library Service (SLS) in NI.

The surveys were conducted using a non-probability sampling method. The LGBT survey was distributed through LGBT community websites and emailing lists whilst the school librarian survey was distributed to each post-primary school in NI. The SLS questionnaire was distributed to each Education and Library Board (ELB) in NI. The samples were self-selected rather than chosen by the researcher.

This chapter will discuss this research approach and design in more detail and explore the appropriateness of these methods to this research topic.
3.2 Methodological approach

Research into LGBT issues is fraught with difficulties. The population is largely invisible, with only a small percentage accessible for study through LGBT organisations and clubs. There are no reliable means of assessing how much of the population is LGBT and even within the terminology there are issues of self-definition; one man may call himself “gay” whilst another would call himself “queer”. The population can also be wary of persecution and, therefore, reluctant to participate in any research in which they may have to “out” themselves. Researchers have, therefore, been forced to apply qualitative methodology to their studies as reliable and generalisable quantitative figures are impossible to achieve in the current circumstances. In Northern Ireland this is very much the case, where research methodology has relied on traditionally qualitative techniques like focus groups and interviews, together with questionnaires, to assess the meaning behind the lives of LGBT people (Carolan and Redmond; Quiery; Loughry).

Creswell claims that the advocacy or participatory model of research is the most appropriate methodological approach for LGBT studies as “postpostivist assumptions imposed structural laws and theories that did not fit marginalized individuals or groups or did not adequately address issues of social justice” (9). Gamson echoes this theme when he writes that social research on sexuality is “a history intertwined with the politics of social movements, wary of the ways ‘science’ has been used against the marginalised, and particularly comfortable with the strategies of qualitative research – which at least appears to be less objectifying of their subjects, to be more concerned with cultural and political meaning creation, and to make room for voices and experiences that have been suppressed” (Gamson 347).
This research seeks to allow space for these “voices” and to provide a snapshot illustrating the current situation for LGBT teens in schools and how school libraries are helping them. The research methodology is, therefore, qualitative in order to build up this picture as accurately and reliably as possible.

McManus advises that a mixed method approach particularly suits studies into LGBT issues as “Many sexual orientation researchers have found that there is so little existing data currently available that they need to pursue an exploratory and multi-modal approach in order to establish a more reliable baseline picture” (32). Quantitative data is, therefore, also collected in this research to provide a background for the study.

The question of reliability is a common issue with qualitative research; however, this can be established using a process called triangulation. Bryman defines this as “The use of more than one method or source of data in the study of a social phenomenon so that findings may be cross-checked” (545). This process allows the researcher to have confidence in their findings and establish external validity to their results. In this research, data is gathered from three different sources, allowing triangulation to offer rigour and reliability.

Finally, Breitenbach, in her report on researching LGBT issues in NI, finds that good, reliable quantitative evidence is difficult to achieve in NI especially when the question of sexuality does not appear on the census (7). The Coalition on Sexual Orientation (CoSO) “suggest that it will take a considerable period of time – perhaps as much as fifteen to twenty years – to produce good quantitative data on sexual orientation, and that for this reason qualitative data is advocated as a means of
gathering evidence of people’s experience” (Breitenbach, 10). The primary concern of this research is to create an understanding of the current situation for LGBT students in schools and this is illustrated using the personal experience of LGBT people, school librarians and representatives from the SLS. A qualitative methodological approach offers the tools to illuminate this issue.

3.3 Methods

3.3.1 Literature review

To gain a wider view of the situation before beginning to gather data, the researcher conducted a thorough literature review using a systematic search of published and unpublished literature. LISA and LISTA were used as the primary bibliographical sources together with educational bibliographies, ERIC and the British Education Index as well as PSYCINFO. LGBT organisations like Rainbow and Stonewall were searched for more specific LGBT research along with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. Finally, the researcher employed the newspaper database Lexisnexis to source news items dealing with sexuality, schools and young people in NI.

This literature search exposed themes and questions which were then explored in the research. The review also offered a point of comparison for the data analysis section, giving the final results extra validity and rigour.

3.3.2 Population

Wright’s research on information provision in school libraries in the Sheffield area questioned only the opinion of the school librarians and those associated with school libraries. It did not ask the students how they felt about their experiences of
school libraries. This research, however, gathered data from three different sources; LGBT teens, school librarians and SLS representatives, to build a more rounded picture of the situation.

For the first population, it was decided to approach people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered and who were aged between 16 and 25 years old, as this group would be able to recount recent experience of NI school libraries. Also as this is the age range of members of an LGBT organisation, Gay and Lesbian Youth Northern Ireland (GLYNI) it was felt that it would be an appropriate age range for this research.

There are 223 post-primary schools in NI, ranging from grammar schools to secondary and from catholic to protestant and integrated. For the second source, the researcher approached every post primary school in Northern Ireland as it was important to get responses from a variety of types of school.

Finally, the researcher approached a representative from each of the five ELB’s in NI to get responses from the SLS which serve school libraries across the country.

3.3.3 Data collection method

In this research, it was important to gather experiences from across NI in order to build up as comprehensive a picture as possible of the situation in school libraries. For the LGBT teens, this meant attempting to get samples from those who went to school in both urban and rural communities. This would not be easily achieved using traditional qualitative research methods such as focus groups and
interviews because of the difficulties associated with sourcing “out” LGBTs. Also, the researcher felt that gaining access to a cross-section of school librarians for focus groups or interviews would be costly and, possibly, inconvenient for the population sample. It was decided, therefore, to use a data collection tool for both populations which could be easily distributed and completed to get the best possible responses from the samples. This method was self-completion web-based surveys, where emails were sent to potential respondents inviting them to visit a website where they found a pre-prepared online survey to be completed.

Traditionally a quantitative tool, the researcher felt that, with the inclusion of open-ended questions to allow fuller answers, it was possible to get good qualitative data whilst reaching the desired population in a low cost and effective manner. Teddlie and Tashakkori, referring to this mixed-method questionnaire approach, report that “some of the most interesting information ... came from the direct quotes generated by open-ended questions” (235). It was the researcher’s intention to elicit similar information from both groups to be surveyed and thus determine their feelings, beliefs and attitudes to the issue.

Another factor which determined this choice of data collection tool was the issue of confidentiality. Given the sensitive nature of the topic of this research, it was felt that allowing respondents the freedom to complete the survey in private would make them more inclined to take part. This was particularly important when gathering information from LGBT teens as some of the respondents would still be at school. These people would have the most relevant information to offer and it was felt a focus group or interview might be too intimidating for them.
When choosing a data collection method for the school librarians, the researcher was concerned that her appearance might identify her as a lesbian and could interfere with the true feelings of the librarians under question. Bryman warns “that such characteristics as ethnicity, gender, and the social background of interviewers may combine to bias the answers that respondents provide” (133). The researcher was also concerned that, in the face of overt homophobia, she would be unable to remain objective throughout the interview. Self-completion web-based questionnaires, therefore, offered anonymity and objectivity to the data collection process.

Each survey was pilot tested by people associated with the population groups. A group of LGBT people who were older than 25 and a group of ex-school librarians completed a pilot online survey. Their responses and feedback allowed the researcher to test the set up of the surveys and fine tune the questions before starting the live version. The questionnaires are replicated in the appendices to this research; Appendix 1 for the LGBT teenagers’ questionnaire and Appendix 2 for the school librarian questionnaire.

The data collection method used for the third population, the SLS representatives, was a set of questions emailed to each respondent along with an explanatory cover note. The researcher had attempted to contact this population for telephone interviews, but experienced difficulties in accessing them. A standard set of questions was therefore opted for, with a view to encouraging further email communication if necessary. These questions are listed in Appendix 3.

3.3.4 Sampling method
As previously discussed, getting a representative sample from the LGBT population in NI is not currently possible. Breitenbach suggests that in order to “maximise diversity and numbers”, researchers should use a variety of methods to gather samples, such as online surveys, visiting LGBT clubs and using LGBT mailing lists and newspapers (21). Given the impossibility of reaching 16-25 year old LGBTs who are not open about their sexuality, the researcher chose to use some of the options above to get as many responses as possible. The survey, together with an explanatory cover note, was therefore emailed to every LGBT organisation in NI for dissemination through email groups, and placed on the website of the biggest organisation, Rainbow. To boost response numbers, the researcher also attended a GLYNI drop in evening where paper copies of the survey were completed.

This non-probability sampling resulted in 42 self-selecting respondents of which 40 were under the age of 25 and 37 were educated in Northern Ireland. Of this sample, 78% were male and 22% female, which is symptomatic of this type of research in NI, where female respondents are hard to access (O’Doherty, 9; Carolan and Redmond, 18). The researcher attempted to reach a group which had been set up for young lesbians, but a poor attendance (of one woman) prevented any success.

As the sample was self-selecting and it was important to achieve as large a sample as possible, it was not necessary for the researcher to employ any further sample selection methods.

The researcher acknowledges that there are obstacles to achieving a large response number with this population. Research fatigue is a commonly quoted reason as reporting on LGBT issues in NI becomes more in vogue with the recent
changes in legislation. According to CoSO, this fatigue is due to a lack of confidence in the ability of the research to change the lives of LGBT people (Breitenbach 24). The research population will also only represent LGBT people who are “out” in society as those who not involved in LGBT organisations or who are just becoming aware of their sexuality are unreachable. Online surveys also demand that the young people have access to the Internet and the privacy to use it to complete the survey. Given these obstacles and the qualitative nature of the research, it was felt that a sample of 37 gave enough information to provide as realistic an illustration of the situation as is possible to achieve with limited time and resources.

This non-probability method of sampling was also used to survey post-primary school librarians in Northern Ireland. The researcher initially approached the SLS, hoping that they would be able to send out the survey to their members. They were, however, reluctant to do this and so the email addresses of each school office was obtained from the websites of the five education and library boards (ELB). This was not an ideal situation, as the researcher depended on staff in school offices to pass on the survey. To eliminate any bias that might occur, the actual email did not mention the subject matter, only that it was a survey for school librarians. The full details of the survey were covered in an attached letter along with the web address.

This survey resulted in 54 self-selecting respondents from school libraries. Given the nature of the topic in a traditionally conservative country, along with the difficulties in accessing the population, the researcher felt that this provided a good cross section of school library experience for the study.
As with the LGBT survey, this sample was self-selecting and it was not necessary for the researcher to employ any further sample selection methods.

Finally, when accessing the SLS, the researcher contacted each librarian responsible for post-primary school supply in each of the five ELBs in NI. One librarian was responsible for both the Belfast ELB and the Southern ELB. Responses were received from all four librarians, who represented a self-selected sample which did not require any further sample selection methods.

3.4 Ethical considerations

Breitenbach warns that it “is crucial, in order not to jeopardise future research, that research is carried out with sensitivity, that it does not breach privacy, and that subjects of research can be assured of confidentiality” (28). The LGBT population is a vulnerable group who depend on a researcher to maintain the strictest confidentiality and ensure that their sexuality is not publicly revealed. This is particularly the case with LGBT teenagers who may only just be coming to terms with their sexuality themselves. Often still under the authority of their parents and teachers, disclosure of the sexuality of these young people could attract sanctions from the people who care for them. For this study the researcher recognised a duty of care to these people and therefore prioritised ensuring the confidentiality and, where possible, the anonymity of the respondents.

To access this population, the researcher approached various LGBT organisations that held email addresses of LGBT people from across NI. The groups emailed a cover note to their mailing lists which gave a link to the survey website.
(see Appendix 4 for a copy of this letter). By approaching the survey population in this way, the researcher had no access to any of the potential respondents’ details and so could guarantee confidentiality and anonymity. Each respondent was properly briefed through the cover email which explained what the research was about, that it was voluntary, anonymous and that any information supplied would be treated confidentially. By completing the survey, therefore, the respondents were giving their informed consent to participating in the study. Surveys completed during the GLYNI youth groups sessions went through a similar process. The researcher approached the youth leader to gain access to the group and briefed the group about the research. It was emphasised that the survey was voluntary and that personal details such as names and addresses should not be given. The cover note was distributed and followed by a paper copy of the survey. Completion of the survey indicated informed consent to participate.

A cover note to the school librarians also briefed potential respondents of the details of the research (see Appendix 5). Anonymity and confidentiality was important here, too, as the researcher was interested in an overall picture of the situation in school libraries and not how individual schools were performing. It was also felt that anonymity might encourage a frankness of responses which might not be forthcoming if the school name was divulged.

As emails were sent out to individual SLS librarians it was impossible to guarantee anonymity. Each librarian, however, was informed that participation was voluntary and that any information given would be treated confidentially by the researcher.
3.5 Data analysis

All data was treated in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. The researcher, alone, held access to the survey data which was stored on a password protected online database. All paper copies of the survey were transferred onto the online web survey and then destroyed. Emails received from the SLS librarians were also held on a password protected site.

The small response rates meant that Excel was an ideal tool for analysing the data from both web surveys. The survey data was downloaded into an Excel worksheet at the end of the collection period. The quantitative results from each survey were then counted and the qualitative open-ended question were coded and counted. Correlations where then made within and between both surveys.

The data retrieved by email from the SLS was also coded and these results were then correlated with those of the web-surveys, allowing the data triangulation to be complete and a full picture of the current situation in school libraries to be illustrated.

3.6 Limitations of the methodology

Bryman warns that a key problem with web-based surveys is that “the researcher can never be certain that the person answering questions is who the researcher believes him or her to be” (485). Indeed in this study, the researcher had to trust that the respondents to the LGBT survey were under 25 and over 16, as well as hope that they did not complete the survey twice. For the sake of the anonymity
and confidentiality of the respondents, the researcher felt that this was a risk worth taking.

Another limitation is the lack of representativeness of the sample, especially for the LGBT population who were drawn only from people who access LGBT organisations. This meant that any of the population who were not involved with these groups, or did not use the websites on which the survey was posted, would not be able to complete the survey. The problems accessing both of these survey populations have already been discussed. The researcher acknowledges these limitations and is clear that this is an illustrative study which does not pretend to represent the complete situation for LGBT students in schools libraries today.

A further limitation of web-based surveys is that they do not offer any means of following up further questions, or digging deeper into the meaning of some open-ended questions. This limitation can be addressed by following up the surveys with personal interviews or focus groups. In hindsight, the researcher regrets that this was not possible in this study, mainly due to time constraints. This would have given a further depth of understanding to the research question which is not possible using only the surveys. Future research could address this issue.

3.7 Conclusion

This research sought to explore how school libraries are helping their LGBT students. This is a sensitive topic for each population involved and required sensitive measures to ensure the best quality of responses. Although the chosen methodology of web-based surveys has many limitations, it offered privacy and anonymity to the
respondents and the ability to ask questions in an unbiased way in order to get the most truthful responses.

Response rates, though not high, were more than expected, given the sensitive nature of the topic. The qualitative data from open-ended questions in the survey offered a rich source of information from which to begin to analyse the topic. The quantitative data further developed this analysis by helping to build up a firm background picture of the current situation. Finally, triangulating the data with reports from the SLS librarians completed the picture, helping to explain the “hows” and “whys” of the research questions.

The findings of the surveys and emails provided trends and patterns which confirm theories derived from the literature review. The next chapter will look at these findings in detail and provide examples of these trends as they emerged from the data.
Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

The research questions of this study have three initial aims: to consider the information needs of LGBT post-primary school students; to ask why access to this information is important; and to discover what problems may exist which would prevent access to this information. This chapter will consider each of these aims, in order to provide an insight into how well school libraries in NI are addressing LGBT information needs.

The work of Carolan and Redmond will be referred to in places as some of their survey questions are comparable to those asked in the LGBT survey. This will add an extra dimension to these findings as the comparison helps to deduce how the situation may have changed for LGBT students in the last six years.

Quotes from each sample type are referenced with a T for the LGBT survey, L for the school librarian survey and S for the SLS questions, followed by the respondent’s number.

4.2 Statistical data

4.2.1 LGBT student survey

This survey received 42 responses of which 37 were within the 16-25 age range and were educated in NI. Of these, 78% (n=29) were male and 22% (n=8) female.
A breakdown of the age of respondents is detailed in figure 1. The youngest group is the hardest to access, probably because they are the least likely to be open about their sexuality or belong to the groups who emailed the survey. The rest are more likely to be open about their sexuality and to have left home and joined the LGBT groups.

![Figure 1: age of respondents](image1)

The respondents were then questioned about the type of school they attended and chose from a list of options that they felt applied to them (figure 2).

![Figure 2: types of schools attended by LGBT respondent](image2)
In keeping with the city biased population trend in NI, 76% (n=28) went to school in an urban setting and 24% (n=9) in a rural area. The survey would also be more likely to reach those who live in towns or cities as LGBT groups tend to be located in urban environments.

In terms of sexuality, 68% (n=25) defined themselves as gay, with 16% (n=6) defined as lesbian and 16% (6), bisexual. No respondents defined themselves as transgendered or straight.

Figure 3 compares the age at which respondents became aware of their sexuality and the age that they began to be open about it.

![Figure 3: comparison of age of awareness of sexuality and age of coming out](image)

The same data was collected by Carolan and Redmond who reported that the 52% of their respondents realised they were gay by the age of 13 compared to 62% in this survey (25). This illustrates a trend towards earlier self-awareness when compared to six years ago. In both surveys the majority of respondents had come out to people by the age of 17.
4.2.2 School librarian survey

Of the 223 post-primary schools in NI, 54 school librarians responded to the survey, representing 24% of the population. As the survey was self-selecting, librarians who were unhappy about the subject matter could choose not to complete it, so the results are not representative of the opinions of all school librarians in NI.

In order to gauge the levels of training and knowledge of the school librarians, they were questioned about their library qualifications and their membership of the CILIP. 54% (n=29) are qualified librarians, with the majority of these belonging to CILIP, whilst of the remaining unqualified librarians, only 8% have CILIP membership (see figure 4).

As with the LGBT survey, the school librarians came from a cross-section of schools, see figure 5.
90% (n=49) of librarians worked with students from aged 11, 2% (n=1) from aged 4 and 8% (n=4) from aged 14. The majority (89%) of these students remain until aged 18 and 11% leave at 16. This gives an idea of the cross-section of user needs facing school librarians.

4.2.3 SLS questions

A full response rate was received from the SLS as all four representatives of the five education and library boards responded to the survey.

4.3 What are the information needs of LGBT teenagers?

4.3.1 Information needs of LGBT students

When asked about where they went to find information about their sexuality, the LGBT respondents confirmed Hamer’s comment that the internet was the first choice for seeking knowledge and help (81). Figure 6 shows all the information seeking routes used by the sample.
In 2003, Carolan and Redmond reported that 50% of their sample went to the internet for information (29). The increase to 89% (n=33) here indicates an increased accessibility to the internet for teenagers. That only one respondent chose to go to the library for help is in stark difference to the 84% of respondents from the research of Creelman and Harris in 1990 (38).

When questioned about their information needs, LGBT respondents showed an overwhelming desire to find somewhere to belong, with 62% (n=23) choosing the gay community information option. They were also looking for help in coming out and for fictional references to themselves with over half of the sample choosing these options.

The school librarians were questioned about their LGBT provision and figure 7 draws a comparison between their answers and the information that LGBT respondents are looking for.
It is clear that school libraries are failing to provide the community links which LGBT teens are searching for as only one library offers this information. The school library holdings represent only 26% (n=14) of the respondents, the rest have no material at all. One respondent’s comment suggests that the information that is present is often only there by chance:

Any information which we have relating to these issues are usually covered in books relating to “teenage sexual development” (L55)

4.4 Why is access to information particularly important to young LGBTs?

4.4.1 LGBT experiences

The literature review revealed that access to information is crucial in strategies for stopping homophobic bullying and its effects in schools. To assess the extent to which this is problematic in NI, the respondents were asked a number of questions about their experiences in schools.
They were first asked if their school anti-bullying policy included homophobic bullying. 16% (n=6) said it did whilst the remaining sample said that it was not mentioned (n=19) or that they did not know (n=12). One respondent from a rural secondary school said that there was no policy at all in his school (T12).

The respondents were then asked about experiences they may have had or witnessed in school because of their sexuality. Figure 8 details their answers.

*Figure 8: events witnessed or experienced linked to sexuality*

Comparison with the research of Carolan and Redmond suggests that verbal abuse has increased since 2003, as the figures have risen from 65% to 78% (30). Physical and sexual abuse and attempted suicide totals are all lower, although they still feature as an issue. Hidden abuses such as self harm and eating disorders are both slightly higher than in the 2003 research.

That only 8% (n=3) of the sample claimed not to have witnessed or experienced any of the listed issues indicates the difficulties which can be experienced at school for the majority of LGBT teens.
The sample was then questioned further about their own experiences in schools, see figure 9.

Figure 9: personal experiences linked to sexuality

Bullying affected 65% (n=24) of the survey, which was 21% higher than Carolan and Redmond’s survey (34). 27% felt that none of the experiences had personally happened to them, possibly because they were too afraid to be out at school.

I was bullied for other reasons and it was such a bad environment to be gay in (all girls) with a lot of indirect homophobia not necessarily directed at me (though I'm sure it was rumoured) I didn't truly deal with my sexuality until uni. (T30)

There was too much of a stigma attached to LGBT people. The atmosphere was hostile. I was not out to many people at school and this [borrowing LGBT material] would have instantly identified me as gay, and I would probably have been bullied outside the library for it. (T38)

Having witnessed some of the events listed in figure 8, it is probable that some respondents would not want to be identified as LGBT at school, for fear of suffering the same abuses.
The respondents were very aware of the negative experiences at school and were vocal about why they thought access to information was important to them.

There was a definite desire for LGBT information to be held in libraries to help both LGBT students and their peers:

I think that our school library should create an LGBT section with both fiction and non-fiction books. I think this would be of benefit to people who maybe don’t have access to the internet. I also think that by making LGBT fiction available, this may help to educate more people on what their gay/lesbian peers are going through as well give them some insight into the gay community. (T14)

There should definitely be resources for people to find out, even if they’re just curious. (T4)

They also felt that a gay-friendly library would help their self-esteem whilst tackling heterosexism in school through normalising the gay community.

I would have liked to see some posters offering support simply by being there and saying that being gay is normal and acceptable. Seeing gay friendly posters, material etc could have boosted my confidence a LOT! (T19)

Some, however, were negative about the impact of information in schools. They could not see how a school library might change to benefit them given the homophobic nature of the school.

My school was extremely Christian and did nothing to prevent homophobic bullying. If I had [sic] used such materials, the other pupils would have made my life hell, and the school would do nothing about it. (T37)

Homophobic bullying and internal difficulties are problematic for LGBT students at school, and many are aware that better access to information would help with these issues. In order for this information to be made available, however, school librarians have to be equally aware of the issues and willing to address them.
4.4.2 School librarian opinions

The librarians were asked about homophobic bullying and how aware they are of it happening in their libraries. 93% (n=50) responded that they had not witnessed homophobia whilst the remaining 7% (n=4) had only witnessed verbal abuse. The difference between these statistics and those of the LGBT students emphasises the vulnerability of these students, who may be bullied out of sight of school staff.

The librarians were asked if they felt that it was appropriate for a school library to provide LGBT information. 20% (n=11) felt that it was not, commenting that public libraries or school counselling services were more appropriate facilities.

I feel that that support is the remit of other areas of the school e.g. School councillor, nurse and pastoral team. (L9)

This information can be assessed at public libraries. (L13)

80% (n=43) did feel it was appropriate to provide information and in their answers it becomes clear they are aware of the dangers of not having information for LGBT students.

Yes definitely, children may just be coming to terms with their sexuality and any help and advice they can be given will reassure them that they are not alone. They are at a vulnerable [sic] time in their lives and this can lead to depression and even suicide. (L57)

Information for LGBT needs to be made available and a school library should provide this information. (L57)

Particularly so in a Catholic school where at every other point they are told they are an abomination it is important for them to be aware of literature that contradicts this. (L44)

Pupils need to feel that the library is a safe learning environment. Books on other issues such as racism are available. Coming out is such
a huge issue, particularly in such a small school like ours, so pupils should be supported. (L52)

Should have same rights to access suitable materials as any other student. Also useful for other non LGBT students to have good information on the subject - more open minded approach. (L46)

However 74% (n=40) of the sample, including the above respondents, reported that they had no LGBT information in their libraries. This indicates that many librarians, whilst aware of their duty to provide information to all users, either are (or were, prior to this study) unaware of the needs of this specific group of users or feel unable to respond to them.

4.4.3 The library as a safe place

For LGBT students, school can be a minefield of problems and a place of safety, away from the bullies, is essential. Figure 10 details the responses from the LGBT students when asked if they felt that the school library was a safe place for them.

![Figure 10: assessing the extent to which the school library is seen as a safe place](image)
The majority clearly do feel safe in the library environment, perhaps because it is a space in school which is constantly supervised. School librarians are also aware of this as 76% agree that it is a safe place for students. For this reason, access to the library is essential for LGBT students who not only need information, but a safe place from which to access it.

4.5 What, if any, are the barriers LGBT teenagers face when seeking to fulfil their information needs in post-primary schools?

4.5.1 Institutionalised heterosexism

The literature review identified an institutionalised heterosexism in schools which created an environment of information poverty for the LGBT students. This is confirmed by the LGBT survey where only 24% (n=9) said that sexuality was discussed as part of their school curriculum. The majority of these experiences were clearly negative:

Basically it boiled down to that anything other than heterosexual marital [sic] relations was a sin and same-sex relationships were not valid. (T30)

a teacher in an RE class asked pupils to raise their hands as to whether or not they agreed with homosexuality and condemned those that were in favour of it. (T27)

One respondent was only taught about sexuality because their teacher was also gay and prepared to help her students by giving them information:

Sexuality was discussed in 1st year tutorials with out good/well informed teacher but she only ever discussed it with us, no other teacher did for any other classes. (T26)
4.5.2 Problems with school teaching staff

Although 78% had not witnessed or experienced homophobia from school staff, the remaining LGBT respondents had experiences which showed a lack of understanding and support by the adults responsible for their well-being.

A teacher when approached by a friend of mine who was being bullied by other students and called gay etc told my friend that if he wanted to stop being bullied he should stop acting so camp. (T12)

During sex education, a member of staff announced that they wouldn’t bother discuss [sic] LGBT sexual health because it went against the ethos of the school, and because there probably weren’t any gays in the class anyway. They then joked that AIDS is only something that gay people get. I have also heard members of staff refer to things as gay. (T38)

This lack of awareness and resistance to providing information is highlighted in the librarian survey:

Mentioned this survey to some of the teachers who had no idea what LGBT stood for nor way [sic] we should stock information or magazines concerning this topic. Also no idea if there was such information available. (L22)

4.5.3 Religious ethos of school

The religious ethos of a school is also often cited by respondents as a barrier to information provision. One LGBT respondent simply noted:

Catholic school - need i say more? (T9)

School librarians elaborated further, detailing the difficulties in providing sensitive information in a Christian school:

The catholic ethos of our school would not permit me to have information in the school. (L15)
The school has a strong Christian tradition and as such many teachers would not approve of such material being in the library, and even those who do not share this view would be unlikely to select it for us to purchase. (L33)

As a Catholic school I think there would be a reluctance to advertise issues like these. (L26)

Against this background of ignorance, homophobia and fear, LGBT students struggle to find information in a predominately Christian school environment.

4.5.4 Internet filters

Figure 6 identified the internet as the primary source of information for LGBT respondents, yet the literature review revealed that filters on school internet computers prevent LGBT students from accessing information this way in schools (GLAAD 17; Greenblatt 23). Both survey groups, therefore, were questioned about using the internet in the school library to access safe LGBT websites and figure 11 compares their answers.

![Graph](image)

*Figure 11: is it possible to access safe LGBT websites on school computers?*

Of the 51% of LGBT students who had attempted to access LGBT sites, only 11% were able to view them, indicating that internet filters are preventing access. A
further 59% were unsure if access was possible, indicating, perhaps, a fear of exposure through using these facilities, or a lack of promotion of them in the library. The majority of respondents said that they had or would have used the internet in school to view safe LGBT websites if it was possible.

School librarians were questioned further about their filters, which revealed that 61% (n=33) were able to change their own internet security. Despite this, 19 of these did not allow access to safe LGBT websites. This freedom to manipulate the filters is illustrated by the comments of one LGBT student who says:

I felt very uncomfortable when I accessed them but I tried to access the GLYNI site so those who saw it could access it at home if needed. GLYNI made available only after I complained and had a meeting with principal. (T26)

Conversely, another student reported:

I liked using the internet to go on GLYNI but students who were homophobic told teachers I was on gay porn. And the GLYNI website was banned. (T28)

The LGBT respondents were asked how secure they felt using the internet to find information (see figure 12).

![Figure 12: degree of comfort and security in using the school internet to find information](image)
57% of respondents were clearly unhappy about using school computers to research information about their sexuality, whilst only 13% felt that it was something they could do comfortably and securely.

Open questions reveal a possible cause of this discomfort as the majority of students revealed that accessing information in schools was a precarious procedure with a constant fear of bullying stopping them from feeling secure.

I would not have felt safe looking up information on gay issues, support services etc, because of fear of harassment outside the library. (T38)

Given this fear, it is unsurprising that 49% did not know if they could access LGBT websites on their school computers (figure 11).

4.5.5 Library stock issues

In order to assess the provision of LGBT information in school libraries, both sets of respondents were questioned about their experiences. Figure 13 compares their answers when asked about the availability of LGBT material.
The vast majority of students thought that there was no specific LGBT material in their school library, and the remaining respondents were unsure if it was available. The survey of librarians showed that the majority of school libraries failed to provide this material.

They were also asked about the ease of accessing any information regarding sexuality in their library, from personal experience (LGBT survey) and perceived ease (Librarian survey). The answers are illustrated in figure 14.

![Figure 14: was/is it easy to find any information about sexuality in the school library?](image)

The majority of students and librarians felt that it was difficult to find information about sexuality in the school library.

The absence of specific information in libraries and the difficulties in finding any non-specific but relevant information is a significant problem for LGBT students. Interestingly, of the 40 librarians who had no information, nine felt that their students would find it easy to find material about their sexuality and, of those who had information and felt it was easy to find (n=7), only two used LGBT keywords for classifying the items.
4.5.6 Information promotion issues

The librarians were asked if they used any of the usual methods of information promotion to help LGBT students access information. Their answers are detailed in figure 15.

![Figure 15: use of LGBT information promotion methods](image)

The absence of promotional methods shown in this data is confirmed by the LGBT survey where 84% of respondents felt that their school library was not gay friendly as it did not have LGBT displays or posters and 89% said that there was no information about the LGBT community. In both cases, the rest of the respondents were unsure about this provision. It is interesting to note, however, that 76% of the LGBT respondents said that they would have used their school library if it had been more gay friendly.
4.5.7 LGBT invisibility

A lack of awareness of LGBT students may be the cause of this paucity of information in school libraries. When questioned, 74% (n=40) of the librarians were unaware of any such students using the library. A few seemed surprised by the survey, feeling that this user group did not apply to them:

Dont [sic] have any LGBT students (L8):

Probably of no relevance to anyone enrolled at this time. (L38)

This invisibility is partly due to the students’ unwillingness to divulge their sexuality as only one librarian reported being asked for help on finding LGBT material and that was once, five years ago. To assess this, the LGBT students were also asked how comfortable they felt asking for help and the findings are detailed in figure 16.

![Pie chart](image)

**Figure 16: degree of comfort in asking school librarians for help**

The majority of students are uncomfortable asking for help and for one student this was not something that she felt she could do for fear of disclosure:
Upon asking about gay related books, I saw someone be told they shouldn’t be reading things like that and that their parent would be told, I didn’t ask then. (T4)

School librarians, however, appear to be waiting to be asked before they purchase any material.

No students has [sic] ever manifested the interest in exploring this topic within the library therefore I never felt the need to campaign for including LGBT titles or resources in the stock. (L6)

I am always happy to add additional information sources on any subject if asked for. (L48)

Any pupil wanting information about these issues would have to ask - which of course they would be unlikely to do if they were embarrassed about their sexuality. (L55)

Despite being aware of the discomfort of LGBT students, this librarian appears to have no alternative to stock selection than waiting to be asked.

A collection development plan (CDP) would address this issue as it would provide formal means of ensuring that stock is selected for purchase. When questioned, however, of the 33% (n=18) of libraries who had a CDP, only one covered LGBT information provision in it.

4.5.8 Training issues

The librarians were asked if they had received any training to help them provide a service to minority groups of students. Their responses reveal that this kind of training does not seem to be a priority for school librarians in NI (see figure 17).
Representatives from the SLS were also asked if they received training. Two chose not to answer the question whilst the other two said that they had not. They gave similar answers when asked if they received government led instructions from the ELB’s as to what to stock.

Despite the poor levels of training, 67% (n=36) of the school librarians felt that it should be mandatory. Others felt that they should be able to help people without training.

I think that as a librarian we should be able to provide material for all groups in society, but specialty training is not required. If anything where there is the greatest demand is where we should specialise. (L53)

Any qualified librarian with a modicum of common sense should be (able) to select and purchase the stock relevant to the needs of specific users if required. (L11)

The fact that material is not being stocked for this user group means that “common sense” does not appear to be working for LGBT students in school libraries.
4.5.9 Purchasing stock issues

80% (n= 43) of librarian respondents reported that they were free to choose the stock they purchase for the school library. However, 61% (n=33) reported that they were not free to choose where they acquire these items. This has implications for LGBT students as LGBT material is hard to purchase as it is often published by small, independent firms (Clyde and Lobban, 25). Many of the librarians in the survey are forced to buy material through their SLS using a budget given to them by their ELB.

our stock is chosen from the school library service collection and would be restricted to the publishers and suppliers which they use. (L34)

The SLS representatives reported that their stock is based on curriculum requirements as well as responding to individual requests for other material. Only one of the four admits to stocking LGBT material and none have ever been asked for it:

We have never been specifically asked for this material nor do we actively promote it. (S3)

It seems that there is a stalemate in LGBT stock provision, where all parties are waiting for others to request the information before supplying it. For LGBT students this adds yet another barrier to their quest for information.

4.5.10 Self-censorship issues

The literature review highlighted the issue of self-censorship by school librarians as a reason for poor LGBT stock provision. The librarians were, therefore, questioned about their experiences of complaints and how they felt about controversy over book selection. 76% (n=41) had not received complaints from
parents about the material they stocked. For those who had received complaints the reasons were mainly for sexual content in heterosexual books. 74% (n=40) of the survey would not be afraid of stocking material for fear of the controversy it may cause. Interestingly, nine of the respondents said that they would not stock certain material, despite having never received any complaints. Some librarians felt that self-censorship was a necessary element of stock selection:

Parents do not like sexual [sic] explicit books to be freely available to their children (L8)

Each library is unique- the pupils are unique- we have to provide material which is appropriate- eg we would be very careful about providing any material which could lead to poor behaviour or immaturity. (L54)

Some also felt they had to consider the age range of their students:

I only deal with Junior School aged 11 to 13 stock dealing with sexuality for this age group is frowned upon. (L22)

I think that access to such material should be available but not in a school environment. Material could accidentally be accessed by pupils who are much too young. Also parental disapproval is a very strong restraint. (L11)

19% of the sample felt that they would not get the support of their managers when faced with controversy. One librarian sums up this issue:

I do not believe there would be support and would be confident the Board of Governors would not be supportive. Obviously it would depend on the issue but I believe they would bow to parental pressure and would be anxious not to offend conservative elements in the community. Again, the religious aspect would be important. (L26)

Self-censorship is an issue in school libraries, stemming both from the fears of individual librarians and from a desire to maintain the ethos of the school, and creates a further barrier to information for LGBT students.
4.6 Conclusion

In summary, these results have exposed a grave situation for LGBT students attempting to access information in school libraries. They are searching primarily for links to the community to which they want to belong and are trying to accomplish this using the most precarious of tools, the Internet. However, links to these communities are denied them in school libraries and the internet is so well filtered that they cannot use it to access even the safest of sites.

The majority are becoming aware of their sexuality when they are between 11 and 13 and need to access information to help understand what is happening to them. Information is also essential in addressing the issues of homophobic bullying and heterosexism which are so prevalent in their schools. Libraries, by providing information, could normalise the issue of homosexuality. However, school librarians are largely unaware of their LGBT students and have, therefore, made no provision for their needs. They are untrained in dealing with this minority group and have mixed opinions as to whether the library is a suitable place for this provision. LGBT students are too afraid to ask for help whilst librarians are waiting for them to ask before they will respond to their needs, as are their suppliers, the SLS.

In the following discussion, these issues will be addressed in more detail and recommendations will be suggested which could help improve this bleak situation.
Chapter 5: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The emerging picture for LGBT students is not encouraging as the research data indicates a situation where, under the influence of political conservatism and religious dogma, LGBT teenagers are being denied information. In interpreting this data further, it is possible to build up an illustrative profile of school libraries and how far they are fulfilling the needs of LGBT teenagers in NI. With findings from the literature review as a baseline from which to assess the current situation, the researcher will use this data to discuss the research questions and offer recommendations, where necessary, for improving this situation in the future.

5.2 What are the information needs of LGBT teenagers?

The literature review identified a need for specific LGBT information and for the means with which to find it. Researchers noted that coming out information, learning about the gay community and sexual health guidance were key elements for helping LGBT teenagers come to terms with their sexuality (e.g. Creelman and Harris 39; Carolan and Redmond 35; Whitt 278). More recent literature also shows that the internet and television played the largest part in providing this information (Hamer 81).

These findings were mirrored in this research with the majority of LGBT respondents looking for gay community information, coming out help and fiction with gay characters. A third were also looking for LGBT sexual health information. They also favour the internet as a means of searching for this information and many
went to friends and the TV/media for help. These young people are looking for information which will help them understand their sexuality in a predominately heterosexual world. LGBT websites, books and media programmes give them a way of discovering who they are and a sense of belonging to a different but just as valid community as their heterosexual peers.

The increased accessibility of LGBT information via the internet and media reflects the positive changing attitudes to homosexuality in society, as does the reliance on friends. These are, however, unregulated resources, which have the potential to cause harm as well as help. As information specialists, school librarians are in a position to provide these needs in a safe and controlled environment.

However, as can be seen in figure 6, libraries are the least likely place for teenagers to search for information, with only one respondent choosing this option. That school libraries are failing to attract LGBT students is the first indication that they are not providing or promoting a service to these users.

### 5.3 Why is access to information particularly important to young LGBTs?

A key factor in information provision to LGBT students is help in addressing the adversity which many face on a daily basis. The literature review revealed some consequences of homophobic bullying in schools, including increased risks of attempted suicide, self-harm and mental health problems, as well as other issues affecting their performance at school like truancy (e.g. O’Doherty 5; Barron and Collins 4; Schrader and Wells 3). Students become undervalued and insecure in these circumstances whilst schools remain unable to acknowledge their presence and adjust anti-bullying policies accordingly. School librarians are equally ignoring the
plight of their LGBT students and, by denying them access to information, are treating them as lesser class citizens than their heterosexual peers.

This study confirms that homophobia and inequality are an integral part of school life for LGBT students in NI. As in Stonewall’s School Report, two thirds of the respondents had personally experienced bullying because of their sexuality and many have either experienced or witnessed verbal and/or physical abuse (Hunt 3). The damaging and potentially fatal effects on victims are illustrated as respondents report experiences such as depression, alcohol and drug misuse, and eating disorders. Their performance at school also suffers, with lower exam results and reports of truancy indicating that homophobic bullying makes schools a precarious environment for LGBT students. That six of these young people report attempting suicide because of their sexuality emphasises the gravity of this issue and how seriously it should be taken by schools.

Far from addressing the issues of these students, and indeed all students who are even perceived to be gay, most schools leave them to deal with this abuse themselves. Despite the high level of homophobic bullying in schools, only six respondents reported that their school anti-bullying policy specified homophobic attacks. This sends a clear message to students that this type of bullying is tolerated in school, leaving anyone perceived to be gay open to homophobic violence.

Constant fear of attack means that many students never fully come out at school. They also deal emotionally with their sexuality through hidden abuses such as eating disorders and drug abuse, which can often remain undetected until it is too late. Despite increased visibility and acceptance of homosexuality in society, there is
no corresponding support within the educational environment, leaving vulnerable LGBT students forced to remain closeted about their sexuality and emotionally unprotected.

This research shows that young people are aware of how LGBT information in school libraries could help their situation both by boosting their self esteem and educating their heterosexual peers. They are, however, conscious that, as long as homophobic bullying is allowed to prevail in schools, such information would be inaccessible as to look at it could immediately make them a target for abuse.

Whilst homophobic bullying, and its consequences, is a key reason why information is essential to LGBT students, the fact that it is often allowed to happen is just one of the many barriers to accessing this information. The next section will look at these barriers and make suggestions for improving the situation.

5.4 What, if any, are the barriers LGBT teenagers face when seeking to fulfil their information needs in post-primary schools?

5.4.1 Institutionalised heterosexism

That LGBT issues are ignored in school anti-bullying policies is symptomatic of an environment which is overtly heterosexist and homophobic. This issue was indentified in the literature review as a barrier to information, as institutionalised heterosexism serves to marginalise LGBT students from their peers and make them invisible to their schools (e.g. Loutdes 19; Epstein and Johnson 198; Schrader and Wells 3). Homosexuality, for example, is not treated as an essential part of the
curriculum and is rarely discussed in the classroom, thus denying LGBT students their right to an equality of education when compared to their heterosexual peers.

The unwillingness to teach about sexuality is confirmed in this research, where the majority of students received no education about sexual orientation. On occasions where it was mentioned, homosexuality was condemned and openly abhorred by teaching staff. The DENI circular cited in the literature review, which calls for the open discussion of homosexuality, is clearly not being adhered to, possibly because teachers have not received training and direction to help deal with this topic (Northern Ireland. Department of Education 4). The consequence, in information terms, is that if the curriculum does not deal with homosexuality, then school librarians, who base most of their budget on what is taught in school, will not automatically stock books on sexuality. This is likely to continue until the government finds a way of ensuring that this topic is a compulsory aspect of NI education. In the meantime, LGBT students must contend with a serendipitous approach to sexual orientation education, where, if they are lucky, an open-minded teacher might teach them about themselves and a liberal school librarian might stock some helpful material.

5.4.2 Religious influence

The religious ethos of the school was discussed in the literature review as a major barrier to LGBT information provision (e.g. Feenan et al. 12; Loudes 20). It can define what will be taught in the classroom and can, therefore, influence library holdings. As only around 20 schools in NI are free from religious involvement, this represents a significant issue facing LGBT students searching for information.
The religious nature of the school is often cited in this research when asked about experiences and information provision. For the students, it is often the reason why homosexuality is not taught within the school curriculum and why they can receive negative reactions from teaching staff. For some librarians, religion is what prevents them from stocking certain material for the fear of the controversy this may cause. It is also one of the reasons why they feel a lack of support from their governing bodies. However, despite the fact that the majority of post-primary schools in NI have a Christian ethos, 14 librarians surveyed do hold LGBT material. This suggests that some librarians are able to consider this topic for their stock regardless of the religious nature of the school. Again it appears that luck, rather than direction and guidance, will determine whether the school library will hold material relevant to their LGBT students.

There is a general sense of confusion and fear about contravening the schools religious ethos which exists among some librarians. This situation is unlikely to change whilst religious ethos, rather than the government driven equality directives, is allowed to determine the acceptability of homosexuality in NI schools.

5.4.3 Internet filters

Previous research showed that the internet was an essential resource for LGBT teenagers as it offered a private and anonymous tool for searching for information (Hamer 81). However, it is an unregulated resource, which can expose teenagers to the dangerous aspects of the web. Filters are placed on school internet computers in order to protect the students, but they also prevent access to safe and informative sites.
In this research, only 10% of LGBT respondents said that they were able to access safe LGBT websites on school computers; whilst the rest were either denied access or unsure if access was possible. Most students felt unhappy using school computers to research LGBT issues for fear of reprisals from peers and school staff. The majority of school librarians also reported that access to LGBT sites was not possible from their school libraries despite the fact that many could manipulate the filtering software if necessary. Safe sites were not filtered in some libraries but, given the number of students who were unsure if access was possible, this does not seem to be a well promoted facility.

Access to safe LGBT websites are, therefore, not routinely available and where they are, fears of bullying or a lack of promotion hinders use. Students are often still coming to terms with their sexuality and need to be able to find out about themselves in a safe and private environment without fear of bullying from their peers. The internet is essential to this search, but school libraries in NI do not seem to be making any effort to cater for this need, and by ignoring the issue, are creating a barrier to this resource. As many can change filters then safe NI gay community websites such as GLYNI, the Rainbow Project and Cara-Friend, could be made available to students and promoted through lists displayed in the library. This would not only inform students that they can access sites, but would also help towards normalising the issue for heterosexual students. Careful positioning of some computers could also offer the privacy they need.
Currently, these kinds of initiatives depend on the individual librarian to undertake. Government directives could ensure that this is the norm and the process of normalising the issue of homosexuality in schools could begin.

5.4.4 Library stock issues

Despite increasing publication of teenage LGBT titles, research shows that a substantial barrier to information provision in school libraries is the absence of this material in stock (e.g. Wright 1; Clyde and Lobban 25). Any stock which is present tends to be poorly catalogued and rarely promoted (Joyce 271). Data from this research mirrors these findings as the majority of students and librarians report a scarcity of LGBT specific material in school libraries. A small number of librarians held fiction with gay characters, coming out help and sexual health information but only one offered access to information about the gay community. It was also suggested that generic sexual health material should fully satisfy the needs of LGBT students. Most librarians also failed to use traditional library promotional methods for LGBT resources such as displays, booklists and lists of gay community links. Of the 14 libraries who did stock some LGBT material, only two classified them with LGBT keywords.

Given the paucity of information in school libraries and the lack of promotion for stock that is present, it is unsurprising that the majority of students reported difficulties in finding information about sexuality by themselves. It is also understandable that 84% felt that the library was not a gay-friendly place. However, 81% of students felt that it was a safe place for them to hang out. This could be because the library is one of the few supervised break-time places in a school, or
because it is not an attractive place for bullies to hang out. Whatever the reason, this is a readily accessible user group who could really benefit from a supportive and friendly environment in school.

Buying in stock is only one way of achieving a gay friendly environment. Other recommendations include the simple addition of an equality poster, or rainbow flag (which is an internationally recognised symbol of gay pride). Bookmarks and booklists can promote material and make the library more welcoming to LGBT users whilst displays of LGBT writers are a public way of showing that the library is gay-friendly. Some librarians expressed concern over privacy issues when it comes to taking LGBT material out, but as Linville suggests, a sticker system could address this problem: by identifying one copy of a text as LGBT using a rainbow sticker, other copies can be discretely taken out by students (186).

These simple, but effective suggestions could help both LGBT students and their heterosexual peers, by creating a space where LGBT issues are treated in the same way as all issues in the library. This will never be possible, however, whilst LGBT students remain invisible to schools and school librarians.

5.4.5 Purchasing stock issues

Purchasing issues are a further barrier to information provision as, even if a librarian is keen to stock LGBT material, they are limited by the suppliers they use. Though many librarians are free to choose the stock they need, they are not free to purchase from anywhere. The majority of their budget must be spent in the SLS which focuses on curriculum issues and uses mainstream publishers. As LGBT material is often published by smaller firms (Clyde and Lobban 25), school librarians
will rarely be given the option to purchase it through SLS catalogues. They must actively request it, and given the difficulties already mentioned, this is unlikely to happen easily.

The onus must be on publishers to bring out a wider variety of stock and on the SLS to provide it. Increased visibility of LGBT material could help school librarians in their purchasing choices. This would also be helped by directives to include sexual orientation in the school curriculum.

5.4.6 LGBT invisibility

The invisibility of LGBT students in schools is an issue identified by the literature review and confirmed by this research (Loudes 9). As discussed above, LGBT students faced the brutality and consequences of homophobic bullying. The tendency was to remain closeted to all but closest friends. Perhaps as a result of this, the majority of students reported feeling uncomfortable asking their librarian for help in searching for LGBT information and many were concerned about publicly accessing resources. School librarians were also largely unaware of their gay students and were rarely asked for help.

A vicious circle therefore exists, which perpetuates the barrier to information provision for LGBT students. Whilst librarians and the SLS are waiting to be asked for information and students are unable to do so, there will rarely be LGBT provision in school libraries. The key to this problem is education and training as it is only once librarians acknowledge that they do have LGBT students and can begin to understand their needs that this will become a useful, and perhaps lifesaving, resource for these young people.
5.4.7 Training issues

As in the literature review, this research shows that surveyed librarians from schools and the SLS have received no training in how to help LGBT students (Wright 44). There is no real surprise in these statistics as it is a recurrent theme in literature about LGBT provision. When writing about lesbian and gay library services in 1987, Richard Ashby’s first recommendation was for staff training (154). He advocated making staff aware of the issues surrounding the gay community in order to complement an environment of diversity and equality in the library. Over 20 years later and it is still being requested by researchers. This serves to illustrate that LGBT issues are not being considered as a serious matter by librarians.

In this research, some librarians felt that common sense and a general ability as a librarian should equip them with the necessary knowledge to address these issues. However, looking at the absence of provision in the libraries and reading comments from librarians who feel that they have no LGBT students, it is clear that this approach is not working in NI. There is no indication that professional training helps in this matter either, as qualified as well as unqualified librarians failed to provide a service to their LGBT users.

That many of the librarians said they would welcome LGBT training is a positive sign. Government and professional association training schemes could be a springboard to helping librarians make their libraries into a friendly and resourceful environment for all their students.
5.4.8 Self-censorship issues

A common thread in the literature review is that librarians refuse to stock LGBT materials for fear of the controversy it may cause (Whelan par. 10). Indeed, many children’s books dealing with homosexual issues have frequently made it into the American Library Association ‘Banned Books’ list. Given the CILIP mission statement quoted in the literature review, this should not be possible as the library should show equality for all (par.2).

Data from this survey is, however, quite positive as the majority of librarians have never received complaints from parents about the material stocked and would not let the fear of controversy determine their purchases. Theoretically, there is no reason for LGBT material to be missing from the shelves. Perhaps, for these librarians, the issue is more about a lack of awareness and training. For others a fear of parental challenges is a real issue, as is the lack of managerial support and a desire to follow the ethos of the school. A number of librarians also felt that this was a sensitive topic which should not be accessible for younger students, despite the fact that the majority of students are becoming aware of the sexuality between the ages of 11 and 13. This point serves to illustrate how little librarians are aware of the specific needs of these young people.

Finally, there was a suggestion from librarians that they should not single out LGBT students for special treatment: “we don't have any special service for any other grouping so it would be unfair to discriminate against others.”[L7]. However, LGBT students are already being discriminated against by the absence of information in
their libraries. Until parity exists between LGBT students and their peers, therefore, they have the right to be treated differently to avoid this inequality.

5.5 Conclusion

This research has shown that the information needs of LGBT students in NI post-primary schools are not being met. These students are looking for ways of understanding who they are and where they fit in society. They are being educated in an environment which allows them to be bullied because of their sexuality and this is having a detrimental effect on their school work, their health and their lives. They are suffering discrimination from their schools and government who are failing to address their particular issues and instead prefer to toe the religious line. Librarians are also falling foul of this conservatism and instead of providing a service which is equal to all, are, by omission, further discriminating against their LGBT students.

Although responsibility lies with governmental and educational authorities, librarians can take the initiative and begin to slowly improve the situation, through small changes to their purchasing and promotional practices. These and other recommendations will be discussed in the conclusion.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

The aim of this research was to illustrate the extent to which post-primary school libraries in NI address the information needs of their LGBT students. An overview of the research process shows how this aim has been achieved and the conclusions which have been reached in the process.

6.1 Research objectives

Suspecting an unfulfilled need in the area of LGBT information provision, the researcher set out to explore objectives which would help both to confirm this theory and to understand why this gap in provision exists. By first establishing the information requirements of LGBT students and how they sought this material, the researcher was able to build a baseline of need from which to assess school library provision. The researcher then considered the importance of information to LGBT students and why it should be provided for them. Finally, the experiences of LGBT students and school librarians were examined in order to establish which barriers prevent the provision of this information in schools. Having addressed these issues, it was possible to establish how well school libraries were providing information and any recommendations for improving the situation.

6.2 Literature review

In order to establish a background to the study, the researcher undertook a thorough literature review which looked at the issue from different angles. Whilst it
was important to look at literature from a library viewpoint, it was also essential to
explore literature which was concerned only with LGBT people and the issues which
they face. This allowed the researcher to build a full theoretical picture from which
to start the empirical research.

The literature review showed that LGBT teenagers require information which
is different to their heterosexual peers, as they need resources which will help them
come to terms with their sexuality in a world which often condemns it.

Both library and LGBT focused literature agree that education and
information about LGBT issues is essential to the well-being of these young people as
it can actively prevent homophobic attacks and reduce institutionalised
heterosexism.

The review also revealed the many barriers to this information, including
negative religious influence, poorly trained staff and inflexible internet filters. A
common problem was that library staff were unaware of these students and,
therefore, not prepared to provide facilities for them.

A notable issue from the literature review was that libraries have become the
last place that LGBT teenagers would turn to for their information. Despite
recommendations for service improvements, which have been repeated over the
last three decades, libraries have failed to respond to the specific and important
demands of this group of users.

6.3 Methodology
Given the sensitive nature of this research and the difficulties associated with reaching the target population, the researcher chose to employ self-selecting, web-based surveys as the main methodological approach. Using a mixed-method questionnaire approach, both qualitative and quantitative data were gathered in order to illustrate the current situation in NI school libraries.

Three different populations were sourced to supply data: 16-25 year old LGBTs; post-primary school librarians and representatives of the SLS. This allowed the researcher to triangulate the data and ensure the rigour and validity of the findings.

6.4 Findings

The findings of the research largely confirmed the outcome of the literature review. LGBT students are looking for links to the gay community and want to use the internet to find them. Neither of these facilities are routinely provided by school libraries, who have limited stock and impose stringent filters on web access. Institutionalised heterosexism and a prevailing conservatism due to religious influence on the school ensure that homosexuality remains largely a taboo topic. This is compounded by the absence of any mention of homophobic abuse on most schools’ anti-bullying policies, despite its prevalence and severity.

Although more than 60% of these students are becoming aware of their sexuality before the age of 13, the majority of school librarians are unaware of the existence of LGBT students, despite the high levels of homophobic abuse which exists in their schools. They receive no training in how to provide for LGBT students
and are unprepared to help a minority that they cannot see. It is hardly surprising, in these circumstances, that these students are too afraid to ask their librarians for information.

There is, however, a general agreement that the school library is a safe place for these young people to spend their free time. A haven away from homophobic abuse, school libraries need to capitalise on this status and create an environment which is educational as well as secure.

6.5 Summary and recommendations

It is clear from this research that LGBT students are indeed being denied their right to information, but the responsibility for this does not wholly rest with school librarians. These students are unprotected by school policies and are being ignored by the government who, whilst providing support and protection for adult LGBTs, prefers to adhere to religious conservatism than give gay teenagers similar consideration to that afforded their adult counterparts. On a governmental level, making legislative policies which ensure that sexual orientation is included in school curriculums and anti-bullying policies would address this situation, as would funding for training all school staff about LGBT issues.

This research has also shown that schools need to increase the visibility of LGBT issues if the situation is to be fully addressed. Updated anti-bullying policies and appropriate staff training would both help to raise awareness of LGBT students as would ensuring the inclusion of sexual orientation in RSE classes.
Library organisations such as CILIP and the SLS are also failing to acknowledge this issue and so cannot provide necessary training to school libraries, or the stock they need to ensure that LGBT students are not denied their basic right to information. Publishers, too, should be made aware of the problem, possibly through demands from CILIP and the SLS. If mainstream publishers regularly published and promoted LGBT material, it would be easier for the SLS and school librarians to stock it.

For school librarians themselves, although they receive no specific government direction, there are simple measures which can be undertaken to improve the situation. The findings of this research have shown that simple measures such as purchasing and promoting LGBT stock along with allowing access to responsible LGBT websites could make the library a resourceful environment for their LGBT students. A gay-friendly library can easily be achieved with equality posters and a rainbow flag. Book and web lists as well as library displays can also help to raise the profile of LGBT students and create an environment for all students where homosexuality is no longer stigmatised.

Further research, using more in-depth interviews and focus groups, would build on this research and add further validity and rigour to the findings.

The research does illustrate the prevailing situation for LGBT students who must struggle with their emerging sexuality against a background of homophobic hate and violence. It is therefore encouraging to note that ten of the school librarians who responded to the survey expressed a desire to improve the situation for their LGBT students. Three of these contacted the researcher personally,
requesting help in this matter. Perhaps as school librarians become more aware of their LGBT students through this and similar research, they will be able to redress the imbalance which currently exists and ensure that each of their LGBT students has their book and a place on the shelves.

Bibliography

Works cited


1 DIS MLA citation style used throughout bibliography


Works consulted


## Appendix 1 - LGBT survey

### Section 1. About you

Please tell me a bit about yourself. *(Please tick one box for each section unless otherwise directed)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Are you?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. How old are you?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16 or under</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. Did you attend post-primary school in Northern Ireland? (Please continue answering this survey even if you did not go to school in Northern Ireland)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. What type of post-primary school did you attend? Please select all that apply.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other - please specify</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5. How best describes where you went to post primary school?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. How would you describe your sexual orientation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesbian</th>
<th>Gay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>Transgendered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other - please specify</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. At what age did you become aware of your sexual orientation?

8. At what age did you start to come out to people?

9. When you became aware of your sexuality, where did you go to for information to help you? *Please tick all that apply.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internet</th>
<th>TV/Media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>Books from bookshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public library</td>
<td>School Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBT helpline</td>
<td>Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazines</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other - please specify</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10. What types of information were you looking for? *Please tick all that apply.*

- Factual books about coming out
- Fictional stories with gay characters
- Sexual health information
- Community information about the local gay scene
- Other - please specify

**Section 2. About your school library**

Please indicate with a tick how much you agree with the following statements:

11. The school library is a good source of information about sexuality and sexual identity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree or disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. I would feel comfortable asking the school librarian for information about sexuality and sexual identity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree or disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13. It was difficult to find information about sexuality and sexual identity by myself in the school library.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree or disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
14. I did not feel secure using the school library computers to search for information on sexuality and sexual identity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree or disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15. The school library is a safe place to hang out.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree or disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Section 3. More about your school library**

Please tell me more about your school library. *(Please tick one box for each section unless otherwise directed)*

16. Did your school library have a separate collection of LGBT material?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17. Did you use your school library’s separate collection of LGBT material; or would you have used it if they’d had one?

Yes

No - please explain your answer

____________________
____________________
____________________
18. Did your school library allow access to safe LGBT websites/chat rooms like GLYNI (*Gay and Lesbian Youth Northern Ireland*)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

19. If your school library allowed access to safe LGBT websites did you use them; or would you have used them if they had allowed access?

| Yes | |

No - please explain your answer

<p>| |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<p>| |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<p>| |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

20. Was your school library gay friendly? For example, did it have gay themed displays or posters?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

21. If your school library was gay friendly, did you use it? Or, if your school library had been gay friendly would you have been more inclined to use it?

| Yes | |

No - please explain your answer

<p>| |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<p>| |</p>
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<p>| |</p>
<table>
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<th></th>
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</thead>
</table>
22. Did your school library offer any links to the gay community, in the form of pamphlets, helpline numbers etc?

No [ ]  Don't know [ ]  Yes - please specify

23. Did you ever personally experience or witness homophobia from a member of school library staff?

No [ ]  Yes - please tell me about this

24. If you can, please tell me about your experiences when using the school library to find information about your sexuality.

25. If you never used the school library to find information about your sexuality, please let me know the reason why.
### Section 4. About your school life

Please let me know how it was for you at school. (Please tick one box for each section unless otherwise directed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>26. Was homophobic bullying mentioned in your school anti-bullying policy?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>27. Did you ever personally experience or witness homophobia from a member of school staff?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>28. Did you ever personally experience or witness any of the following at school because of your sexuality? Please tick all that apply.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbal abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempted suicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol misuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other - please explain</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


29. Did you personally experience any of the following at school because of your sexuality? *(Please tick all that apply)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bullying</th>
<th>Lower exam results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Truancy</td>
<td>Dropping out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing school</td>
<td>None of these</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other - please explain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

30. Was sexuality discussed as part of your school curriculum?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don’t remember</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Yes - in which subject

29. Is there anything you would like to add about your school library and how it could have improved its service to you?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. It is very much appreciated!
### Section 1. Your school
Please tell me something about you and your school.

1. Are you a qualified librarian?
   - Yes
   - No

2. Are you a member of CILIP?
   - Yes
   - No

3. What type of school do you work in?
   - Grammar
   - Secondary
   - Catholic
   - Protestant
   - Integrated
   - Other - please specify

4. Approximately how many students are there in your school?

5. What is the age range of your students? (eg 11-18)

### Section 2. Your Library.
Please tell me some general information about your library.

6. How big is your library collection? Please enter approximate numbers for each category.
   - Books
   - DVD's
   - Magazines
   - Other - please specify
7. How much control do you have in the stock which you buy for the library?

Full control [ ]  Some/no control - please explain

8. Are you free to buy your stock from any publisher/supplier?

No - continue to question 9 [ ]  Yes - go to question 10 [ ]

9. Please tell me about any restrictions you face which determine the publishers/suppliers you use.

10. Do you have a Collection Development Policy (CDP)?

Yes - continue to question 11 [ ]  No - go to question 13 [ ]

11. Who is responsible for writing your CDP?

12. Does your CDP include information provision to LGBT students?

Yes [ ]  No [ ]

Section 3. Provision for LGBT students

Please tell me about the information provision in your library to LGBT students

13. Do you have information specifically for LGBT students in your library?

Yes - continue to question 14 [ ]  No - go to question 16 [ ]
14. What type of information did you provide for LGBT students? 
*Please select all that apply.*

- Factual books about coming out
- Fictional stories with gay characters
- Sexual health information for LGBT teens
- Community information about the local gay scene
- Other - please specify

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other - please specify</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

15. Do you use LGBT keywords to catalogue this material? 

- No
- Yes - which terms have you used?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes - which terms have you used?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16. Have you ever held a LGBT themed display in your library, like, for example, LGBT History Month? 

- No
- Yes - please tell me about this.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes - please tell me about this.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17. Have you produced a book list of LGBT material? 

- Yes
- No

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

18. Have you produced a list of local LGBT community groups for your students? 

- Yes
- No

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
19. Does your internet filter allow access to safe LGBT websites like GLYNI (*Gay and Lesbian Youth Northern Ireland*)?

Yes ☐ No ☐

20. Are you, or someone in your school, able to change security filters in your library to enable safe internet sites to be accessed?

Yes ☐ No ☐

21. Have you produced a list of safe LGBT websites for your students?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Section 4. Your LGBT students

Please tell me about your students

22. Are you aware of any students who may still be coming to terms with their sexuality using your library?

Yes ☐ No ☐

23. Have you been asked by a student for help in locating LGBT material in your library?

No ☐ Yes - please tell me about this __________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

24. Do you think it is easy for students to find information about their sexuality in your school library?

Yes ☐ No - please explain __________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

95
25. Have you ever witnessed homophobic bullying between students in your library?  
No [ ] Yes - please tell me about this ____________________________________________________________________________

26. Do you think that the library is seen by LGBT students as a safe place to hang out?  
Yes [ ] No - please explain ____________________________________________________________________________

**Section 5. More about you**

27. Have you received any training in providing a library service to the following minority groups? *Please select all that apply.*  
Disabled users [ ] LGBT users [ ]  
Ethnic Minorities [ ] Travellers [ ]  
Other - please explain ____________________________________________________________________________
None of the above [ ]

28. Do you think such training should be mandatory for school librarians?  
Yes [ ] No - please explain ____________________________________________________________________________


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes - please explain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29. Have you ever received complaints from parents about any of the material you stock in the library?</td>
<td>Yes - please explain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>No - please explain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Would fear of controversy prevent you from stocking some items in your library?</td>
<td>Yes - please explain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>No - please explain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Do you think you would get the support of your manager if you faced controversy over an item in your library?</td>
<td>Yes - please explain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>No - please explain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Do you think it is appropriate for a school library to provide a service to its LGBT students?</td>
<td>Yes - please explain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No - please explain</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
33. Is there anything else you would like to add about information provision in school libraries to LGBT students?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.
It is very much appreciated!
Appendix 3 – School Library Service questions

My name is Sally Bridge and I am currently working on my Masters in Information and Library Studies at the University of Aberystwyth.

My thesis is looking at the information provision in school libraries to young lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) students. I have completed a survey of post-primary school libraries in Northern Ireland and, as the School Library Service makes up their biggest supplier, I thought it would be useful for my survey to have some feedback from the service. I am contacting each board with the same questions and would really appreciate it if you would have the time to answer a few questions for me. All answers will be treated with the strictest confidence and all data will be destroyed after my Masters has been completed.

1. How do you decide what stock to buy in?

2. Do you stock material for LGBT students?

   Yes

   What type of material is this? (for example - factual books about coming out, fictional stories with gay characters, sexual health information for LGBT teens etc)

   No

   Why is this material not stocked?

3. Have you ever been asked for LGBT material by a school library?

   Was it supplied?

4. Do you stock material for other minority groups? (for example - disabled users, ethnic minorities, travellers etc)

5. How do you decide on which groups to purchase for?

6. Do you get direction for the government about stocking these materials?

7. Do you receive any training on providing materials to these groups?
Appendix 4 - Cover note of LGBT survey

Hi

My name is Sally Bridge. I am doing a research project into school libraries and the information they provide to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered teens in Northern Ireland. As I want to get a good idea of the current situation, I need responses from people who are between 16 and 25.

This research forms part of my Masters in Information and Library Studies which I am doing through the University of Aberystwyth. As a lesbian mother living in Northern Ireland, I also have personal interest in the outcome of the research.

At the end of this letter is a link to an online survey which asks a variety of questions about you, your school library, and your experiences at school. I would be very grateful if you could take the time to complete this survey; it should take about 10 minutes to finish.

I plan to build an overall picture of how well school libraries respond to the information needs of LGBT teens. My aim is then to suggest improvements to the school library service where appropriate.

All responses will be strictly anonymous, as will any quotes used in the research and the survey is totally voluntary.

Please complete this survey before Monday 23rd March.


Many thanks for taking the time to do this survey. Your help will be invaluable.

If you have any questions regarding the research, then please feel free to email me at lgbtsurvey@hotmail.co.uk.
Hi

My name is Sally Bridge. I currently work in an academic library in Queen’s University Belfast and would be very grateful for your help and expertise regarding school libraries.

As part of my Masters in Information and Library Studies through the University of Aberystwyth, I am doing a research project into school libraries and the information they provide to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) teens in Northern Ireland.

At the end of this letter is a link to an online survey which asks a variety of questions about your school library. I would be very grateful if you could take the time to complete this survey; it should take about 10 minutes to finish.

I plan to build an overall picture of the ways in which school libraries respond to the information needs of LGBT students in Northern Ireland.

All responses will be strictly anonymous, as will any quotes used in the research and the survey is totally voluntary.

Please complete this survey before Monday 4th May.


Many thanks for taking the time to do this survey. Your help will be invaluable.

If you have any questions regarding the research, then please feel free to email me at schoollibrarysurvey@hotmail.com

Thanks

Sally